

THE ORIGINS AND EARLY YEARS OF A MULTICULTURAL REEF LABOUR SOCIETY

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The discovery of gold and the proclamation of the main reef in 1886 launched the South African Republic into an economic revolution and so doing created the infrastructure for a complex multicultural Reef labour society. White, Black and Yellow in the diverging positions of capitalist, statesman and labourer converged on the mines — as the largest homogenous section of the Witwatersrand — in an elementary struggle as each strove to give form and stature to his particular position. Foreign ideologies and organizations challenged the locally settled labour man as he grappled with the other cultures and reacted to the forces of developing capitalist exploitation and transitional government legislation.

The pre-gold Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek with its small, sparsely scattered, isolated, self-sufficient, quiet, primitive, agrarian Dutch descendant community was to be revolutionised into a rapidly expanding, energetic, materialistically competitive cosmopolitan mining society on the Rand. It was a case of two diverging societies being thrust together, aptly described by Lord Milner, the High Commissioner as:

'two wholly antagonistic systems, a medieval race oligarchy and a modern industrial state.'¹

The transition was additionally complicated by political vicissitude as within the wake of discovery an imperial onslaught in the form of a Raid took place, followed by a devastating two and a half year war, ending in imperial victory with a half decade interlude before Boer leadership commenced again. These intricacies were to form the microcosmic foundations of the macrocosmic kalleidoscope of future society and so doing entrench the labour divisions that would take decades to alter.

The gold mining industry was built up at a phenomenal rate. The mines leaped up on the shoulders of the diamond mines which paved the way with their already established groups of entrepreneurs who had international connections in the capitalist world, adequate financial resources, experience of local conditions and on-sight judgement.² Immediately after the discovery the mineral trek began to the newly established "El Dorado".³ The European population of the South African Republic escalated from 50 000 in 1880 to 119 218 in 1890, with an annual rate of increase of

Abbreviations used for repositories:

CAD: Cape Archives Depot
TAD: Transvaal Archives Depot
BRA: Barlow Rand Archives
JPL: Johannesburg Public Library
WITS: Wits University Library

1. F Troup: *South Africa: An Historical Introduction*, p. 177.
2. T.G. 13, 1908 Colony of the Transvaal: Report of the Transvaal Indigency Committee 1906—1908. Government Printing Office, Pretoria, 1908, pp. 24—26.
3. L. Marquard: *The Story of South Africa*, p. 18.

9,1%. This was phenomenal considering that the contemporary West European increase averaged at 0,7% a year and in America at 2,1%⁴. Black labourers employed on the mines for periods varying from six to twelve months increased to over 100 000 by the end of the century,⁵ while imported Chinese labour numbered some 50 000 during the first six months of employment in 1904.⁶

The great industry was built thus on the twin foundation of foreign white enterprise and skilled labour, and masses of local cheap black labour supplemented for a half dozen years by yellow labour. This article concerns itself primarily with the various labour forces, but one cannot exclude reference to the capitalists as their manipulations and extreme exploitation were in most cases responsible for the foundation of labour strategies. It suffices to say that the capitalists came primarily from overseas and included an overwhelming percentage from Great Britain followed by Germany and France.⁷ They amalgamated their claims, floated companies, and founded groups which made for an oligopoly with a highly centralised structure of control.⁸ To complicate issues the magnates exerted pressure on the government for state assistance to advance their position, as opposed to that of the labourer, stressing to all extent the dependence of state welfare upon the gold mining industry.⁹ Their prime goal, in short, was the maximization of profit and minimization of cost.¹⁰

The experienced, technically skilled miner came largely from the coal mines of Britain, others came from New Zealand, Australia and America. Smaller numbers of foreigners heralded from Russia, Germany, Portugal, Italy, France, Scandinavia, Spain, Austria and Greece.¹¹ The influx was so great that by 1890 the ratio of men born in Europe to those born in the South African Republic was about two to one on the Rand.¹² These miners had for the most part come to the Reef in a temporary capacity.¹³ They had come to seek a fortune and thus were not disposed to getting involved in local affairs.¹⁴ According to R K Cope, biographer of *Comrade Bill: The Life and Times of W H Andrews*, only 13% of the white workers on the mines had families with them, 33% had families living abroad and 54% were unmarried.¹⁵ These skilled artisans were initially treated most favourably,¹⁶ after all they were in the

