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Profitability, respectability and challenge:

**(re)gaining control and restructuring the labor process while
maintaining racial order on the South African gold mines, 1913 - 1922**

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Prof Dunbar Moodie

Hobart and William Smith Colleges

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PROFITABILITY, RESPECTABILITY AND CHALLENGE: (RE)GAINING CONTROL
AND RESTRUCTURING THE LABOR PROCESS WHILE MAINTAINING RACIAL
ORDER ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOLD MINES, 1913-1922

T. Dunbar Moodie

Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, New York

Our story begins with two gold mining strikes on the Rand; one of white workers, the other of black. The first has become known as the "general strike of 1913." Since Elaine Katz (1976) has a very thorough book on this event, my account can be brief. Consisting entirely of white workers, the strike began with a dispute about working hours for white underground mechanics at the New Kleinfontein mine in Benoni. A new manager had been appointed to rein in what the Chamber of Mines considered "exorbitant" earnings by white workers, on a mine regarded as "a hotbed of 'Labour'."¹ Indeed, since the recession in 1906-8, mine managements had been tightening up on white earnings, cutting rates and insisting on higher productivity.

White miners had come out on strike in 1907 because white rock-drillers on Knight's Deep mine were required to supervise three machines rather than two. That strike had been ignominiously defeated. Chinese and African contract labor continued to work the mines under the nominal supervision of Afrikaner "scabs." Imperial troops turned out to break up picketing. Again and again since then, disputes between white miners and managements had been decided in favor of the workers by state-appointed conciliation boards and again and again the Chamber of Mines had simply ignored the recommendation.

Although individual mine managements frequently called in representatives of the Chamber, the latter refused to recognize union representation when aggrieved workers on any mine met with management. Overtime rates were abolished on one mine, white workers were retrenched on another, minimum wages were reduced and, in 1912, "many mines introduced new contract forms absolving the companies from having to provide contract-miners with reasonable facilities." (Katz, 1976:328-9). A substantial number of white underground mining contractors found themselves

¹ Elaine Katz, *A Labour Aristocracy*, Witwatersrand University press, Johannesburg, 1976, p.382. Chapter 9 of this book is a detailed account of the 1913 general strike and I rely heavily on it.

unable to come out on the rates set by management (Katz, 1976:344). Those who did found their rates cut viciously. The manager of Crown Deep, giving evidence to the Mining Industry Commission after the 1907 strike was quite open about cutting rates. After denying that white contractors would be cut during any month, he explained that "if we find that a man is making an exorbitant wage we pay him his cheque and cut him next month."² Such arbitrary and arrogant managerial despotism understandably enraged white miners.

The strike on the New Kleinfontein in May 1913 was thus but the final straw. What made it an especially effective mobilizer was that it started with members of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE), a craft union with a history of moderation. Moreover, the engine drivers on the New Kleinfontein, famous throughout the Rand for scabbing on fellow white workers, were firm in their support for the engineers, making it impossible for strike-breakers to be lowered to work the mine. Management backed down on the immediate issue at the New Kleinfontein, but adamantly refused to meet with the strike committee to bargain with them, since that would imply *de facto* recognition of unions. Meanwhile, Parliament had rejected a Labour Party bill requiring an eight-hour day bank-to-bank and on June 10 the New Kleinfontein was restarted with strike-breakers.

"Scab-beating" began at once and on June 30 an angry crowd, including many women, moved along the Reef from mine to mine "pulling out" support for the Benoni miners. By July 4, sixty-three of sixty-seven mines were out and there was call for a general strike, supported by a violent crowd. Police opened fire on a mob that burned down the offices of The Star on the night of July 4. On July 5, all the mines were out and 19,000 white men were on strike. Mass meetings in the streets of Johannesburg, although forbidden at the last moment by magisterial proclamation, were peaceful until Imperial troops opened fire on them, killing women and children and curious bystanders. As the rioting and military slaughter continued (at least 100 people died), Louis Botha and his deputy, Jan Smuts, met with strike leaders and signed a settlement agreement under humiliating circumstances.³ The Chamber of Mines still refused to meet with the unions, however. Since the strike leaders did not press the issue, their victory, for all its dramatic effect, had a certain hollow quality which would return to haunt them.

² T.G. 2, 1908, evidence of W.T.Hallimond, para. 7431.

³ For a brief account of these events see David Yudelman, The Emergence of Modern South Africa, Westport CT, Greenwood Press, 1983, p.99.

The second 1913 strike, this time by black mine-workers, went along with the first and has generally been regarded as its corollary. Actually, the black strike didn't happen until the white Federation had forced the state's hand during the July 5 bloodbath. At the time of the white miners' strikes of May and June, except for a brief event at Van Ryn Estates⁴, black miners continued to work, although they were harassed by strikers and occasionally refused to descend for fear the white men might cut the ropes. For several days at the height of the "general strike" the mines did not operate and black workers were confined to their compounds. Perhaps the successful humiliation of Botha and Smuts by the white strikers gave black workers cause for conversation in the compounds as they waited for the whites to return to work. On Nourse Mines, afterward, the manager reported "constant deputations are coming up to demand increased wages"⁵ -- "a minimum 5/- a day wage."⁶

More militant action took place on Driefontein and New Comet mines on July 3, where 600 or so black miners refused to go down to work, on Witwatersrand mine where Xhosa-speaking miners refused to go to work "until the Native Affairs Inspector opened up the work for them," on Wolhuter mine on July 6, where Pedi workers gathered and shouted their demand to be returned home and when thwarted started throwing stones in the compound, on York Mine, near Krugersdorp, where black workers "rioted" on July 7, requiring police action, and on Modder B, where largely Zulu workers in one compound put out pickets and "threatened to kill any who went to work." They went back only after being threatened with jail by the Director of Native Labour (DNL) who was backed by troops with fixed bayonets.⁷

