

RACE AND INDUSTRIAL LEGISLATION
IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1911-1926

by

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ABSTRACT

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Race and Industrial Legislation in South Africa, 1910 - 1926.

It is widely believed that job reservation constitutes the sole form of statutory racial discrimination in South African industry. Little is known of the legal disciplinary codes which apply only to Africans. The initiation of both kinds of legal discrimination by the British mining community is an equally neglected theme; Afrikaner Nationalists are almost automatically blamed.

A race relations structure similar to that of the rural Afrikaner society developed in the nascent mining industry. Yet this occurred not because of either Boer racism or political pressure, but because the British industrialists and miners, like the Boer farmers, constituted a society of colonists whose economy rested on the cheap labour of captive Africans. Class conflicts within this society were resolved when its democratically elected government passed discriminatory laws to protect both the "white standards" of miners and the profits of magnates. These conflicts and compromises are the subject of this thesis.

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La législation raciale et industrielle en Afrique du Sud, 1910 - 1926.

Les restrictions de l'emploi sont souvent présentées comme la seule forme de discrimination raciale fixée par la loi dans l'industrie de l'Afrique du Sud. Les lois disciplinaires, prévues uniquement pour les Africains, restent peu connues. Il en est de même pour l'introduction par la communauté minière britannique de mesures discriminatoires légales des deux genres. Les Nationalistes Afrikaner en sont presque automatiquement tenus responsables.

Une structure de relations raciales, semblable à celle déjà en vigueur dans la société rurale Afrikaner s'est développée dans l'industrie minière naissante. Pourtant cette évolution n'a pas été provoquée par le racisme Boer ou à la suite de pressions politique; les causes proviennent du fait que les industrialistes et les mineurs britanniques, tout comme les fermiers Boer, constituaient une société de colons dont l'économie était fondée sur la disponibilité d'une main d'oeuvre africaine, bon marché et captive. Les conflits de classe à l'intérieur de cette société se sont résolus lorsque le gouvernement démocratiquement élu a voté une série de lois discriminatoires visant à protéger les "white standards" des mineurs, ainsi que les bénéfices des industrialistes. Ces conflits et compromis forment le sujet de cette thèse.

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PREFACE.

South Africa's industrial society has long attracted the interests of students of race relations. Historians and social psychologists claim to have unearthed the "feudalistic" roots of its racial prejudice, and sociologists have analysed the racial structuring of its labour force. Most of these studies give the mistaken impression that laws protecting white workers from African competition are the only form of legal discrimination in South Africa's mines and factories. Disciplinary codes which discriminate against Africans by making it a criminal offence for them to organize trade unions, to strike, or to otherwise fail to "do their duty" are rarely discussed. An equally neglected theme is the responsibility of the British industrial community for the formulation of both types of racial legislation; the Afrikaner Nationalists are usually condemned a priori for this aberration.

Such widespread misconceptions are encouraged by the continued absence of a thorough study of race relations in the early period of industrialization. My thesis is an attempt to fill this gap. It will show that a system of race relations similar to that of the Afrikaner rural society was incorporated into the nascent mining industry. Yet far from being initiated by Afrikaners, who played little or no part in the development of mining, this system was designed by British trade unionists and mine owners. The race

relations structure erected by these Britons closely resembled the system evolved by the Afrikaner farmers because both communities had a similar position vis-a-vis the "natives": they were white colonists whose economy depended on the extensive use of the cheap and tractible labour of colonized Africans. Neither Afrikaner farmers nor recent British immigrants shied from using their power as colonists to enforce conventions and laws which protected their colonial status - their "white standards".

It is nevertheless true that white miners and their employers were members of different economic classes. These two classes did not always agree on what constituted a threat to "civilized standards". The miners regarded the cheapness and tractibility of their African labourers as the danger, while the "bosses" constantly complained that only a more captive and lower paid African labour force could prolong the life of the mining industry. But what is more significant, and what has been ignored in the past, is that a compromise between these two views was achieved when laws were passed which dispelled the fears of both classes. Because the colonial "status group" possessed a democratic government, its dominant economic classes were both able to obtain legal protection from the vagaries of "market forces". Thus although there was class conflict within the colonial society, such conflict was resolved or over-ridden by a collective desire to unite against the African assault on "white

standards". The conflicts and compromises which shaped South Africa's industrial colour bar structure occurred for the most part between 1900 and 1924; they are the subject of my thesis.

For his guidance in the preparation of the thesis I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Myron Echenberg. I have also received valuable and much appreciated assistance from librarians at McGill University and various libraries and archives in England. The final draft of the thesis was very conscientiously typed by Mrs. Audrey Hannan. My greatest debt however is to my wife, for her encouragement and, above all, her patience.

CHAPTER ONE

The Historical Perspective: Pre-Industrial Race Relations and the Birth of the Mining Industry.

White settlement in South Africa began in 1652 when the Dutch East India Company established a way station at the Cape of Good Hope. The station was to be nothing more than a half-way house between Holland and the East, a place where ships could stock-up with fresh water, meat and vegetables. At first the Company used the military garrison to do the necessary farming work, but disappointing results soon forced them to search for an alternative labour force. The Company's commander at the Cape, Jan van Riebeck, suggested importing Chinese labourers, but "head office" preferred the idea of sending Dutch settlers to establish an agricultural colony. Jan van Riebeck responded with a proposal to give "free burgher" status to a number of Dutch "Company servants", and in 1657 the Company agreed to the granting of this status and a certain amount of land to nine company men.¹ Though technically free, these men were forbidden to engage in the important cattle trade with the Cape's indigenous inhabitants - Khoikoi or "Hottentots" - for fear that they would either encroach on Company profits or disrupt the trade.² So apprehensive was

¹ I.D. MacCrone, Race Relations in South Africa. (Johannesburg, 1937), pp.27-8.

² Cornelius W. DeKiewiet, A History of South Africa, Social and Economic. (Oxford, 1941), p.5.

the Company about the dangers of unregulated contact between black and white that it even contemplated building a canal to ensure separation.³ The burghers keenly resented this and other proposals designed to restrict their freedom to expand and trade.

Dissatisfied with these ambitious ex-employees, the Company started importing slaves from West Africa and the East Indies in 1658. Initially intended solely for Company use, and perhaps eventually to replace the errant burghers, the slaves quickly found themselves working in burgher households. Indeed within a year each burgher was given permission to buy up to three slaves from the Company.⁴ But the burghers were unable to establish a permanent slave caste from these slaves, for they justified slavery in terms of religious rather than racial differences and were thus obliged to free the children of slaves after they had been baptized. Such manumission was virtually automatic when the children were products of marriages between slave and master.⁵ In this way blacks not only gained their freedom but even became land-owning burghers with the same legal status as white burghers.⁶

But this situation did not last. As the numbers of white free burghers increased,⁷ so did their desire to leave all manual work to

³ MacCrone, op.cit., p.26.

⁴ Ibid., p.31.

⁵ Ibid., pp.42-4.