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4. D.H. Houghton and J. Dagut (eds.): *Source Material on the South African Economy 1860—1970*, Vol. 1, pp. 289—290.
 5. T.A.D.: Col. 1896, Transvaal Labour Commission, Exhibit no. 1; Transvaal Mines Department, Annual Report of the Government Mining Engineer, June 1910.
 6. T.A.D.: FLD 51 no. 6/6 Correspondence: Inspectors Report, 19.10.1904.
 7. F. Johnstone: *Class, Race and Gold*, p. 15.
 8. T.A.D.: PM(T)36 Correspondence Numbered 77/8/07. Note of an interview which a deputation of strikers had with the Right Honourable Attorney-General in the Prime Minister's Office on Saturday 22 June 1907 at 11 a.m., p. 5.
 9. B.R.A.: HE 152 L. Phillips Outgoing Correspondence: L. Phillips — J. Wernher, 4.12.1905.
 10. Mining Industry Commission, Minutes of Evidence, L. Reyersbach, 13.6.1907, pp. 96—102; The Star: 28.4.1902, Crown Reef Dispute, T.A. Haynes, Letter to the Editor, p. 8.
 11. T.A.D.: A 1632 Vol. 1: Return of White Employees on Mines at the Witwatersrand according to Nationality, 1901; B.R.A.: HE 253, file 148: Record Department Subject Correspondence Files: Labour: Nationality of White Employees: Eckstein and Rand Mine Groups, June 1906.
 12. D.H. Houghton and J. Dagut (eds.): *Source Material on the South African Economy 1860—1970*, Vol. 1. p. 225.
 13. WITS: A953: R.K. Cope: Research I — Early Labour and Economic Conditions, p. 110.
 14. C.H. Haggart: Organised Labour as a Political Factor (*The State*, Vol. III, no. 6, June 1910, p. 953.)
 15. R.K. Cope: *Comrade Bill. The life and times of W H Andrews*, p. 30.
 16. J.P.L.: Ref. 5 Store 920 — J. Cockerill: Miscellaneous Letters, 3.8.1902.

early stages indispensable to the starting of the new industry.¹⁷ In the words of a contemporary the Rand mine workers' grievances were "as compared with Europe, crumpled rose leaves to thorns."¹⁸

The unskilled form of labour came from the various indigenous Black tribes of Southern Africa. Labour was initially extracted locally from the South African Republic, Orange Free State, Natal, Cape Colony, Bechuanaland, Basutoland, Swaziland and Transkei. At a later stage experimental batches were attained from Central Africa and after 1897, Portuguese East Africa, which was eventually to become the most important reservoir supplying the largest percentage of Blacks to the Rand mines.¹⁹ They were regarded by contemporaries as the "most industrious section of the mine labour population",²⁰ and the "breath of life that made the Rand possible".²¹ The pattern of the usage of black labour was inherited directly from the diamond fields where the first large scale industrial employment of the Blacks originated,²² but unlike on the diamond fields the rapidly growing labour demand shortly exceeded supply. This factor was to add a new dimension to labour employment. The Black worker was not driven by the same pioneering fortune seeking drive as his white skilled counterpart, and so exogenous stimulants were used to induce him to the mines.²³ The Black miner was only similar to some of the immigrant White miners in that he too was on the mines purely in a non-permanent capacity. In fact, even more so, as he migrated to the mining areas merely to satisfy certain "static" needs,²⁴ returning to his traditional commune based agricultural and pastoral existence.²⁵

The treatment the Black miner was subjected to once he had been recruited to the mine (often by means most dubious) was described in short by the Secretary for Native Affairs in 1902 as "emaciated".²⁶ Given this poor state of affairs, one must bear in mind that the mines received thousands of labourers annually, all of whom could not possibly have been compelled by circumstance to take up mine employment, there being other alternatives and, besides, many returned periodically.²⁷ Yet malpractice, ill-treatment and unsatisfactory conditions did prevail, much of which never attained public or official attention while likewise very little was put on record.²⁸

A third element drawn to the labour field during the early years of the gold mining industry were the Chinese. Recruited and repatriated within a half dozen years,

17. W.H. Andrews: *Sixty Years of Struggle*, p. 1.

18. Pseudo — Africanus: Johannesburg (*The National Review*, Vol. XL, January 1903, p. 806.)

19. T.A.D.: C14, Vol. 1, Minutes of Evidence, Reports of the Transvaal Labour Commission, p. 76 and Annexure A, Chamber of Mines Annual Report, No. 16, 1905.