The real action, however, took place on the City and Suburban, Meyer and Charlton, Village Main Reef and Village Deep, four mines virtually within the city itself. Here more than 9000 black

⁴ Fearful black workers demanded their discharges. [Charles de Villiers, NRC, to DNL, June 20, 1913 (NLB 109, 1238/13/48)] Several were arrested. [SAP, Benoni, to Commissioner of Police, Pta, June 23, 1913 (SAP 80 (Conf) 1/185/13B)]

⁵ . Manager's Report, Nourse Mines, July 19, 1913. [BRA Group, Box 854, File 1445, Vol 3, 1913]

⁶ Letter from Richard Barry, Manager, Nourse Mines to John X. Merriman, 8/7/13. [Merriman Papers, 1913 Correspondence]. On New Rietfontein Estates, the compound manager reported that several black mine-workers had told him that "the [white] men underground had told them that if they went on strike they (the natives) would get 10/- per shift." [NAD memorandum on the events of the strike, February 6, 1914, entry for July 7, 1913, NTS 207, 98/14/473]

⁷ . NAD memorandum, February 6, 1914. [NTS 207, 98/14/473] For Wits Mine see evidence of H.I. Mills, Compound Manager to Buckle Commission, January 30, 1914. [K358, p.31] On Modder B, the compound manager had heart trouble and was replaced "just after the strike." For this and details on activities of Zulu mine police on Modder B, see evidence of mine manager and new compound manager to Buckle Commission, February 5, 1914. [K358, pp.6-15]

workers refused to return to work on Monday, July 7 unless they were paid 5/- a day. To every question put to them, they responded: "We want more money."

The compound manager of the Meyer and Charlton later obtained a statement at the request of the DNL from one Maticket, a Shangaan who was involved in the strike.⁸ This statement strongly influenced the Native Affairs Department (NAD) understanding of the strike. It provides unique insight into the room by room organization not only of this strike but probably of all black collective action during the period of this paper and for decades thereafter⁹. Maticket's story was as follows:

Jacob came along to room No.2 occupied by me and other Shangaans. He addressed me and said, "All the Basutos have agreed not to work in the morning as we want more money. When the white men ask you any questions your answer must be: We want more money and nothing else must your answer be."

On this mine, then, it seems that the strike was initiated by Basotho workers. On outlying mines, action seems to have been limited to particular ethnic groups, but on the Meyer and Charlton the Shangaans were nothing loathe to follow the Sotho lead. According to Maticket:

The Shangaans then deputed me to accompany Jacob around the compound to see if the other natives agreed. On entering room No.3 which is occupied by Tongas, the same announcement was made by Jacob but he added: "If any of you attempt to go down, we Basutos will stop you at the gate and kill."

This intimidation of "tropicals" seems to have been somewhat redundant, however, since:

The Tongas appointed a native named Matches to accompany us, and the three of us went to 8 other rooms making the same announcement in each. In room No. 12 which is occupied by Contractor's Natives -- principally Transvaal Basutos -- we were joined by Johannes who was subsequently arrested as one of the ringleaders.

Probably these contracted workers had been recruited by Morkel Brothers, who found most of their labor in Basotoland, but also "touted illegally for labour in the city and surrounding districts" picking up many shady characters on the fringes of the black underworld.¹⁰ Small wonder that the

⁸ Manager, Meyer and Charlton Gold Mining Company to DNL, 14/7/13. [NLD 114, 1238/13]

⁹ For an account of very similar black worker action twenty years later, see Moodie

¹⁰ Alan Jeeves, Migrant Labour in South Africa's Mining Economy, Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985, pp.158-161.

compound manager pointed out their representative as one of the "ringleaders." He had probably had his eye on them for some time. At any rate, Maticket concluded his story as follows:

We completed the tour of the rooms in the Compound -- 18 in all -- without any further addition to our number. In some of the rooms Jacob was asked who had given him his instructions as the inmates did not like them. Jacob merely answered: "You must say you want more money," and he then quickly went to the next room.

Apparently, these organizing tactics were extremely successful. According to Buckle's report (para. 478), the workers on the four central city mine compounds "entirely disregarded the orders and exhortations of their compound managers -- at the City and Suburban they hunted the compound manager out of the compound with stones, inflicting serious injuries."

H.M. Taberer of the Native Recruiting Corporation (NRC) arrived at about 8.30 pm with 10 mounted police. He promised to return at 9.30 the next morning "and after a short while the natives settled down." The police remained on guard outside the compounds. At the Village Main Reef, Taberer returned next morning with his colleague, Charles Villiers, and S.A.M. Pritchard, the DNL. Pritchard and Taberer asked the workers to state their grievances. They said they wanted 5/- a day. If the whites could get a raise as a result of striking, they wanted one too. Taberer and Pritchard insisted that the whites got no increase and demanded that the blacks return to work. They gave them an hour to consider the matter. "After a while [the black workers] became noisy and turbulent, and were said to be preparing to rush the Compound Gates," reported the mine manager.

Somebody requested police assistance and the compound gates were flung open. The mounted police galloped full tilt into the first square which was "seething with natives" and drove everyone out of it. Sergeant Michael Lynch was left on guard in the square with a small detachment while his commanding officer carried on to the other compounds. At once, several hundred workers who had hidden in the back alleys of the Village Main Reef compound emerged in a rush "armed with stones, bottles, clubs, hand axes, bars of iron and mining tools." This "determined rush" injured several men and horses. One policeman was knocked off his horse. A heavy bottle felled the horse of another, pinning him to the ground. Four or five policemen drew their revolvers and fired a few shots into the zinc roofs in the compound. At the sounds of the guns and the clatter of the bullets in the tin buildings, the black workers backed off and the police were able to rescue their comrades.