⁶ Ibid., p.71

⁷ By 1756 there were 5123 free burghers, Daniel S. Neumark, Economic Influences on the South African Frontier 1652-1836. (Stanford, 1957), p.10.

slaves.⁸ The practice of baptizing and freeing the children of slaves obviously threatened to thwart these aspirations by constantly whittling down the numbers of slaves. Consequently emancipation through conversion to Christianity became difficult, and by 1700 the slave condition was becoming a more permanent thing.⁹ To justify the change, the view that slavery was the "proper condition of the black race" developed. And the conviction increased in popularity as more of the Cape's white population were freed from the drudgery of manual labour by their possession of slaves. By the end of the eighteenth century there were more slaves than burghers - 16,767 as opposed to 13,830¹⁰ - and a white skin rather than religious belief became the criterion for entry into the burgher class.¹¹

The reasons for this change need emphasizing. When attempting to establish a slave caste from a slave group who are of another race or races, it is more efficient to use this racial difference rather than a cultural difference like religion as a mark of permanent servile status. This is especially true if acculturation in the form of religious conversion has previously led to manumission. It can also be argued that the decision to subject a group and all its descendants to permanent slavery entails the establishment of a system of exploitation and coercion

⁸ W.M. MacMillan, Bantu, Boer, and Briton. (Oxford, 1963), p.33.

⁹ MacCrone, op.cit., p.78.

¹⁰ Neumark, op.cit., p.10.

¹¹ M.K. Katzen, "White Settlers and the Origin of a New Society, 1652-1778", in Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson, (Editors), The Oxford History of South Africa. (Oxford, 1969), Vol. 1, pp.187-232, p.232.

requiring greater justification than cultural difference - the dehumanization of the slave caste is necessary. The all-powerful white group in Cape society thus invented within that society and in their minds a frontier with free white human beings on one side, and non-white sub-human slaves on the other. The other important attitude of the whites towards their slaves was ambivalence - a desire to have their labour but a fear of their presence.

An external frontier was developing at the same time as this internal frontier. During the eighteenth century white farmers pushed the boundaries of the Cape settlement further and further into the interior. Though partly a reaction by restive burghers against Company restrictions, this expansion was mainly a response to the "economic principle demanding an extensive use of the abundant factor, land, relative to the scarce factors, capital and labour."¹² Maximum use of land was also encouraged by the "insatiable" demand for cattle at the Cape as opposed to the "precarious" grain and wine market.¹³ But the abundant land was not good pasture and this, combined with the desire of all whites to be independent farmers, stimulated a conversion not simply from agriculture to pastoralism but to transhumance or even nomadic pastoralism.¹⁴

¹² Neumark, op.cit., p.18

¹³ Ibid., p.16

¹⁴ Katzen, op.cit., p.209

The new pastoralists developed a distinctive lifestyle and a modified belief system. Those who migrated seasonally or at longer intervals, lived in windowless huts with mud floors, while the true nomads lived permanently in their ox-wagons.¹⁵ Isolated from each other and from "civilization", the so-called trek-boers became xenophobic and ultra-conservative. They rarely brought slaves with them, for on the frontier it was too easy for slaves to escape. But they nevertheless retained the racial ideology of the Cape's slave-owning society, which became their justification for taking the land of the Khoikoi and San - "Bushmen" - and reducing them to servile status. Indeed the isolation of the trek-boers in the more hostile environment of the frontier and their desire to distinguish themselves from the surrounding Africans resulted in the adoption of more rigid and exclusivist racial and religious ideologies.¹⁶

The Company strongly disapproved of this trek-boer expansion, but they were unable to contain it. All white settlers were regarded by the Company as profit stealing "interlopers", though the trek-boers were particularly unpopular. Their land-grabbing, unscrupulous trading, and raiding created frontier unrest which disrupted trade and necessitated increased military spending.¹⁷ On numerous occasions during the

¹⁵ DeKiewiet, op.cit., p.18, Katzen, op.cit., p.209.

¹⁶ Katzen, op.cit., p.230.

¹⁷ These raids led to "Kaffir Wars" in 1779 and 1793, Neumark, op.cit., pp.102-3. "Kaffir" was the common derogatory name for Africans.

eighteenth century, the Company tried without success to end the interaction between settlers and Africans. The trek-boers resented these attempts to restrict expansion, and towards the end of the eighteenth century they used the demands of the French Revolution for Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity in their battle for the freedom to steal African land, people, and cattle.¹⁸

Yet despite their reluctance to accept the Company's policy of complete separation of black from white on the frontier, the boers did want to establish some kind of dividing line between themselves and the Africans. Because they feared the African pastoralists, the trek-boers wanted them driven out - except the ones they needed to do their work. This ambivalence towards Africans across the external frontier was clearly displayed in 1812. Whites living in the area of the Zuurveld on the Eastern Cape frontier first agreed with the Cape's new British administration that all Xhosa clans should be "removed" from the Zuurveld, but later complained that this would mean the loss of their Xhosa servants.¹⁹ Unable to use slaves on the frontier and not having enough loyal Hottentot servants, some boers employed Xhosa who were paid with "blankets, beads, and metal - but also horses and guns."²⁰

The British administration of the Cape, which began in 1795 but was

¹⁸ Arthur Kepple-Jones, South Africa, A Short History. (London, ?) p.163.

¹⁹ Sheila T. Van der Horst. Native Labour in South Africa. (London, 1942), p.12.

²⁰ Monica Wilson, "Co-operation and Conflict: The Eastern Cape Frontier", in Wilson and Thompson, op.cit., pp.233-71, p.242.

interrupted for three years between 1803 and 1806, did more to upset the colony's settlers than trying to stop frontier interaction. It introduced legal and administrative reforms that provoked a mass exodus of Dutch settlers from the Cape Colony into the interior. This "revolution" was affected by British officials whose determination to apply the dogmas of economic liberalism to the Cape was compromised neither by close ties with monopolistic trading companies nor by the need to win votes; they were bureaucratic Whigs whose methods were not democratic and whose aims were not egalitarian.²¹ After flinging the Cape open to free trade, the administration began to apply economic liberalism to the Colony's socio-economic system. His Majesty's officials never propagated racial equality, but they did want the Cape's "non-whites" to be taxpayers and consumers of British goods, as well as being "useful servants"²² - and slaves neither paid taxes nor bought goods.

The first legislative step in the direction of slave emancipation came in 1828 when all free "persons of colour" - mostly "Hottentots" - were granted the same legal status as whites. The next step was taken in 1834: all slaves became "apprentices" and were promised complete freedom in 1838.²³ In the intervening four years white settler resentment against the granting of legal equality to both "Hottentots" and slaves resulted in the beginning of the First Great Trek of Dutch

²¹ DeKiewiet, op.cit., pp.30-1.

²² Van der Horst, op.cit., p.17.

²³ Eric Anderson Walker, The Great Trek. (London, 1938), pp. 84-6.

settlers from the Cape. These folk were not merely horrified at the prospect of "persons of colour" gaining legal equality with them; they were convinced that the loss of slaves or captive servants would undermine their whole socio-economic system and bring about the "total ruin of the country".²⁴ Other aspects of British policy were opposed for the same reason. Foremost among these was the appointment of British Magistrates, the prosecution of burghers on charges of ill-treating slaves and servants and the replacement of the old loan farm system, whereby only a very small rent was paid (sometimes!), with a system of land purchase.²⁵

These changes persuaded many Dutch settlers that they must leave the Colony in order to "maintain such regulations as may suppress crime and preserve proper relations between master and servant".²⁶ The Great Treks thus began, the first lasting from 1835 to 1840 and the second from 1843 to 1848. The trekkers, unlike the traditional trek-boers, deliberately set out from the Cape determined to create their own state or states where their position as a master-caste would be secure.²⁷ This determination was so strong that the colonists embarked on the Trek against the wishes of their Church and without ministers.