20. T. Burt: *A Visit to the Transvaal: Labour — White, Black and Yellow*, p. 70.

21. B.R.A.: HE 152 L Phillips Outgoing Correspondence: L Phillips — J. Wernher, 26.2.1906.

22. T.A.D.: Col. 1897 Transvaal Labour Commission, 1903: Evidence, para. 190.

23. E.B. Rose: *Uncle Tom's Cabin Up-to-Date, or Chinese Labour in South Africa*, p. 4.

24. W. Hutt: *The Economics of the Colour Bar*, p. 6.

25. T.A.D.: Col. 2399, Vol. 86. Report of the South African Native Affairs Commission, 1903—1905, p. 57.

26. T.A.D.: SNA 15 no. 275/02 Correspondence — Secretary of Native Affairs — Chief Labour Inspector 30.1.1902.

27. T.A.D.: SNA 101 no. 319/03 Correspondence — A.E. Lowe — Secretary of Native Labour Association, 12.1.1903.

28. D.J.N. Denoon: The Transvaal Labour Crises, 1901—1906, (*Journal of African History*, Vol. 7, no. 3, 1967, p. 494.)

they were held to have "helped to save an industry and even perhaps a country."²⁹ While Black labour was rightly regarded as the "corner stone" of the gold industry,³⁰ yellow labour was the "scaffold",³¹ a temporary expedient by means of which the industry could be reconstructed. The Chinese, unlike the indigenous Blacks, were a large homogeneous group, and although there existed differences between the populations of different districts, batches enlisted for the Rand were normally recruited together.³²

Generally speaking conditions of Chinese accommodation, diet and medical attendance were good. Enormous sums were spent on "making the Chinamen comfortable", the treatment being regarded as "luxurious",³³ "a life which unskilled workers in many parts of the world might envy."³⁴ Needless to say these conditions were also brought about to counter the British "slavery cries."³⁵ Yet the treatment of the Chinese in general left much to be desired³⁶, and although reports by humanitarians were held to over-exaggerate the ill-treatment "the allegations" according to C P Trevelyan, British M.P., "could not be believed off-hand. But neither could they be denied off-hand by companies against which allegations had been made."³⁷

These three participants in the mine labour field were therefore treated and employed in as diversified a manner as their origins were, and although all three were totally alien to one another it did not take long before rigid attitudes and structures were entrenched.

To begin with, the skilled white miner was lured to the Reef for the principal use of his technical knowledge of mining — a then indispensable prerequisite for the operation of the mines. The remuneration was good and prospects enticing, in fact it was held that the "Rand worker was the highest paid in the world."³⁸ Furthermore, from the very inception of the gold diggings the sentiment prevailed that manual labour degrades the white man,³⁹ and hence the heavy physical work or so-called "dirty work" which they had formerly done themselves overseas, was done by a "man of colour."⁴⁰ The origin of this way of thinking remains a most controversial point, not to mention complex and delicate. It is this that struck the deepest and gravest blow to the labour field.

In England, from whence the majority of Rand miners came, the hard physical work in the mines was carried out as part and parcel of the job. The notion that manual labour degrades the white man was confined to "empty headed snobs," the worth and dignity of honest labour being generally recognised.⁴¹ Evidence of the white

29. P. Holz: *Yellow Men — Yellow Gold (The Reef)*, October 1981), p. 29.

30. F. Johnstone: *Class, Race and Gold*, p. 48.

31. WITS.: Ref. A953 — R.K. Cope: Book I — Research Material for "Comrade Bill", Early Labour Economic Conditions, p. 46.

32. T.A.D.: TKP 203 Foreign Labour Department, Annual Report, 1905—1906, p. 3.

33. T. Naylor: *Yellow Labour: The Truth about the Chinese in the Transvaal*, p. 4; T. Burt: *A Visit to the Transvaal: Labour — White, Black and Yellow*, p. 59.

34. A.G. Boscawen: British Policy in the Transvaal (*The National Review*, XLIX, June 1907, p. 575).

35. T. Naylor: *Yellow Labour: The Truth about the Chinese in the Transvaal*, p. 6.

36. T. Burt: *A Visit to the Transvaal: Labour — White, Black and Yellow*, p. 62.

37. P. Holz: *Yellow Men — Yellow Gold (The Reef)*, January 1982), p. 36.

38. J.P.L.: Ref. 5 Store 920 — J. Cockerill: Miscellaneous Letters, 12.10.1902; Report of the Mining Industry Commission, 1907—1908, p. 94, para. 13; W.T. Stead: *Review of Review*, June 1904, p. 562.