Taberer was shocked. "I had an experience I never had before on the Village Main Reef," he told Commissioner Buckle later. Pritchard called in the Imperial army, fortuitously still around after Friday's slaughter of white protesters, and at 3.30 that afternoon a detachment of infantry marched

into the compound with fixed bayonets. H.S.Cooke, Assistant DNL, fresh from enquiring into black mine worker grievances at the Crown Mines, issued an ultimatum. Those who were willing to work on the old terms should go to one the side of the compound; those who refused could go to the other side and be marched off to goal. Offered this Hobson's choice, all the workers went back to work, but the compound manager picked out 20 whom he considered ringleaders and they were charged, along with 20 from the other central city compounds. Each was sentenced to three months hard labor.¹¹

Thus ended the black strike of 1913. 30 Pedi "ringleaders" on Wolhuter also got three months hard labour; 7 workers on York mine got six months; there is no record of the numbers of Zulu sentenced from Modder B. Perhaps as many as 13,000 workers were involved all along the Reef from Krugersdorp in the west to Modder B in the east.¹²

Aftermath

On July 9, at Knight's Central an anonymous notice was tacked to the door of the compound office.¹³ It read:

We want some legal understanding in regard to our pay and position. We do not see the miners who kick us underground. They are absent and we are working. Why should we be sent underground without anything being said in regard to the black man's position? Is it thought that the black men have sold themselves? We want to be told as soon as possible what our legal position is and if there is a new law preventing us from going underground. If there is no such law you should have told us that everything was all right....

¹¹ My account of the events at Village Main Reef and its neighbors is taken from several sources: the NAD memorandum on the strike dated February 6, 1914 [NTS 207, 98/14/473], two reports by R. Raine, the manager of Village Main Reef, one dated July 12, 1913 in the Barlow-Rand Archives [BRA Group, Box 852, File 1445, Vol 3, 1913] and one to the Deputy Commissioner of Police dated July 11, 1913, with accompanying police statements [NLB 114, 1238/13], Taberer's testimony to the Buckle Commission on February 6, 1914 [K358, p.35], and the Buckle Report itself [UG 37, 1914, paras. 478-482]

¹² DNL, JHB, to SNA, CT, 4 January, 1914. [NTS 207, 98/14/473]

¹³ NAD Memorandum, February 6, 1914. [NTS 207, 98/14/473] This notice helps explain the Xhosa demand on Witwatersrand Mine that "the Native Affairs Inspector open up the work." It was almost certainly written by educated Xhosa-speaking workers whose demands for due process in this period were exasperating mine managements all along the Reef.

This was good advice. The next time white miners struck (early in 1914) both the government and the "native authorities" (NAD, NRC, and compound managers) were better prepared. Martial law was declared at once and white strike leaders were summarily deported by General Smuts. A circular from General Botha explaining the situation was read out in all compounds by NAD inspectors. According to the DNL, black miners' "general behaviour during the [1914] crisis was excellent."¹⁴

From the state's point of view, however, serious damage had been done in 1913, when, in the words of the DNL, "natives were bewildered and astonished that government should allow lawlessness to go on comparatively unchecked with mob law running riot or as they expressed it two bulls in one kraal in which neither was master."¹⁵ In a talk to the Transvaal Mine Managers Association, in July 1913, H.S. Cooke (fresh from drafting his critical report on worker grievances on Crown Mines¹⁶) explained that his department had expected that black mine workers would remain forever divided along tribal lines. The July events had advanced matters rapidly, however. He noted with concern that "some of the chief movers in the recent troubles in compounds were natives who had previously given little trouble such as East Coast Natives and Tropicals and what they wanted was more pay." This was what he had also just discovered at Crown Mines.

What really troubled Cooke and his colleagues, however, was "the absolute unanimity amongst natives in these compounds."

They [black workers] had adopted similar tactics as the white strikers and they had in many cases put out pickets and had even been able to overawe a majority. Further the trouble was not confined to one corner, the same position had arisen not only in the central Rand but also in the west and east Rand which showed that there was a tendency amongst natives to amalgamate.¹⁷

¹⁴ DNL, JHB to SNA, CT, urgent and confidential, February 4, 1914. The NAD 1913 strike diary also includes the early 1914 events. [Both in NTS 207, 98/14/473, see also NLB 139, 26/14/48, for local NAD inspector's reports on the January 1914 strike threat]

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ For a discussion of Cooke's Crown Mines report, see Moodie, 2005

¹⁷ Memorandum re Native Unrest referred to in attached letter, date stamped by the GNLB on July 21, 1913, typed on Transvaal Association of Mine Managers stationery. [NLB 109, 1238/13/48]

Here Cooke exaggerated the extent of inter-ethnic black mine worker organization, which seems to have been effectively limited to the central mines (with the possible exception of Modder B, where troops had also to be called in). No doubt he was hoping to persuade mine managers to cooperate with the Buckle Commission which his department was already setting up.