²⁴ Manifesto signed by P. Retief, leader of the first Great Trek, and published in the "Grahamstown Journal", February, 1837, cited in G.W. Eybers, Select Constitutional Documents Illustrating South African History. (London, 1918), pp.142-5.

²⁵ DeKiewiet, op.cit., p.40.

²⁶ Retief's Manifesto, op.cit.

²⁷ Ibid.

Once they entered the "wild and dangerous territory" beyond the Cape borders, the Voortrekkers, as the members of the Great Trek were called, adopted the life style of the trek-boer.²⁸ Except for the wagons, horses, and guns which enabled them to seize land from the Bantu-speaking people of the interior, the Voortrekkers possessed very little that these people might want. The economic activity of both groups - that is, some kind of migratory pastoralism - was "essentially" the same.²⁹ Socially and politically, the Voortrekkers were even more homogenous than their notoriously egalitarian African "neighbours". The fiercely individualistic and ill-disciplined trekkers accepted little authority from above and no insubordination from below.³⁰ Even when land shortages compelled some boers to become squatters - bywoners - their living standards and political rights were not significantly different from those of the landowner.³¹

To preserve their group integrity, the Voortrekkers had to combat this anarchistic individualism within and the African presence without. A racial and religious ideology even more exclusivist than that previously held on the Cape frontier was evolved by the trekkers in response to this dual threat. They came to regard Africans as another

²⁸ Leonard Thompson, "Co-operation and Conflict: The High Veld", in Wilson and Thompson, op.cit., pp.391-446, p.407.

²⁹ Van der Horst, op.cit., p.54.

³⁰ MacCrone, op.cit., p.108.

³¹ Thompson, op.cit., p.425.

species, calling them "'skepsels' (creatures) rather than 'mense' (people)".³² These Voortrekker racial attitudes were reinforced by the religious conviction that they were involved in a movement identical to the Exodus of the Bible. They were the new Israelites, and as such they had the same divine right to African land that the Israelites had to the land of the Canaanites. And, like the Israelites, it was their religious duty to subjugate or destroy all their enemies in the Promised Land.³³ Faced with the stress and fear of the frontier life, the trekkers thus emphasized and distorted aspects of their religious dogma which contributed to the maintenance of their group integrity. Racial and religious attitudes were fused for the same reason. The word "Christian" became synonymous not with the term "white man", as had been the case in the Cape, but with the word "man".³⁴ The Voortrekkers consequently despised missionaries who tried to convert Africans to Christianity, only tolerating those who promised "to teach the natives that the Boers are a superior race".³⁵

The ambivalence of this "race" towards Africans was an exaggerated form of the same attitude held by the trek-boers of the old Cape frontier. Having severed all political links with the Cape, the Voortrekkers could expect no external aid either in the procurement or the continued

³² Leonard Thompson, "Co-operation and Conflict: The High Veld", in Wilson and Thompson, op.cit., pp.391-446, p.407.

³³ J.A.I. Agar-Hamilton, The Native Policy of the Voortrekkers. (Cape Town, 1928), p.117.

³⁴ MacCrone, pp.125-6.

³⁵ Agar-Hamilton, op.cit., p.123, quoting a letter written by David Livingstone, May 26, 1849.

occupation of African land. After driving Africans from land they coveted, the trekkers were afraid to allow the dispossessed people to live nearby. Yet if they drove them all away, or killed them, who would do their manual work? Thus the Voortrekkers simultaneously advocated the contradictory aims of "separation and interaction; they talked about maintaining the frontier, but themselves employed African labourers...."³⁶

The "Native Policy" of the three Voortrekker Republics - the South African Republic (the Transvaal), Natal, and the Orange Free State - was an attempt to resolve this dilemma. Only those Africans needed for domestic service and farm labour were allowed to reside on "white" land, and their freedom of action was restricted by regulations and practices designed to maintain "proper relations between master and servant". In Natal all Africans were "foreigners" who could only live in the Republic as servants, and even then they were not allowed to own guns, land, or horses, or to move around without a pass signed by their master.³⁷ On unwanted land in the South African Republic reserves were established for "surplus" Africans, and contacts between these reserves and white lands, particularly trade in liquor and cattle, were rigourously discouraged. The Republican regimes even stipulated the number - usually four or five - of African squatter or labour tenant

³⁶ Monica Wilson, op.cit., p.271.

³⁷ Thompson, "...The Zulu Kingdom and Natal", op.cit., pp.367 and 384.

families the boers could safely allow on their land.³⁸

But the most coveted servant was neither the squatter nor those pressed into service by labour taxes,³⁹ but the so-called apprentice. The boer commandos brought back African children from raids and "apprenticed" them. When this "apprenticeship" ended, at the age of twenty-five for males and twenty-one for females, the ex-apprentices became servants with the same family. Though illegal, there was a definite trade in these apprentice children, the usual "transfer fee" being £2.5.0.⁴⁰ The "apprentice" system held two great attractions for the trekkers. Since no inducement in the form of wages or land use was required to attract "apprentices", they were very cheap, and because they were brought up as servants and had no roots elsewhere, "apprentices" were a captive and tractible labour force.⁴¹ But the trekkers were even ambivalent in their attitude towards this kind of docile labour. When questioned about the capture of Zulu children, the typical answer from Natal farmers was that "For my part I would rather not have them; but what...would my wife say if I did not bring her some? It is so difficult to obtain servants in Natal."⁴²

The "farmer aristocrat" of the Boer Republics was "patriarchal" and

³⁸ Thompson, "...The High Veld", op.cit., p.436.

³⁹ Walker, op.cit., pp.239-40.

⁴⁰ Agar-Hamilton, op.cit., pp.172-81.

⁴¹ Katzen, op.cit., p.208.

⁴² Thompson, "...The Zulu Kingdom and Natal", op.cit., p.367.

"arbitrary" in his treatment of these apprentices and his other servants.⁴³ Corporal punishment was sanctioned by law, and insubordinate servants were not spared the rod.⁴⁴ Legislation governing the general maintenance of "proper relations between master and servant" was enacted in all the Republics. The Natal Ordinance No. 20 of 1850 was the first of these "Master and Servants Laws" and it was followed by similar laws in the South African Republic in 1880 and the Orange Free State in 1904. The Natal and South African Republic laws were similar to the Cape's Masters and Servants Act of 1856 in so far as they did not explicitly name the "Servant" as black and the "Master" as white.⁴⁵ But the definition of "servant" in all three laws was "designed to exclude occupations ordinarily followed by white employees...."⁴⁶ Those defined as servants were liable to criminal prosecution for absence without leave, desertion, "wilful breach of duty", and disobedience.⁴⁷

Having both the will and the power to apply such discriminatory laws and conventions, the whites of the Republics were able to handle a large African labour presence. When a Natal magistrate was asked in

⁴³ Agar-Hamilton, op.cit., p.157.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.162.