39. T. Burt: *A Visit to the Transvaal: Labour — White, Black and Yellow*, p.43.

40. G.V. Doxey: *The Industrial Colour Bar in South Africa*, p. 31.

41. T. Burt: *A Visit to the Transvaal: Labour — White, Black and Yellow*, pp. 43, 69.

skilled labourer being totally oblivious of this conception, and not expecting anything other than what he had experienced in England, is neatly depicted in the description given of Bill Andrews's first day at work, which brought a "startling revelation":

"The head of the workshop ... handed out his tools:
'Here's your hammer, your chisel, shifting spanner, pliers ...
and here's a nigger.'
Andrews was taken aback. 'What's he for?' he asked.
'To carry your tools' he replied tersely, and dismissed the new hand."⁴²

Cope continues to relate that it took Andrews a little time to get used to this arrangement,

'for the idea of having a toolbearer had never occurred to him."⁴³

This and similar incidents were to deeply impress Andrews and the many other miners who were on arrival:

'free from the fixed attitudes and colour standards of White colonials."⁴⁴

This sentiment regarding unskilled labour was strongly advanced by the capitalists who openly encouraged the foreign workers to consider themselves superior to the indigenous Black.⁴⁵ Leading mining magnate Lionel Phillips was quoted as saying in a public speech, opposing the employment of white unskilled labour, that he need only point out that

"it was customary for mechanics in South Africa to be attended by one or more black men, who carry and hand them their tools, to bring home the fact that it would be a degradation in the eyes of a white man if under such conditions he performed work of a similar character to the natives. The whole idea (was) preposterous!"⁴⁶

Another incident indicative of this sentiment being initially upheld by the mining capitalists was their stern reaction to a scheme advanced by a mine manager, F H P Creswell. To try and alleviate the post-war unskilled labour shortage Creswell had envisaged a scheme known as the "white labour policy",⁴⁷ whereby unskilled whites were taken on at five shillings a day to supplement the insufficiency.⁴⁸ Creswell proved the scheme to be increasingly efficient in both output and reduced costs, yet the mining leaders objected to it profusely.⁴⁹ The upshot was purely political as they feared the emergence of a "white labour force" which would organise itself and become a force to be reckoned with.⁵⁰ They made it quite clear that they were not prepared to consider white unskilled labour feasible as:

42. R.K. Cope: *Comrade Bill*, p. 27.

43. R.K. Cope: *Comrade Bill*, p. 28.

44. R.K. Cope: *Comrade Bill*, p. 28.

45. T.G. 2, 1908 Transvaal Colony: Mining Industry Commission, Minutes of Evidence of J. Riley, p. 1426; Evidence of T. Mathews, p. 443, para. 4874.

46. T. Burt: *A Visit to the Transvaal: Labour — White, Black and Yellow*, p. 44.

47. F.H.P. Creswell: The Transvaal Labour Problem, (*National Review*, November 1902), p. 449.

48. F.H.P. Creswell: The Transvaal Labour Problem, (*National Review*, November 1902), p. 453.

49. T. Naylor: *Yellow Labour, The Truth about the Chinese in the Transvaal*, pp. 17–20.

50. E.B. Rose: *Uncle Tom's Cabin Up-to-Date or Chinese Labour in South Africa*, p. 8.

"the same troubles would arise as were now prevalent in Australian Colonies, viz. that by combination the labour classes will be able to dictate, not only on the question of wages, but also on political questions."⁵¹

In short Creswell's scheme would "break down the mischievous traditional dependence on Blacks."⁵²

However, it was not unnatural that the elite white labour scheme offered obvious attractions to the skilled miner, and that soon all the heavy work (and parts of the skilled) were left to the unskilled Black labourer.⁵³ The notion was generally accepted that for a white man to do manual work was an extreme degradation.⁵⁴ This view was then to infiltrate and be incorporated in numerous aspects of the labour field as the white skilled miner strove to uphold his newly found superior position. We see for example the first appearance of a statutory colour bar in an Act *requested* by the Transvaal Engine Drivers' Association in 1896. It was compulsory for all Engine Drivers to have Government certificates before taking charge of Engines and Boilers",⁵⁵ and regarding these certificates,