The NAD had more than mine-workers on its mind, however. The Natives' Land Act had been passed on June 20, 1913, in the teeth of vehement opposition from the African elite.¹⁸ The South African Native National Congress met in Johannesburg in July to discuss their course of action. John Dube wrote an angry Zulu editorial in his newspaper, *Ilanga lase Natal*, on June 20, 1913, the day the Land Act was passed. It was titled "A War of Strike. We shall refuse to work." An English translation from the office of the Chief Native Commissioner in Pietermaritzburg was filed with the NAD diary of the 1913 black strike.¹⁹ The editorial read in part:

As I am going to Johannesburg I have already found out what I intend to propose to the leaders with whom we are arranging a universal meeting....If the European insists daily on making partial, oppressive, insulting and degrading laws, it is well that we should protest, and say you can make them but we refuse. Even going to England seems to me hopeless....It is well, my people, that we should fight our wars here in South Africa...it would be as well for all the Native Chiefs in South Africa to unite, and let them collect their people, and warn them that they should not go to work, not one of them, for a white man in Johannesburg or anywhere else, and even those who are working should be told to return home. We should raise ourselves as the Indians do.... [T]oday land is taken away from us, we should do something to show the white people that we are the Abantu, we will not fight with them, but this war of strike is more effective than a war with weapons.... [W]e are being splashed in our faces with dirt and we are expected to accept this treatment and say nothing. We, natives, should strike with the little stick which we have, we should refuse to make their bread for them, as they are persecuting us in this manner....This is what I intend arranging with your leaders, the rank and file must be ready when the word is given; Go Home! Refuse! Strike!

¹⁸ For a useful account of African nationalist response to the Land Act, see Brian Willan, *Sol Plaatje: A Biography*, Johannesburg: Ravan, 1984, pp.161-169.

¹⁹ February 6, 1914 [NTS 207, 98/14/473]. Clearly the Native Affairs Department elided the 1913 black miners' strike and elite opposition to the Land Act. But, as clearly, the strike was also an inspiration for Dube.

Although clearly aimed at the Land Act, this editorial shows Dube at his most militant, proposing collective action which would unite the educated black elite with chiefs and workers -- an alliance the NAD dreaded above all. "It is somewhat significant," said the NAD memo on the 1913 black strike, "that the Native Congress should have thought fit to hold a meeting of this sort at such a time in Johannesburg."

The meeting, held from July 25 to 28, 1913, focused primarily on the Land Act. Several delegates from the Transvaal did in fact suggest strike action on that issue, but they were easily outvoted. Despite the language of his editorial, Dube apparently supported the meeting's decision to send a deputation to England. The Congress meeting, however, was addressed by one B. Waite, an out-of-work white miner, who told them that the Government intended to replace South African workers with alien Africans. Moreover, at the very time of the Congress meeting, "the demands of the white miners were being formulated for submission to the Government by the Federation of Trades." The NAD believed that "this lead would be followed by certain native agitators."

Aware of deeply felt black mine worker grievances and fearful that the state would be placed in the "lamentable...position of having to make concessions to natives as a result of demands being formulated in respect of known grievances," the DNL sought to separate black mine-workers from the Congress elite's agitation against the Land Act by appointing a judicial inquiry under the Chief Magistrate of Johannesburg, H.O. Buckle, to deal specifically with mine-worker concerns. In thus placating black mine workers, the Department hoped to avert what they most feared: a coalition between black workers, tribal chiefs and the Congress movement that would use the strike weapon for political ends.²⁰ On February 6, 1914, (the day the NAD memorandum on the 1913 black strike was completed), the NAD in Pretoria sent a "very urgent" wire to the Secretary in Cape Town, noting an editorial by Sol Plaatje published in Tsala ea Batho on January 3, 1914 in which he wrote in connection with the Land Act:

Some of our people are advised that a more rapid way of obtaining redress would be to organize a general strike amongst the Native labourers at Johannesburg. The women and some of the chiefs are strongly in favour of a strike and when the women of the Transvaal are bent upon a thing you may depend upon its ultimate success....If the Government persists

²⁰ The translation of Dube's editorial and the NAD Memorandum on the 1913 black strike were filed together in NTS 207, 98/14/473.

in advising against appeal to England they are paving the way for an alternative which will shudder this country.²¹

Although Plaatje recommended an appeal to the Imperial Government as a first step, the state had reason for concern. By January, 1914, however, the Buckle Commission was already under way. Black mine worker grievances remained on the state's agenda.

Implications

While the different state reactions to the two strikes of 1913 demonstrate the workings of a colonial racial order in which disenfranchised black workers received different state treatment from whites, such racial distinctions were not necessarily to the advantage of white workers. Certainly military and police involvement in the 1913 white strike was delayed. Although eventually applied brutally, it was unsuccessful and the strikers' demands were met. In the short term, the strike was victorious. In the black case, the police and army acted promptly and violently and the strike was put down without workers' demands even being considered. Alleged leaders were sent to goal with hard labor.

Implications were actually quite complex, however. Victory for the white workers was short-lived. In 1914, having prepared the police and army, General Smuts forced another white "general strike," declared martial law and broke the strike forcefully, illegally deporting nine of the union leaders. State reactions to the black strike were more conciliatory in the longer term. Buckle's report suggested substantial work-place reforms, most of which were officially adopted by the mines and several of which were enforced by the Department of Native Affairs. However, Buckle made no recommendations regarding wage scales as such.

This combination of repression of white workers and paternalism toward blacks -- without making concessions on black wages -- will come as no surprise to those who have understood Rick Johnstone's classical study, Class, Race and Gold. For the Chamber of Mines and the South African government alike, the grievances of white and black workers were radically different issues. Whatever the historical origins of the racial order, these two different groups of workers occupied very different structural positions in the accumulation process.

²¹ NAD, PTA to SNA, CT, 6 February, 1914. [NTS 207, 98/14/473]

My own position is somewhat at odds with Johnstone's approach, both in theoretical and in historical terms, however. The debate about race and class in South Africa tended to misconstrue the theoretical location of class consciousness and racial norms. Liberals typically essentialized racism, while Marxists universalized class consciousness and then struggled to explain racism in class terms. The logic of capitalism is fundamentally about the production of surplus value, however. Capitalist processes of accumulation do indeed create latent class inequities (“class positions” in Weber’s terms), but these are not necessarily articulated in class terms. Both racism and class consciousness are historically contingent articulations which make manifest interests arising in the establishment of social structures. Both race and class are more than merely relations of production, since they mediate the logic of capital accumulation. In articulating interests in racial or class terms, however, social actors often (re)define their interests and thus fundamentally affect the historical manifestations of capitalist logic.