⁴⁵ This was probably done to avoid giving the British an excuse to intervene; this is indicated by the passing of an explicitly racist Masters and Servants Law in the Orange Free State in 1904, after its annexation by Britain.

⁴⁶ Report of the Economic and Wage Commission (1925), U.G. 14 - 1926, p.39.

⁴⁷ Van der Horst, op.cit., p.35.

1852 about the role of African labour in his district, he replied that:

"It would be very difficult to contemplate any kind of product of labour, except skilled labour, which does not involve that of the Kafir in this district. On a farm he does almost everything. He herds the cattle, milks the cows, churns the butter, loads it on the wagon, the oxen of which he inspanns, and leads. He cuts wood, and thatch, he digs sluits [sluices], and makes bricks, and reaps the harvest; and in the house, invariably cooks."⁴⁸

Despite such massive reliance on African labour, the white populations of the Republics were "amazingly successful" in retaining their biological, cultural, and ideological integrity - in a word, their "standards".⁴⁹ These "standards" were still intact,⁵⁰ as was the African labour system, when large mineral deposits were discovered in South Africa in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Diamonds were first discovered in part of the Cape Colony called Griqualand in 1867. Fortune hunters swarmed in, and the mining industrialization that was to transform South Africa began. Production was at first small scale and chaotic - no less than 3,200 claims were staked out by "diggers" around the diamond town of Kimberley. As the diamonds were buried in subterranean "pipes", relatively deep excavation was needed. The necessary pick and shovel work was usually done not by the "diggers" but by Africans they employed very cheaply.⁵¹ The

⁴⁸ Natal Native Affairs Commission, 1852-4, evidence of Mr. Peppercorne, p.6, cited in Van der Horst, op.cit., p.47.

⁴⁹ Agar-Hamilton, op.cit., p.116, Jan H. Hofmeyr, South Africa, (London, 1931), p.49.

⁵⁰ Thompson, "...The High Veld", op.cit., pp.425-6.

⁵¹ DeKiewiet, op.cit., p.92.

traditional master-servant relationship of rural South Africa was thus easily maintained in the early diamond "diggings".

But the "digger" production system was too uneconomic to last. The multitude of unco-ordinated diggings meant that production costs were high, and the unregulated sale of diamonds flooded the market and depressed prices.⁵² The notorious Cecil Rhodes won the tough battle to control the Kimberley diamond field. His De Beers company monopolized both production and sale of all diamonds by 1890. Although the "diggers" were by then merely employees of De Beers, they succeeded in getting the Company to uphold the division between white and black labour. They became the Company's managers, supervisors and artisans; Africans were restricted to manual labour.⁵³

This dualistic pattern set by the diamond mines was taken up and exaggerated by the gold mining industry which began operations in the Transvaal in 1885. Johannesburg, the metropolis of the gold fields, was the "child of Kimberley".⁵⁴ But the child soon outgrew the parent, becoming the nucleus of a "startlingly modern industry" upon which the rest of the South African economy would depend.⁵⁵

Yet the gold mining industry had a humble birth and many teething troubles. In 1884, two brothers prospecting in the Witwatersrand area

⁵² Van der Horst, op.cit., pp.62-3.

⁵³ DeKiewiet, op.cit., p.94.

⁵⁴ Kepple-Jones, op.cit., p.170.

⁵⁵ Ralph Horwitz, The Political Economy of South Africa. (London, 1967), p.6.

of the Transvaal discovered an outcrop of gold-bearing rock which they called the "Confidence Reef". But the Struben brothers quickly found that it took a great deal of work to recover just one ounce of Transvaal gold. For the gold was dispersed in tiny particles within a conglomerate rock of "rounded quartz pebbles embedded in a quartzitic matrix, which is fine grained and extremely hard."⁵⁶ At first gold was obtained by crushing and washing huge amounts of the surface outcrop of the conglomerate or "banket" - the Strubens had five small crushing machines known as stamps⁵⁷ - but the outcrop of the reef was soon worked out. Continued production thus required the sinking of shafts and the installation of hauling gear capable of bringing large quantities of rock to the surface.⁵⁸ Production on such a scale would also depend on the mine owner's ability to attract and organize a large force of African labourers - even the puny operations of 1886 employed 1500 unskilled Africans.⁵⁹

The diamond magnates of Kimberley were not slow to take up this challenge - once they realized the extent of the Witwatersrand's gold bearing reefs. In terms of the gold content of the ore, the Rand deposits were the poorest on earth, but their unprecedented size made them the world's richest gold field. The great difficulty for South

⁵⁶ DeKiewiet, op.cit., p.116.

⁵⁷ G.A. Watermeyer and S.N. Hoffenberg, Witwatersrand Mining Practice. (Johannesburg, 1932), p.2.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp.5-6.

⁵⁹ Van der Horst, op.cit., p.125.

Africa's gold industry has not been to find gold ore, but to extract gold profitably from abundant but low grade ore.⁶⁰ This struggle began in earnest in 1886 when Rhodes and other Kimberley operators started purchasing mining rights and the necessary plant to extract and crush ore.⁶¹ The advent in 1890 of the process whereby the gold particles were separated from the banket by submersion in huge vats containing a cyanide solution added yet another costly capital item to the mining companies' shopping list.⁶²

This need for both high capitalization and low production costs led to a steady whittling down of the 270 mining companies floated in the few years following discovery. The number had been reduced to 45 by 1899, with financial houses often controlling several companies.⁶³ This process of consolidation eventually resulted in the "group system", under which a few financial companies controlled all the mines. Yet though the great amalgamations of the Transvaal gold mines were not completed until 1910,⁶⁴ extensive co-operation between the mining companies began at an early stage. This co-operation was institutionalized in 1889 by the formation of the Witwatersrand Chamber of Mines.⁶⁵ The Chamber was pledged by its constitution "To promote any legislative measures or petition Government or Volkraad...on any matters directly

⁶⁰ DeKiewiet, op.cit., p.117.

⁶¹ Watermeyer and Hoffenberg, op.cit., p.3.

⁶² Ibid., p.5.

⁶³ H.J. and R.E. Simons, Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950. (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp.127-9.

⁶⁴ Watermeyer and Hoffenburg, op.cit., p.7.

⁶⁵ Van der Horst, op.cit., p.129.

affecting [mining] interests."⁶⁶ And this the Chamber frequently did, especially when it considered government action essential for the success of its constant battles to reduce African wages, to fix a wage scale for all Africans employed in the industry, and to reduce the cost of recruiting Africans. But the Chamber was only gradually able to implement these policies, partly because the loyalty of member companies was not assured until the great company amalgamations of the early twentieth century.⁶⁷

Like the company shareholder and their managerial staff, most skilled miners were British and could only be attracted from their homeland by the prospect of considerable financial gain.⁶⁸ The mines required only a relatively small number of skilled men, and hence they did not balk at the "market realities of demand, supply and marginal productivity" which placed a high price on this labour.⁶⁹ The average wage of the 5,400 white employees on the mines in 1894 was £21 per month; in contrast, the 40,000 Africans employed got an average wage of £3.10.0.⁷⁰ In 1906 these figures were £30.6.0 and £3.16.0 respectively, making South Africa's white miners the highest paid in the world.⁷¹ This wage gap between skilled whites and their African

⁶⁶ Witwatersrand Chamber of Mines, Annual Report for the Year 1897, p.v.