"(n)o person of colour may hold an Engine Drivers' Certificate of competency."⁵⁶

This colour prejudice was also evident in the Transvaal Miners' Association membership qualification. From its inception in 1902 membership was restricted to white underground miners in possession of blasting certificates.⁵⁷ In fact, the Black labour force was never included in the ranks of the whites' labour organizations, a factor which has been criticized as the automatic limitation of the strength of South African trade unionism and bargaining power.⁵⁸

The viewpoint that the Blacks were "excellent muscular machines"⁵⁹ and something apart and inferior⁶⁰ was to be automatically transposed onto the third member of the early labour force — the imported Yellow labour. The magnates had fought hard and successfully for this non-European unskilled indentured labour⁶¹ which they had decided upon as the "cheapest of all labour" and notably the labour over which they would have the most control.⁶² Amidst the enormous and diverging protest against the importation of Chinese labour came the cry from the white unskilled labourer who desired to protect his position against this formidable competitor.⁶³ Government provisions had stated that the Chinese were to be employed only on the

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51. B.R.A.: HE 253 Record Department Incoming Correspondence: Labour, files 148, no. 897, Creswell — Tarbutt.
 52. R.K. Hallack: *White Labour Policy in South Africa*, pp. 9—10.
 53. R.K. Cope: *Comrade Bill*, p. 28.
 54. T. Burt: *A Visit to the Transvaal: Labour — White, Black and Yellow*, pp. 44—46.
 55. T.A.D.: MM55 Correspondence despatched, no. 1785/04 South African Engine Drivers' Association: Request for interview with Acting Commissioner of Mines.
 56. D. Ticktin: *Origins of the South African Labour Party*, p. 109.
 57. I.L. Walker and B. Weinbren: *2000 Casualties*, p. 22.
 58. A. Hepple: *The African Worker in South Africa: a study of trade unionism*, p. 6; L. Schlemmer and E. Webster (ed.): *Change, Reform and Economic growth in South Africa*, p. 232.
 59. T. Burt: *A Visit to the Transvaal: Labour — White, Black and Yellow*, p. 86.
 60. E. Gitsham and J.F. Trembath: *A First Account of Labour Organization in South Africa*, p. 13.
 61. Anonymous: Greater Britain (*The National Review*, No. 263, January 1905, p. 934.)
 62. D. Birnbaum: Chinese Labour in the Transvaal, (*The Independent Review*, June 1905, p. 142.
 63. T. Burt: *A Visit to the Transvaal: Labour — White, Black and Yellow*, p. 66.

Witwatersrand as unskilled labour meaning "labour as is usually performed in mines ... by persons belonging to the aboriginal races or tribes of Africa south of the Equator."⁶⁴ Yet, despite this legal position, it was feared that the Chinese would "take the bread out of the White men's mouths"⁶⁵ as they were mentally alert, had a readiness to learn new things and were also prepared to take a job for less pay.⁶⁶

The alleged threat posed to Whites by the Chinese was shortlived, but it served to intensify the resistance of the white skilled miner to any onslaught on his exclusive position.

Another more permanent and drastic onslaught on the White man's position was to eventually arise from the ranks of the Black labour force. Initially the latter had not been regarded as a threat,⁶⁷ on the contrary, mine magnates had upheld and almost enforced the division between Black and White, skilled and unskilled. The position between the two was regarded as one of "stable equilibrium."⁶⁸ However, with long service and continued practice it became noticeable that the unskilled Blacks were becoming more acclimatised and more skillful.⁶⁹ Not only did the Black men reveal themselves as capable of doing a great deal of work which formally necessitated the employment of Whites,⁷⁰ but also in cases where mechanical appliances had been introduced they were so satisfactorily run by Blacks that they tended to obviate the extended employment of White labour on economic grounds.⁷¹

This was to constitute the most serious menace to the White worker's hitherto protected and "artificially maintained"⁷² position. The mine magnate's attitude changed radically as he became convinced that much greater use could be made of the Black man, *and* much greater economisation would result. This changed attitude is clearly visible in the correspondence of Lionel Phillips who wrote:

"In the past (they had) always, publically and privately, both by speech and in act, endeavoured to maintain the prestige of the white man ... letting the black man do the hard work ... (but it seemed to him) ... more and more evident ... that a system of maintaining the aristocracy of the white man, which (they had) always endeavoured to pursue was) doomed."⁷³