While the mining industry was totally dependent on large numbers of poorly paid migrant black workers, it had to deal as well with the racial exclusiveness of skilled and semi-skilled white workers' insistence on family wages. In Johnstone's account relations between black and white workers are mediated through their systemically derived relationships to capital and the state. Racial differences in working class consciousness thus emerge from different levels of proletarianization (and he smuggles in racially defined suffrage rights) directly. His three class actors, capital, white workers and black workers emerge complete from the processes of capital accumulation with no attention to class divisions, let alone differently articulated identities, within them.

At the very least, we need to consider the shared racial consciousness of whites in South Africa, class divisions among blacks (not to mention differences of “tribal” consciousness) and also to differentiate the interests of the state from those of the mining industry. The nation-state in a given territory, for all its fiscal dependence on capitalist accumulation, has access to means of direct violence denied to capitalist institutions. The state's responsibility for the maintenance of social order (which implies at least consent from its subjects and legitimation from its citizens) constrains it to act in ways which may limit capitalist accumulation, even as it sanctions the legal structure necessary for capitalist accumulation to take place.

I have dealt at length with the events of 1913 because they uncover several themes crucial for this argument in concrete historical guise. For local mine managers and the Chamber of Mines, what was at stake in 1913 was absolute control of production in the face of white working class demands. While this became much more clear during the war years, already in 1913, Richard Barry,

manager of Nourse mines (who had little respect for the Chamber and its minions, whom he thought would "never rise to a big policy") wrote to his uncle, J.X.Merriman, "there appears to be considerable ground for fearing that we shall find ourselves under the tyrannical heel of the Labour Unions before very long. Men will be forced to join the Unions -- recognition of which will be demanded -- Maximum wage for a minimum amount of work will be stipulated and shorter hours will also be proposed." "I do not want to get the heel of labour on our neck," he added, so that "the Trades Federation can cause an absolute cessation of the business of the community every time a Manager has a disagreement with 5 pumpmen..."²². For white workers, what was at stake was protection of their racially articulated interests in a respectable, "civilized" life style.

Mine managements' wished to cut the costs of white labor while maintaining white workers' supervisory control of the labor process. While many managers testified to the growing expertise of black workers, after 1907 mining capitalists never seriously challenged the racial order in South Africa.²³ Race was used by mining interests (in combination with the state) to ensure the massive supplies of cheap labor they needed. Race was also used defensively by white miners, to protect their structural position as fully proletarianized workers from what they perceived to be unfair competition with black indentured labor. What was at stake here was not simply wages, but white miners' standing in the community, their ability to support wives and children in respectable working class housing. Between 1902 and 1912 the percentage of married white mine workers more than doubled, from 20% to 42%.²⁴ This change was partly an outcome of the Afrikanerization of the mine labor force, but it also represented a shift in the meaning of class struggle for white miners. Hence one notes the increasing involvement of women in their struggles.

Black workers and whites were not hermetically sealed from one another by the racial order. Pressures on white contractors by managements after 1907 were immediately passed on to black miners. Moreover pressure on their wages was exacerbated for black workers by the Chamber's introduction of the "maximum average system." This move effectively denied remuneration to black workers for piecework and for taking on supervisory positions and as such was strongly and

²² Merriman Papers, 1913 Correspondence, Richard Barry to J.X.M., July 7, 1913.

²³ The best account of the beliefs and assumptions of mining capitalists is to be found in Belinda Bozzoli, The Political Nature of a Ruling Class, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, chapter 2.

²⁴ Charles van Onselen, Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914: Volume I: New Babylon, New York: Longman, 1982, p.31

unavailingly opposed both by the NAD (for whom black advancement was a major paternalistic commitment and a strategy of control) and mine managers unable to keep skilled black labor at maximum average prices.²⁵

Nor were black mine workers insulated from other black South Africans. They owed allegiance to rural chiefs and headmen and they were never denied access to the urban townships. Like white workers, many educated black city dwellers, who made their livings by clerical work and professional services to rural chiefs and the small black urban community, were also fully proletarianized and even more pressured than white workers by the need for incomes that could ensure "respectability." Unlike white workers, of course, such "petite bourgeois" blacks were excluded from the vote in the Transvaal. The NAD paternalistically claimed to represent their interests. We have already noted the NAD's worries about a possible coalition between mine workers, the chiefs and an increasingly angry black petite bourgeoisie. The compounding of thousands of black workers close to black townships gave rise to white fears of disorder that the state was hard pressed to assuage -- partly because it shared them. The state's interest in the racial order performe laid stress on "order." NAD officials favored black advancement. In fact, dividing the militant youth of the African petite bourgeoisie from the mass of "ordinary" mine workers (and the Congress elite) was a central state concern. Notable was state refusal to tolerate African collective action, but also official readiness to seek concessions from management for black workers when they acted collectively.

A full understanding of the black strike of 1920 and the Rand Revolt of 1922, would require a careful historical survey of articulation and action around these issues by the various collective actors during the war economy and the post-war crisis²⁶. Since this is impossible in the space available, I can attempt only hasty discussion of the high points before turning briefly to the "big" strikes.

Production Politics

The majority of white miners before 1915 were contractors who were paid a percentage of the fathomage mined. The mines provided them with black labor and equipment for which they charged them. Black rock drillers were paid for the number of inches they drilled if they were

²⁵ See also Moodie, n.d..