⁶⁷ Van der Horst, op.cit., pp.30-1.

⁶⁸ The Report of the Economic Commission, U.G. 12 - 1914, para. 33.

⁶⁹ Horwitz, op.cit., p.168.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Majority Report of the Transvaal Mining Industry Commission, T.G. 2 - 1908, p.42. 1914 Economic Commission, op.cit., p.25.

labourers was often widened in practice by a system under which some miners were contracted to extract a given amount of ore and were responsible for paying their African labourers. Not surprisingly, the contractors frequently underpaid the labourers who, as members of a colonized people, found it virtually impossible to redress their grievances.⁷² Although "market realities"⁷³ were important in establishing the hiatus between white and black labour, "colonial realities", such as the powerlessness of cheated Africans, contributed much more to the moulding of the South African labour system than writers on the subject have acknowledged.⁷⁴

The most significant of these colonial realities was the division between white master and black servant transferred from the rural African society. White mine employees were exempt from the Masters and Servants Law and Pass Laws which the Rand mines used to keep their African labour force in line. The white miners' privileged position was further enhanced by conventions and laws which reserved certain mining jobs for whites, especially jobs which experienced African workers could aspire to. After representations from the all-white miners' union, the Volksraad of the Transvaal passed South Africa's

⁷² The Report of the Native Grievances Inquiry, U.G. 37 - 1914, p.302.

⁷³ Horwitz, op.cit., p.168.

⁷⁴ For instance, Horwitz, op.cit., pp.168-9 and Kepple-Jones, op.cit., p.170. They and many other writers seriously exaggerate the influence of market or "natural" forces.

first industrial job colour bar law in 1893.⁷⁵ Under Section 63 of that law, non-whites were barred from preparing explosive charges, placing them in position, and igniting them.⁷⁶ Three years later three semi-skilled jobs, including locomotive driving, were legally reserved for whites. But in 1897, as a concession to the mining companies, the government dropped the bar on two of the three previously protected semi-skilled jobs.⁷⁷ Thus when the British took over the administration of the Transvaal after the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), the only job legally reserved for whites was engine driving. The new regime repealed this prohibition and all the other mining laws of the Republic, replacing them with a Mines, Works and Machinery Ordinance in 1903. The Ordinance itself contained no colour bars, but regulations authorized by the Ordinance reserved for whites the job of mine manager, and the three semi-skilled jobs previously reserved by the Republican government. These discriminatory regulations were introduced by a victorious and "all-powerful" British regime under no significant public or trade union pressure.⁷⁸

Such laws, combined with conventions and market forces, set the white miner apart from his African labourers. Most miners became, in practice though not officially, supervisors of black labour. What manual work these "bosses" did perform was usually done grudgingly and

⁷⁵ Simons, op.cit., p.55.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.56.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.78

inefficiently.⁷⁹ Nor did the mining companies object to this racial division of labour. Indeed in 1905 the Chairman of the Chamber of Mines regretted the failure of some people to "appreciate the justice of this sharp identification line...."⁸⁰ The industry also accepted, either "consciously or unconsciously", the concept of a high minimum wage for white workers.⁸¹

But despite their ability to collect a high wage and leave the hard work to the "Kaffirs", the white miners' calling was dangerous and insecure. Perhaps the greatest hazard they faced was a form of silicosis known as Miners' Phthisis. Constant drilling and blasting filled the air of the poorly ventilated Rand Mines with "microscopic particles of exceedingly sharp silicious dust."⁸² When inhaled, these particles remained in the lungs and their irritant effect stimulated the growth of fibrous tissue which could accumulate until breathing became impossible.⁸³ The mining companies were indifferent to the havoc that Phthisis wrought among its white and African employees. The Chamber of Mines vehemently opposed the implementation of certain government safety regulations because its members objected to the cost of installing ventilation systems and other devices to allay dust.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Report of a Select Committee on European Employment and Labour Conditions, S.C.9 - 1913, pp.2-3.

⁸⁰ Chamber, Annual Report for the Year 1904, p. lx.

⁸¹ 1914 Economic Commission, op.cit., para.101.

⁸² Report of the Miners' Phthisis Commission, 1902-1903. (Pretoria, 1903), pp.xxi and xiii.

⁸³ Ibid., p.xix.

⁸⁴ Chamber, Annual Report for the Year 1896, pp.60-4.

In addition to inhaling this lethal dust, the white miners had little job security. Men were often fired in large numbers when the management of mines changed hands, as it frequently did.⁸⁵ And when this happened, the men and families were thrown out of the company houses in which most of them had lived. Such evictions were so common that company houses were "treated as camps rather than homes."⁸⁶ It was to fight for more secure and safer employment and to combat African and white immigrant competition that the Witwatersrand Mine Employees and Mechanics Union was formed in 1892.⁸⁷ The Union, which was not recognized by the employers until 1914, was later renamed the South African Mine Workers' Union.

Although certain of the white miners' grievances were legitimate, their working and living conditions were superior to those of the African labourers. The vital role that cheap African labour played in making the Rand's ore pay, and the shortage of this labour about which the Chamber constantly complained, did nothing to improve the lot of African labour - "market realities" proved unreal. Various strategies unrelated to market forces were devised to induce Africans to work in the mines. Laws designed to force Africans into employment in order to pay money taxes were passed in the British Colonies, Rhodesia and the

⁸⁵ 1914 Economic Commission, op.cit., para 40.

⁸⁶ Ibid., para.38.

⁸⁷ Simons, op.cit., p.53.

Republics. Yet because there were alternative forms of wage employment, these tax laws failed to appease the mines' insatiable demand for cheap African labour. In 1890 the Chamber acknowledged that "private enterprize had failed to maintain an equilibrium of supply and demand" with regard to African labour, and it asked the government to "render assistance by inducing the natives" to work in the mines.⁸⁸ Similar requests were made throughout the 1890's,⁸⁹ but the farmers who sat in the Volksraad were unwilling to help the mine bosses syphon off their labour supply.

The mines were thus forced to begin recruiting operations, first by paying independent labour agents and later by establishing their own recruiting system. Labour agents were paid a "capitation fee" for each African they signed-up for mine work. These labour agents usually employed "touts", most of whom were white traders on African reserves, who did the actual "recruiting". In addition to deceiving prospective recruits about pay and working conditions, these unscrupulous men frequently advanced either cattle or large quantities of goods and then forced the debtor to work in the mines in order to repay his debt.⁹⁰ The debtor usually had no choice of mine and often used every penny he earned to pay his debt; his creditor, the trader, also received a

⁸⁸ Letter from Chamber to the Industrial Commission of Inquiry, 1897, 20th May, 1897, cited in Annual Report for the Year 1897, pp.44-5.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ The Report of a Select Committee on the Native Labour Regulations Bill, (1911), Minutes of Evidence, pp.42-4, Evidence of Mr. S.A.M. Pritchard, Director of the Transvaal Government Native Labour Bureau.

percentage of the capitation fee paid to the labour agent. Before long Africans began to react to the "solicitations" of such men with the accusation that "You want to buy and sell us, and afterwards we find that we have to pay from our earnings all your expenses [including the capitation fee] as well as our own."⁹¹ Mine employment thus became unpopular - no more than 754 of the 42,557 Africans employed within a three mile radius of the Johannesburg in 1896 were "Transvaal Natives."⁹²

The mining industry's response to this situation was a turning point in the history of Southern Africa. It recognized the need for its own centralized recruiting agency, but stipulated that this organization should concentrate on recruiting in Portuguese Mozambique. The agency, the Rand Native Labour Association, was set up in 1896 - but only after the government had enacted a Pass Law strong enough to ensure that the labour recruited at great expense by the R.N.L.A. would not desert in large numbers.⁹³ The R.N.L.A., which was renamed the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association in 1901, was granted monopoly recruiting rights in Portuguese East Africa and the British High Commission territories.⁹⁴ In 1912 the Chamber formed the Native Recruiting Corporation to recruit African labour within the Union of South Africa.