Utterances of this nature became the order of the day. Articles in the mine magnate mouthpiece, the *South African Mines Commerce and Industries* journal bore the same threatening tone:

"Unless the (miners on the Rand) maintain their superiority over the native in something more than in name and colour, they must suffer."⁷⁴

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64. T.A.D.: Col. 2026 Vol. 51, Transvaal further correspondence relating to the Transvaal Labour importation Ordinance, May 1904.
65. B.K. Long: *Drummond Chaplin: His Life and Times in Africa*, p. 107.
66. T. Burt: *A Visit to the Transvaal: Labour — White, Black and Yellow*, p. 66.
67. *Report of the Mining Industry Commission: 1907—1908*, p. 23, para. 256.
68. *Report of the Mining Industry Commission: 1907—1908*, p. 23, para. 257.
69. D.M. Goodfellow: *A Modern Economic History of South Africa*, p. 217.
70. *Report of the Mining Industry Commission: 1907—1908*, p. 26, para. 279.
71. *Report of the Mining Industry Commission: 1907—1908*, p. 26, para. 284.
72. B.R.A.: HE 153 L. Phillips Outgoing Correspondence: L. Phillips — J. Wernher, 18.5.1907.
73. B.R.A.: HE 152 L. Phillips Outgoing Correspondence: L. Phillips — J. Wernher, 27.8.1906.
74. Anon: A Straight Talk to Strikers (*The South African Mines Commerce and Industries*, 11 May 1907), p. 202.



by

Market Square, Johannesburg, June
Cape Times weekly edition

"There is a kind of Gresham's law of labour that the cheap invariably drives out the dear, other things being equal. When, as on the Rand, the dear is also inefficient and destructive, it is plain that once the industry decides to allow full play to the economic laws, the position of our white miners becomes precarious."⁷⁵

While mine leaders such as George Albu and E J Way publically announced that the intention was to

"eliminate the white miners to a large extent and to replace them with native miners at native wages,"⁷⁶

they wanted to permit the unskilled Black to be the "real miners" nominally as well as virtually and thus save much of the money paid to White workers "for work they did not perform."⁷⁷

These utterances were more than just talk, and so within two decades we see the White man displaced from a position of being indispensable and important to one of excessiveness and rejection.

Throughout the first two decades of the Reef industrial development there is evidence of the White miner actively resisting this subtle, ever increasing capitalist onslaught. The resistance in the form of spontaneous retaliations and shortlived strike activity was limited but indicated that even in these early stages the White miner was by no means passive towards the manipulating magnate — nor on the other hand were the Black and Chinese labourers.

The first strikes, numbering less than a dozen in two decades, bore the characteristics of things to come in the post-Union industrial period: employees' desperate protection of their privileged position and employers' drastic measures to counteract and subdue opposition. Although these strikes appear to be few in number one must bear in mind that conditions were by no means conducive to collective action, labour sectionalism being the order of the day.⁷⁸ In other words, besides the already mentioned impregnable separation between the Black and White labour forces, there existed definite division between members of different trades and crafts. The early Reef trade unions resembling craft unions of Old Unionism whereby a specific craft strove to ensure and maintain its vested interests.⁷⁹

The following were White workers' strikes on the Gold Mines between 1897 and 1907:

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75. Anon: A Straight Talk to Strikers (*The South African Mines Commerce and Industries*, 25 May 1907), p. 248.
 B. Weinbren: Inside Story of South Africa Labour — Turbulent Years, (*Forward*, 5.11.1943), p. 5;
 W.H. Andrews: *Class Struggles in South Africa*, p. 19.
77. I.L. Walker and B. Weinbren: *2000 Casualties*, p. 22; E. Gitsham and J.F. Trembath: *A First Account of Labour Organization in South Africa*, p. 28.
78. T. Mann: Diamond Mining in South Africa, (*The International Socialist Review*, Vol. XI, no. 1, July 1910), p. 1.
79. W.H. Andrews: *Class Struggles in South Africa*, p. 16; R.M. Rayner: *The Story of Trade Unionism* p. 32; V. Feather: *The Essence of Trade Unionism*, p. 18.