²⁶ This has recently been attempted by Jeremy Krikler in his important book, with somewhat mixed success from the theoretical point of view.

hammer drillers and for the number of holes if they were machine operators. Hand hammer drillers were the best paid black workers on the mines and the most independent. They consistently refused to drill more than one hole a day for fear of having their rates cut.

Ruthless cutting of white miners' contract rates in 1912, which was one of the reasons for the 1913 general strike, did affect black workers as well, however. Rates of pay for black migrants were set by the recruiting organizations of the Chamber and could not be altered. In order to be paid for a day's work a black "hammer-boy" had to drill a certain number of inches. If he failed to do so, the word "loafer" would be marked by the white miner on his ticket for the day and he would not be paid for the shift nor would the cost of his labor be deducted from the white miner's contract. As management began to tighten up on contracts, the issuing of "loafer tickets" (always a temptation for white miners) became a regular practice.²⁷ In addition, while it had always been common for hand drillers to lash (shovel after blasting) their stopes (the channels to the rock face) in order to get to the face to drill, by 1912 white miners would often save on lashing costs by assigning so much shoveling to their drillers that the latter would not have time to complete their holes.²⁸

It ought to come as no surprise, then, that the central city mines where black miners went on strike in 1913 were all older hammer mines and that evidence to the Buckle Commission is filled with complaints about loafer tickets (and lashing) by hammer boys. Indeed, in 1915, on the basis of Buckle's recommendations and at the insistence of the NAD (in the face of strong opposition from the Association of Mine Managers and the Chamber, but with passive support from the NRC) loafer tickets were officially banned by the DNL.

Their department having officially banned the loafer ticket system, NAD inspectors were instructed to turn a blind eye to its use for purposes of labor control. However, the mines were

²⁷ For a useful description of loafer ticket problems, see the report of the Natal Deputation to the Witwatersrand, November 7, 1909. [SNA 449, 3749] See also NLB 3, reports from Inspectors, January 1909, and the report of the 1913 NAD Crown Mines Enquiry. [NLB 111, 1376/13/154]

²⁸ Moodie, n.d. has a more complete account of mining processes. For a detailed report on an inspection by a NAD inspector on the problem at Randfontein mine, see A.W.Rawlinson, 22 March, 1912. [NLB 43, 996/12/154]. On September 23, 1912, the DNL held a special meeting with the Chamber's Consulting Engineers on this matter and agreed that there be a two-hour maximum. [NLB 77, 2817/12/154] There is much in the evidence to the Buckle Commission [K358] on this topic (cf.eg. D.B. Donovan, Mine Captain, UMR, 30 January, 1914, pp.14-15; S.A.M.Pritchard, DNL, 2 February, 1914, pp.1-8; A.W.Stockett & C.W.Villiers, NRC, March, 1914, pp.8-11 & 20). This issue hung on long after the loafer ticket question was resolved. See, for example, evidence to the Economic and Wages Commission on 16 September, 1925 by George Champion for the ICU (para 7778), with the response of the Compound Managers' Association (paras. 12356-96).

required to record every unmarked ticket and to make the figures available to NAD inspectors. The ban was enforced in cases where a disproportionately high percentages of loafer tickets were issued. The mines also gradually phased out contract labor for white miners during the early war years. White miners were thereafter paid a daily rate (usually with a bonus for productivity). The number of loafer tickets issued was drastically reduced by the end of 1915.²⁹ By 1922, white miners were pleading for the reintroduction of loafer tickets to ensure labor control.³⁰

Resistance to Proletarianization and the Moral Economy of the Mine

Even such a brief account of race relations at the point of production in the gold mines raises questions about the adequacy of Johnstone's historical treatment of black labor. His notion of "ultra-exploitation" renders black migrants mere puppets of the structures of capital accumulation. He cites nine different plaintive voices of black miners giving testimony to the Buckle Commission in support of his argument that African workers had objected strongly but helplessly against their ultra-exploitation under the wage color bar. Each of his quotations, with complaints about tickets marked for "porridge not money," is actually a complaint about loafer tickets, not about low wages in general. He makes no mention of the banning of loafer tickets soon after. Thus, his failure to contextualize leads him to read what were specific grievances as systemic problems.

For Johnstone, while white workers used their industrial and political organization to defend their class position, Africans were little more than pawns in this struggle, dutifully (albeit complainingly) carrying out their systemically defined roles as suppliers of labor power for the capitalist accumulation of surplus value. Closer analysis, examining historical changes in relations in production, shows black mine workers as more active participants in production struggles and more effective in pursuit of their collective interests than Johnstone imagines (however much they may have been "objectively" ultra-exploited).

This was at least partly for a perfectly good systemic reason which Johnstone's discourse about migrant "proletarians" neglects. Most African mine workers had access to land in the

²⁹ There is a brief history of official policy on loafer tickets in the NAD evidence to the MIB (Sept 2, 1921) in NLB 339. For more detail, see the correspondence in NLB 115 & 117, 1759/13/243 in 1915 and C of M archives, "Buckle Commission," T2314 to T2597. Actually the story is rather more complex than the summary I provide here.

³⁰ See evidence of the MWU to the MIB (Sterling Library, Yale University), June 28, 1922, pp. 3593-97.

countryside, with rural projects and social organization to sustain them both at home and on the mines. They retained a stubborn and socially supported sense of integrity rooted in their rights and resources as rural proprietors.³¹ They also made skillful use of a deferential dialectic, backed by collective action, and their evidence to commissions must be read in this light.