⁹¹ Letter from L.S.H. Tainton, Government Labour Agent, Cape Colony, to the Chamber of Mines, 31st. Jan., 1899, cited in Annual Report for the Year 1899, p.42.

⁹² Van der Horst, op.cit., pp.136-7.

⁹³ Chamber, Annual Report for the Year 1896, p.5.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

The recruiting and employment of "Portuguese natives" was, from the mining companies' point of view, a great success. Recruiting was so successful - in 1897 half of the industry's African labour was from Mozambique and in 1903 "about eighty per cent"⁹⁵ - and the "Portuguese natives" were such good workers⁹⁶ that the British Administration strengthened the system with an agreement between itself and the Portuguese. Signed in 1901 and called the modus vivendi, the agreement recognized the industry's monopoly recruiting rights in Mozambique in return for a guarantee that a good percentage of the Rand's lucrative rail traffic went to the Mozambique port of Lorenzo Marques.⁹⁷ Similar arrangements were embodied in the Transvaal Mozambique Convention, which replaced the modus vivendi in 1909. But even before then, Mozambique had become the industry's "most important source of [African labour] supply, both in numbers...and the length of time for which the natives stay at work, as well as in the suitability of the natives for mine work."⁹⁸ Because the "Portuguese natives" stayed longer at the mines, the companies got a bigger return on their recruiting and training expenses. And the fact that their pay was not given

⁹⁵ Van der Horst, op.cit., p.136, Chamber, Annual Report for the Year 1903, p.xlvii.

⁹⁶ Chamber, Annual Report for the Year 1899, p.39.

⁹⁷ Leonard Thompson, The Unification of South Africa 1902-1910. (London, 1960), p.55.

⁹⁸ Chamber, Annual Report for the Year 1905, pp. xxiv-xxv.

to them until they returned to Mozambique, together with their confinement to compounds in a foreign environment, meant that few Mozambique workers deserted.⁹⁹

But desertion remained a serious problem, especially in the years before the consolidation of the Mozambique recruiting system. The act of desertion - that is, permanently leaving a place of employment - was of course a criminal offence under the Republic's Masters and Servants Law, but the mine employers did not consider its sanctions sufficiently harsh. The Chamber therefore campaigned for more effective legislation. In 1895 the Volksraad responded with a new Pass Law specifically designed to "bring the natives under effective control and reduce the risk of desertion to a minimum."¹⁰⁰ On taking over the Transvaal the British promulgated Pass Regulations which even more effectively "controlled" African mine labour.¹⁰¹ Such was the dedication of the mining companies and their political collaborators to the free play of market forces.

The mining industry was also eager to combat "market realities" related to the wage rates of their African employees, and the government was once again willing to support them. Africans accepted low

⁹⁹ Chamber, Annual Report for the Year 1904, p.65.

¹⁰⁰ Chamber, Annual Report for the Year 1896, p.6.

¹⁰¹ Van der Horst, op.cit., pp.161-2.

wages because they had to earn money to pay taxes and to supplement the produce from their overcrowded and eroded reserves. Their inability to change jobs suddenly also kept down wage competition between mines. But the mine owners wanted to push wages down further still. This was essential, the Chamber insisted, in order to increase the size of the African labour force. For Africans came to the mines to earn a specific sum - a target - to pay taxes or debts, and once the target was reached they abandoned wage employment.¹⁰² If wages were reduced they would work for longer periods.¹⁰³ The Chamber and the Association of Mine Managers therefore drew up a new pay structure based on reductions of between twenty and twenty-five per cent.¹⁰⁴ And when the new scales were introduced in 1896, the government co-operated with the Chamber to "prevent any disturbance arising in the event of the change causing discontent".¹⁰⁵ But the policy was not entirely successful; certain mines refused to reduce wages for fear of losing too many African workers. The Chamber nevertheless ordered similar wage reductions in 1897 and 1898; it was determined to make a success of its wage colour bar policy.

¹⁰² Chamber, Annual Report for the Year 1895, p.22.

¹⁰³ Ibid. The Chamber's position was backed up by The Report of the Transvaal Labour Commission 1904, Cd.1896, p.33, and by fairly widespread belief in the operation of the "backward leaning supply curve".

¹⁰⁴ Chamber, Annual Report for the Year 1896, p.xxv.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

After the Anglo-Boer War the notorious "maximum average" system became the mainstay of this policy. In its Annual Report for 1902 the Chamber recommended that the average wage of an African mine worker, whether he was employed on piece or day work, should not be higher than £2.10.0 for a month of thirty shifts¹⁰⁶ - that would be the "maximum average". The system was adopted and African recruiting slumped, as did the efficiency of African workers previously paid at piece rates.¹⁰⁷ The Chamber reacted by relying more on Mozambique labour and by looking around for other sources of foreign labour. It was also compelled to relax temporarily the "maximum average".

The appalling conditions under which Africans worked were as much a cause of discontent and desertion as the industry's wage colour bar principle. A combination of colonial and market forces shaped their fate: to be a permanent caste of unskilled labourers¹⁰⁸ with no power to effect changes in their industrial lives. The market forces contributing to this were powerful only in the early years of mining industrialization, when Africans had only their muscle power to sell. During the 1890's many African mine workers became experienced and

¹⁰⁶ Chamber, Annual Report for the Year 1902, p.56.

¹⁰⁷ Transvaal Mining Industry Commission, 1908, op.cit., Minutes of Evidence, Part II, p.430, evidence of miners' union leader Tom Mathews.

¹⁰⁸ Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission, T.G. 13 - 1908, p.22.

efficient,¹⁰⁹ yet they were neither promoted nor given official training in more skilled jobs. If market forces had been in action they, the cheapest labour by far, would have displaced at least some semi-skilled whites. The African was, of course, barred from all but unskilled work by the "colonial forces" activated by the belief, shared by mine owners¹¹⁰ and their white employees, that it was improper for an African to be anything but the unskilled servant of a white master. The white miners based their claim for colour bar protection on this dogma, and its common acceptance, plus the powerlessness of Africans, enabled the mining industry to subject its labour force to the discipline of the Masters and Servants and Pass Laws. And though there were provisions in the Masters and Servants law forbidding "deception in contracts"¹¹¹ and assaults on "servants", the colonial situation encouraged such things while giving the "servant" little or no chance of redress.¹¹²

This was certainly true in the mines, whose African "servants" worked under extremely dangerous conditions and lived in squalor.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹Transvaal Mining Industry Commission, 1908, op.cit., pp.480-1.