DATE	MINE	DURATION	
1897	April	Robinson Mines	Few Weeks
	April	Lancaster Mine	Few Days
	September	Crown Deep Mine	One Week
		New Primrose Mine	Few Days
1899	Robinson Deep Mine	Few Days	
Anglo-Boer War			
1902	April	Crown Reef Gold Mines	Six Weeks
	September	Villiage Main Reef Mine	Three weeks
1903	November	City and Suburban Mine	Day
	November	Ferreira Gold Mine	Few Days
		New Kleinfontein Mine	Few Days
		Wit Deep Gold Mine	Few Days
1907	October	New Kleinfontein Mine	Few Days
	May	52 Rand Mines	Three Months ⁸

As is evident the 1907 Strike was the first large scale strike to take place in the history of South African labour. The cause of this strike, as in the case of any large scale strike, is multi-faceted and although immediate causes can be singled out they are usually symptomatic of much wider and deeper grievances with many variables at work.⁸¹ Amongst the more immediate causes of the strike was the displacement of White labour by Black.⁸²

This strike was to mark the beginning of a new militant phase of South African trade union and strike activity as the labour force became aware of the need to "thoroughly organise (themselves) with the object of making their influence felt."⁸³ In fact, the end of the strike was dramatically announced by a leader, Mr Coward, emphasizing that:

"the strike had taught them one great lesson, and that was the need of being thoroughly organised and forming a compact body before embarking on a fight with Capital, and their experience during the past three months would prove invaluable to them in the future."⁸⁴

Strike activity during the so-called second phase which then ensued was of a far more militant and aggressive nature, whereafter in the 1940's a third phase followed of curtailment of freedom of action by legislation.⁸⁵

Although the unskilled Black and Chinese labour forces employed during these first twenty years of mining history were excluded from White labour action and circumstantially debarred from their methods of objection, they also revealed their ob-

80. WITS.: Ref. A953 — R.K. Cope: Book II — Research Material for Comrade Bill, Early Labour Economic Conditions, pp. 1—2, 13—15, 52; *The Star*: 1902—1907; *Rand Daily Mail*: 1902—1907; *South African News*: 1907; *East Rand Express*: 1905—1909; *Transvaal Leader*: 1907; T.A.D.: Gov 1106 Correspondence file no. 76/16/07: General Mine Strike Report, p. 1.

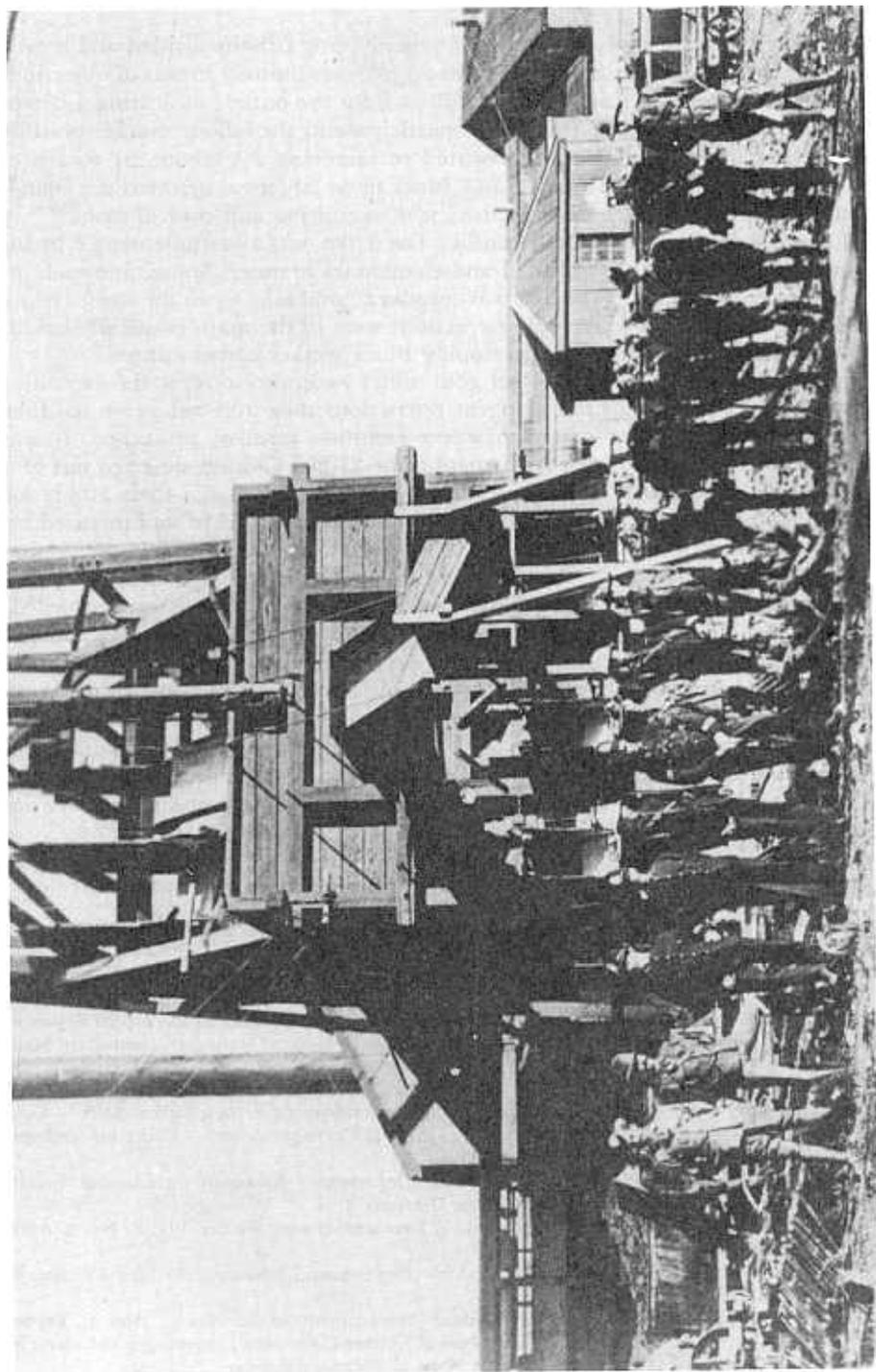
81. E.G.A. Armstrong: An Anatomy of Strikes (R.H. Preston (ed.): *Perspectives on Strikes*, pp. 9, 15, 22, 28); J.E.T. Elridge: *Industrial Disputes*, p. 17; R.A. Leeson: *Strike — A Live History*, p. 14.