In fact, I would argue that, far from black workers' being puppets of management control, unrepresented subjects of a company state, hegemony over black miners was always uncertain. It required constant vigilance by managers, whose powers were limited by a moral economy, an implicit contract, admittedly unequal, which nonetheless gave workers a strong measure of independence from management strictures in their everyday lives. Basotho and Mpondo ex-miners told me how compound dwellers would confront management injustices, either by means of mass demonstrations after work, or, to quote the 1919 evidence of James Cowan, a shaft sinker at New State Areas, by adopting "a sort of strike attitude for an hour or two until a level-headed man talks to them."³²

The several elements in the standard repertoire provided by the moral economy for black worker action around local issues included wildcat strikes for underground (largely late hoisting) grievances, mass demonstrations for compound grievances, and marches by groups of workers from the compound to the offices of the recruiting organization. All these techniques of struggle were later used in the great 1920 black wage strike. Note however that workers mobilized in local struggles over the moral economy did not usually demand wage increases in local confrontations. Their collective action, in Tilly's terms, was reactive rather than proactive.

1918 Store Boycotts

Mozambicans gave a clear demonstration of the reactive nature of the moral economy in 1918 when they introduced a new form of collective action on the mines. In February 1918, they organized a very successful boycott of concession stores near the East Rand mines to protest inflationary prices. In typical fashion, Mozambican leaders at Van Ryn Estates mine went from

³¹ See my own work on this topic in Going for Gold, chapter 1. Keith Breckenridge's unpublished essay, "We Must Speak for Ourselves," makes a similar point, with more stress on rural hierarchies which I tend to neglect.

³² Evidence to LGMC, para, 43331. See Going for Gold, chapter 3.

room to room calling a meeting, where "they made it a law [umteto?] that any native seen buying from the shop...will be knocked [about] and they will take the thing he bought and tear [it] into pieces."³³ The boycott movement spread rapidly to other mines on the East Rand with well-organized and effective pickets. As far as possible, pickets would accost shoppers from their own language-group so as to avert faction-fighting.³⁴ Nonetheless, purchases were sometimes destroyed in front of their owners, although, in the words of the Rand Daily Mail (February 13, 1918), "most of the victims became converts to the cause." They were demanding that concession stores return to pre-war prices. Eventually, action by mounted police against the pickets and several arrests and convictions temporarily settled the boycott movement. The boycotters had made no public mention of wages.

Deeply concerned, the NAD hastily set up the Stanford Commission to investigate prices at mine concession stores. Its findings were predictable -- that price rises were a result of wartime inflation, not price-gouging. Mozambicans stayed longest on the mines and bought more goods to take home at the end of their contracts, so it was not surprising that they led the early boycotts. White workers had been given wartime cost-of-living allowances but these were denied to the blacks. The Commissioner's greatest fear was:

that the natives are now realizing that the purchasing power of a sovereign only equals that of 10/- as before the war, and on some articles even less than 10/-, and in the near future this may lead to a demand for increase of wages and possibly a strike if this is refused.³⁵

1920 Strike

Indeed, inflation does seem to have been the primary cause of the great wage strike which rolled along the Reef in February, 1920, and brought out more than 80,000 black workers in all.³⁶

³³ Report of Native Constable W. Jali, not dated (c. February 18, 1918). [SAP 91, 15/13/18/1] For an account of meetings generating umteto see my Going for Gold, p.291.

³⁴ Telegram from Deputy Commissioner of Police, Pretoria, to Commissioner of Police, Cape Town, February 14, 1918. [SAP 91, 15/13/18/1]

³⁵ First Stanford Report, UG4-'19.

³⁶ Phil Bonner's article remains the best analysis of the strike, but see also Breckenridge, op cit.

Ironically, the strike was ignited by a Chamber decision to increase the maximum average from 2/- to 2/2 per shift. It also offered a re-engagement bonus of 5/- a week. That decision, made at the end of 1919, followed store boycotts and compound demonstrations on several mines in November and December. Further demonstrations broke out in January. Individual mine managements seem to have been free to exercise their own discretion in giving the raises, however, providing splendid opportunities for moral outrage on the part of workers on those mines which didn't give raises right away.

On February 9, the NRC distributed a further circular, upping the raise another penny a shift. Store boycotts continued through the early weeks of February, and on February 15 the night shifts at Modder Deep and Nourse West were picketed by workers urging them out on strike. Police dispersed the pickets. The same night, on Cason compound at ERPM, two black workers were arrested for incitement to strike and the next day the entire work force simply refused to turn out. The following day two mines and 3,500 African miners were on strike. By February 19, there were 11 mines and 30,000 black workers out. On February 24, the number on strike had increased to 15 mines and 47,000 workers. By then several mines had returned to work and yet others were coming out. The police surrounded striking compounds, refusing to allow workers to leave.

By February 24 and 25, mounted police were galloping into the compounds and driving the striking inhabitants to work on the pretext of breaking up illegal pickets. At Village Deep, however, all the workers were on piecework and many were Basotho. The Basotho have no fear of horses so when the mounted force thundered through the compound gate they were ready for them. Forty-four gallon drums were rolled at the horses knees, downing them. Dismounted, the police opened fire, killing three workers on the spot. Four or five others died later in hospital. By February 27, all the mines were back at work. To the best of my knowledge, this was the last time horses were ever used for strike-breaking on the mines.

The Chamber, enormously impressed by the discipline and order of the black strikers, fully expected recurrences. Once people were back at work and drawing pay, however, they would have seen their 15% raises. In 1921, South African prices started to deflate and, perhaps as important, the Portuguese escudo collapsed against sterling.