¹¹⁰Chamber, Annual Report for the Year 1904, p.lx.

¹¹¹The Native Recruiting Corporation gave advice on how to write *déceptive* contracts, e.g. N.R.C. Circular no.55, Nov. 8, 1913, cited in Native Grievances Commission, op.cit., paras. 72-75.

¹¹²Ibid., para.37

¹¹³T.B. Commission, op.cit., p.259. Dr. Gregory, the only member of the Commission not professionally connected with the mining industry, said in his Minority Report that a "chaotic state of affairs" existed.

While white and black miners were equally exposed to the dust that caused Phthisis, the treatment that Africans received in other respects made them far more susceptible to the health hazards of mining. The bringing of many labourers from tropical regions to the cooler climate and different disease-environment of the Rand caused hundreds of deaths each year. Over-work and poor nutrition greatly increased this toll. African miners were frequently kept underground for more than twelve hours a day without food.¹¹⁴ The one meal they received each day was a maize gruel¹¹⁵ which they ate while still clad in their filthy, sweat-soaked work clothes; white miners had changing facilities.¹¹⁶ In this way large numbers of Africans contracted pneumonia and other respiratory diseases - and many of them died. The official death figures were gruesome - every year between 1905 and 1912 an average of 88 out of every 1000 "Portuguese natives" died - yet they were a gross underestimation of the toll that the Rand mines took.¹¹⁷ For as soon as an African was found to be suffering from Tuberculosis, Phthisis, or any similar condition, he was sent home to die.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Simons, op.cit., p.84.

¹¹⁵ Select Committee Native Labour Regulations Bill, op.cit., evidence of Mr. A.M. Mostert, labour contractor, p.131.

¹¹⁶ T.B. Commission, op.cit., pp.208-10.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp.199 and 197.

¹¹⁸ Select Committee Native Labour Regulations Bill, op.cit., p.69, evidence of Mr. S.A.M. Pritchard.

Victims of Tuberculosis thereby introduced the disease into their families and communities, and in some areas it reached epidemic proportions.¹¹⁹

Most of the healthy African mine labourers spent their off-duty hours confined to compounds where they were housed and fed. Surrounded by fences and patrolled by company police carrying hide whips (sjamboks), these camps were prisons in all but name. Cut off in this way from their normal family and social life, some African miners became heavy drinkers - in 1897 the Chamber estimated that between twenty and thirty per cent of African labourers were "constantly incapacitated through drunkenness"¹²⁰ - while others indulged in "certain evil and loathsome practices to satisfy their passions."¹²¹ This unwholesome situation, the 1913 Commission on Assaults on Women warned, could only be remedied by providing quarters where labourers could "lead a family life".¹²²

Other investigators, including U.S. Surgeon-General Gorgas of Panama Canal fame, made similar recommendations, but they were never adopted. Though a labour force so housed would be "more stable and

¹¹⁹ T.B. Commission, op.cit., pp.81-2.

¹²⁰ Chamber, Annual Report for the Year 1897, p.24.

¹²¹ Report of the Commission on Assaults on Women, U.G. 39 - 1913, para.44.

¹²² Ibid.

contented"¹²³ and therefore more productive, neither the mining companies nor the white populace were prepared to see the African mine worker and his family housed permanently on the Rand. The transfer to the inhabitants of the new industrial society of the traditional trek-boer ambivalence towards African labour was illustrated by certain recommendations of the 1903-1905 Native Affairs Commission: if Africans on the Rand were "working people" then "there was no reason why they should not be encouraged to stay", but "surplus or idle natives" must be expelled.¹²⁴

It is not surprising that these poor working conditions, together with constant wage reductions, caused so great a shortage of African labour that the importation of indentured labour from China began in 1904. According to the Chamber's Chairman, Sir George Farrar, there were "only 64,000 boys [the usual term for African workers] at work" in 1903, compared with 110,000 in 1899; consequently 2,785 of the industry's 7145 stamps were not crushing ore.¹²⁵ Yet the use of white unskilled labourers was unthinkable, for it would surely bring them "down to the level of the native"; and besides, such a scheme would

¹²³ W.C. Gorgas, "Sanitation and Health Conditions on the Witwatersrand Mines", printed in the Chamber's Annual Report for the Year 1914, pp.335-57, p.347.

¹²⁴ Report of the South African Native Affairs Commission, 1903-1905. Cd.2399 (1905), p.49.

¹²⁵ Chamber, Annual Report for the Year 1903, p.xlvi.

flood the country with poorly paid "free aliens" who would quickly become discontented, inefficient, and impossible to control. Sir George thus concluded that the industry "should look around the world to find labourers whom we can import under restrictions...."¹²⁶ The Chamber's Executive Committee outlined the strategy in more detail: no labour importation would begin until "legislation" was enacted "to secure that such labourers ... should be employed as unskilled workmen only...."¹²⁷

Both the British administration and the white miners accepted the Chamber's proposals, though for different reasons. Lord Milner, the High Commissioner, was obsessed with building a white and British South Africa, and he felt that suitably controlled Asian labourers could be easily dispensed with after providing the "impetus" for the "great influx of British population ... which is the ultimate solution...."¹²⁸ The white miners were won over by the Chamber's argument that the importation of Asians legally barred from skilled and semi-skilled jobs was better than flooding the Rand with white immigrants who would compete with them.¹²⁹

Milner introduced the Transvaal Labour Importation Ordinance (1904) to provide this protection. The Ordinance named 59 jobs, from drill sharpening to wiresplicing, which the Chinese were not permitted

¹²⁶ Ibid., pp.1-li.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.xxx.

¹²⁸ "Milner Papers", Vol.II, p.461, cited in Van der Horst, op.cit., p.168.

¹²⁹ Sir George Farrar held out this prospect of protected employment to a miners' meeting in March, 1903, Simons, op.cit., p.83.

to do.¹³⁰ This industrial colour bar law thus went "far beyond" any similar legislation enacted by the Transvaal Republic,¹³¹ and the British mineowners, the British officials, and the British miners were not concerned that the Ordinance put the "liberating" market forces of capitalist industrialization into a straight-jacket.

For all but the Chinese themselves, their importation was a huge success. Between 1903 and 1906 gold production doubled and white employment went from 13,000 to 18,000.¹³² But in 1907, when they had done their job of providing cheap muscle power during the post-war period of acute labour shortage, Chinese "importation" stopped and the Labour Importation Ordinance was repealed. Yet by that time the Rand's white workers regarded all jobs from which the Chinese were legally barred as being "white jobs",¹³³ though many of the jobs were of neither the skilled nor the supervisory type.

The rapid growth of the mining industry that the Chinese facilitated, stimulated the development of the so-called Poor White class among rural Afrikaners - the name given to the descendants of South Africa's early Dutch settlers. This class was formed in embryo even before large scale mining began, when land for expansion grew scarce and some Afrikaners had to become squatters on the land of their

¹³⁰ Schedule No.1, Transvaal Labour Importation Ordinance. Ordinance No.17, 1904.