82. T.A.D.: Gov. 1106 Correspondence file no. 76/16/07: General Mine Strike Report, p. 1.

83. *Rand Daily Mail*: 25.2.1908, The Strike Rumour, p. 7.

84. *Transvaal Leader*: 30.7.1907, After the Strike, p. 6; *The Star*: 29.7.1907, Strike Settled, p. 7; *South African News*: 29.7.1907, Back at the Old terms, p. 5.

85. W.H. Andrews: *Sixty Years of Struggle*, p. 1.



Scene during miners' strike

Ferreira Deep

(1917)

jection to capitalist exploitation.

The Blacks were not inclined to combination, being tribally divided and legally forbidden. Hence the Black worker was to resort to other indirect means of objection. He, for example, merely refused to be recruited from the outset, indicating a disapproval of conditions and hence refusing to participate in the labour market possibly until conditions improved.⁸⁶ He also resorted to removing his labour by means of desertion. It was estimated that some 6 000 Black mine labourers deserted per year,⁸⁷ affording the capitalists much expense in view of recruiting and control costs.⁸⁸

The ultimate weapon of labour conflict, the strike, was also implemented by the Black miner although in a very limited and elementary manner. Some nine such incidences were recorded during the first two decades of gold mining on the Reef, lasting from two hours up to a few days.⁸⁹ These actions were in the main ethnically based, but were indeed an indication of a developing Black worker consciousness.

The Chinese labourers of the Reef gold mines were also to resist the exploitive capitalist measures despite all the stringent restrictions they were subjected to. Like the Black unskilled labourer desertion was a common form of resistance. It was reported that in the first year of employment some 21 205 Chinese deserted out of a total population of 50 000.⁹⁰ The real source of Chinese protest was their ability for "determined combination,"⁹¹ and although by no means alligned to sophisticated industrial world trade unionism it was a show of force that rendered stern counter action necessary. Recorded accounts of Chinese resistance activity is by no means comprehensive,⁹² but during the period 1904—1906 29 incidents of labour unrest were recorded, with duration ranging from a few hours to three days.⁹³ Even the temporary Chinese were compelled to resist the cast iron hand of capitalism.

Thus in these first two decades of Reef mining history all the elements of future labour development were already visible: the White miner's battle to protect his elitist position against capitalist exploitation and even more so against Black worker encroachment; the awakening of a Black consciousness to mobilise labour plus the almost insurmountable racial division between workers which in post-Union years was to become even more defined and concrete.

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