Collective action by black workers had obliged the Chamber to increase black wages. Nobody dared cut them again. Prices came down and did not rise again until the middle of World War II, so that the buying power of black mine wages (especially in Mozambique and the Eastern Cape) remained relatively stable for the next two decades. Their structural independence, work

place organization and informal compound solidarities had won for black mine workers some of the advances they had sought with patient insistence for two years. Thus, both in the case of their agitation against loafer tickets and their wage demands in the teeth of inflation, black workers, far from being merely plaintive victims of colonial despotism or ultra-exploited puppets, had demonstrated their bargaining power.

1922 Rand Revolt

For white workers on the mines, it was a very different story. Mine managements had been arguing for years that as low-cost black migrant workers acquired mining skills they required less supervision from skilled white miners. For whites on the mines, however, the First World War represented opportunity. The departure of many skilled English miners for the battle-front obliged the mines to hire Afrikaners and white labor shortages placed them in a strong bargaining position.³⁷ Unlike blacks, white miners obtained war bonuses. In 1917, a series of wildcat strikes earned them their long-sought 48 hour week, bank to bank. This was a particularly telling concession since regulations required that a white miner make safe before black workers entered the work place. With the new short work-week, black miners had a long wait underground in the morning until the white man came down. In fact, the regulation was honored in the breach and black boss-boys, who were given more and more responsibility as white workers became fewer and less skilled, often made safe and set the teams to work before the white miners appeared. Some blacks even blasted. The 48-hour week concession to white miners thus weakened their racial standing at the point of production.

In 1918, Bill Andrews, the white miners' leader, visited the United Kingdom and made contact with the Clyde Workers' Committee. He brought back to South Africa the methods and ideals of the British shop stewards' movement and unionists like Percy Fisher and Ernest Shaw began to apply militant worker control methods on the mines. The Low Grade Mines Commission endorsed the shop stewards' movement in 1920, but mine managers hated frequent negotiations with white workers about how to run their mines. Endless Boards of Reference seemed to be mine managers' and Chamber representatives' fate under the shop steward structure. Production suffered.

³⁷ Johnstone, *op cit*, pp.98-104.

At the end of 1919, William Gemmill of the Chamber attended the founding conference of the ILO in Washington DC. He watched with enthusiasm the strike-breaking activities of the "firm democratic capitalistic" U.S. Government, and returned to South Africa determined to oblige the South African state to follow the same path. Yudelman (1983:152-5) has beautifully demonstrated how a cost and productivity crisis on the mines with the fall in the gold premium, led to management demands for total reorganization of the labor process. Such reorganization would demand radical pay cuts for white workers and massive lay-offs as well.

Gemmill chose his terrain carefully, increased the numbers of non-union company officials underground, made arrangements with the state, and deliberately forced a strike on the Colour Bar because he was sure this was an issue on which white miners could not compromise. Sure enough, white miners came out on January 10, 1922. General Smuts waited until the Chamber had provoked the strikers (organized in commandos) into violent action and then bombed the strikers into submission. Hundreds were killed. His handling of the affair cost Smuts the 1924 election, but the Chamber won back absolute control of underground work organization from white workers. Unionists' surrender was unconditional. Johnstone provides an excellent account of the reorganization of the mine labor process and the displacement of many white workers.³⁸

Interestingly enough, mine managements, having secured a free hand at the point of production, did not replace all the white workers with experienced but less expensive black supervisors. Why not? One explanation is that the migrant labor system required coercive underground controls which were derived from the colonial context and white workers were thus needed for labor control. As early as 1917, however, the mines had begun to institute slightly higher wages and supervisory responsibilities for black "boss boys."³⁹ Why could these not have been expanded? There was certainly no reluctance on the part of black "boss boys" to use physical coercion on their mining teams. Indeed, as the mines moved into the reorganization of the 1920s, the "boss boy" began to take the front line in coercive control of the labor process, squeezing surplus value out of his reluctant underlings.

Part of the reason for keeping the white miner, albeit in a semi-skilled supervisory role, was certainly the colonial racial assumptions of mine managers. I would suggest with Johnstone,

³⁸ Johnstone, *op cit*, pp.136-145. Yudelman, *op cit*, chapter 6, is excellent on the co-optation of organized white labor.

³⁹See my *Going for Gold*, pp.61-65.

however, that a further more structural factor was at work. This was the maximum average system which the Chamber doggedly held onto in the face of internal and external opposition.⁴⁰ The maximum average system stabilized black wages and kept them down despite intense competition between individual mines for black labor. To have promoted black "boss boys" out of the maximum average system and paid them substantially better wages (which began to happen only in the late 1960s) would not only have aroused white miners. It might also have suggested to other black miners that they could get higher wages. The unequal equilibrium that was established after the 1920 strike was too tenuous, I suspect, to risk by promoting "ordinary" black workers to higher wage positions. The mines settled on retaining supervisory whites at reduced wages with low-paid black supervisory underlings. It was less risky all round, fitted with the racial view of the world shared by colonial whites (including mine managers) and was certainly less expensive than wage raises for all black workers.

Conclusion

Whatever the reason, the Chamber continued with a policy of white supervision on the mines. The loyalty of white miners was ensured by the gradual extension to them of improved wages and benefits (especially from the 1930s) and by providing subsidized housing which guaranteed them respectable family lives.

The defeat of white workers in 1922 and the subsequent reorganization of mining established a production regime whose general delineations continued for fifty years. As secondary industry began to pay higher black wages from the 1930s, this regime obliged the mines to search deeper and deeper into Africa for cheap black labor not "freed" from homestead proprietorship. Call this system "colonial despotism" if you will (it was constituted by a colonial racial order and could never have been maintained in its pure form without colonial domination). Even at the point of production, however, its despotism was limited by an implicit contract, unequal but constantly contested. In mine living quarters also, the undoubted powers of this "company state" were limited by practices of collective resistance.

ENDNOTES

⁴⁰ See Moodie, 2005.