¹³¹ Van der Horst, op.cit., pp.171-2.

¹³² E.A. Walker, A History of South Africa. (London, 1940) p.514.

¹³³ Van der Horst, op.cit., pp.171-2.

compatriots. Called bywoners, meaning "those who lived alongside",¹³⁴ these squatters did not provide labour services as the African squatter and his family did. Manual labour performed for a master was considered "Kaffir work", and hence below the dignity of any white man. Yet apart from this exemption from "Kaffir work", the life of the bywoner was squalid. Large families lived in tiny, insanitary huts and ate a monotonous and unbalanced diet.¹³⁵ Their ideological aversion to manual work was thus reinforced by the lethargy of malnutrition and disease.

The demand for agricultural produce from the new mining towns did little to mitigate the bywoners' plight. For the trend towards larger and more economic farm units made more people landless and developed among many land owners a marked preference for African rather than white squatters. Some of the unwanted bywoners became hired farm hands, while others migrated to the new towns in search of employment.¹³⁶ Few of these Poor White migrants made a successful adaption to life in industrial towns; most of them lived in "wretched shanties on the outskirts of towns" and survived on hand-outs from more fortunate whites.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Horwitz, op.cit., p.18.

¹³⁵ T.B. Commission, op.cit., p.89.

¹³⁶ Report of the Carnegie Commission on the Poor White Problem.
(Stellenbosch, 1932), Joint Findings and Recommendations, p.xix.

¹³⁷ Transvaal Indigency Commission, op.cit., p.62.

It was almost impossible for the Poor Whites to obtain mining employment. They were excluded from the skilled trades because they lacked both skill and the educational standard required for apprenticeship. The exclusivist nature of the British trade unions and the need to work in a foreign language - English - kept them out of the few semi-skilled or supervisory jobs open to them. The mining companies, moreover, felt "very little sympathy" for the Afrikaner Poor White¹³⁸ and actively discouraged their employment by paying them lower wages than those paid to British workers of the "same grade of ability".¹³⁹ This policy was relaxed following the use of Afrikaners to break a strike of British miners in 1907, but in 1910 the percentage of Afrikaners employed was still small.¹⁴⁰

There were good reasons for this suspicion of Poor Whites. They were especially reluctant to do manual work within sight of Africans - and the mines were full of Africans - and they would certainly not work for a wage as low as that paid to the Africans.¹⁴¹ To do otherwise, the Poor Whites reasoned, would not only degrade themselves but the whole white race. It was quite logical for the Poor Whites to shun poorly paid manual work and to demand instead special treatment as members of

¹³⁸ "Report of a Select Committee on the Poor White, 1906", evidence of a Mr. Oats, M.P., cited in Carnegie Commission, op.cit., vol.I, p.179.

¹³⁹ Carnegie Commission, op.cit., vol.I, p.199.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., vol.II, pp.57-9.

the colonizing race. Yet it was equally logical for the mining industry to avoid the economic burden of employing these ill-equipped racial aristocrats.

A small but vocal and influential opposition to the industry's position arose between 1902 and 1910. A so-called "white labour policy" was formulated in response both to Poor White unemployment and degradation, and to the dangers of the large scale African participation in the mining industry.¹⁴² The policy's principal architect was Frederick Creswell, a mine manager of British birth, who received encouragement and support from white labour leaders and certain officials of the British administration. Creswell feared the swamping of the mines and white South Africa with African industrial labour, and he therefore recommended the employment of whites in unskilled jobs currently done exclusively by Africans. Nor would such a revolutionary move be uneconomic, he insisted, for though the whites would receive higher wages, they would be far more productive than African labour. Because they wished to encourage the immigration of British workers, the administration gave official backing in 1902 to a white labour experiment on five mines, including the one Creswell managed.¹⁴³

These experiments were sabotaged by white supervisors who refused to accept more work in order to help counterbalance the increased cost

¹⁴² Transvaal Mining Industry Commission, op.cit., pp.386, 440-44.

¹⁴³ Simons, op.cit., p.79.

of white labour.¹⁴⁴ Neither did many of the white miners want white "helpers", for they could not "boss" and bully them as they did their "Kaffirs".¹⁴⁵ The mine owners vehemently opposed the "white labour policy" and hence were delighted when the experiments were wrecked by the strike of white miners. Labouring alongside the "unskilled Kaffir or coolie" was not the "proper place" for white men, Chairman Harold F. Strange told the Chamber's Annual Meeting in February 1905.¹⁴⁶ Yet in continuing to oppose the use of white unskilled labour, the mining magnates were not motivated solely by their racial-colonist identification with unskilled white labourers. The "bosses" were well aware that an enfranchised force of white labourers "would simply hold the Government...in the hollow of their hand" and could "more or less dictate, not only on the question of wages, but also on political questions".¹⁴⁷

Although they pleased the "bosses" by rejecting the "white labour policy" in practice, the white miners remained apprehensive about the presence of a large African labour force. Evidence given to the 1908 Transvaal Mining Industry Commission - whose Majority Report favoured the "white labour policy" - by white labour leaders indicated that they and their constituents feared African mine labour as the trek-boers

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Evidence of Jimmy Coward, official of the Miners' Union, to the Transvaal Mining Industry Commission, op.cit., pp.480-1.

¹⁴⁶ Chamber, Annual Report for the Year 1904, p.1.

¹⁴⁷ The words of Charles Rood, one of Rhodes' partners, cited in Simons, op.cit., p.82.

had feared the African pastoralists they dispossessed and reduced to servant status. Tom Mathews, the British-born Secretary of the Miners Union who had come to South Africa after years of mining and labour organizing in the U.S., told the Commission that while the African mine workers should be treated "decently", it would be dangerous to "let them be free". Another Briton, W.H. (Bill) Andrews, then leader of the Engineers Union and later a leading South African communist, warned the Commission that unless checked, the African worker would not only replace white artisans, but would also threaten the state.¹⁴⁸

The question of exactly how the African competition in the mining industry could be checked remained unanswered as the South African colonies approached unification in 1910. But the Report of the Transvaal Mining Regulations Commission (1907-1910) strongly indicated that a fairly comprehensive job colour bar law would be introduced. The Commission recommended a system whereby certain occupations and the granting of blasting certificates and certificates of competency for other jobs should be legally restricted to whites. Yet the wisdom of such a system was by no means obvious to all whites,¹⁴⁹ even those outside mining company boardrooms. "To protect the white man from native competition at this stage", the Transvaal Indigency Commission counselled in 1908, "is simply to bolster up the aristocratic tradition

¹⁴⁸ Mining Industry Commission, op.cit., pp.386, 441-44, 702-12.

¹⁴⁹ Final Report of Mining Regulations Commission, Transvaal 1741 - 1910, vol.I, pp.144, 165, 166, 273.

for a few years longer, without doing anything to qualify the white man for the ultimate but inevitable struggle for economic superiority with the native."¹⁵⁰ The government of the new Union of South Africa had to choose between the conflicting recommendations of the Mining Regulations Commission and the Indigency Commission. Their decision was to determine the nature of the "inevitable struggle for superiority with the native".

¹⁵⁰ Indigency Commission, op.cit., para.84.

CHAPTER TWO

The Union of South Africa and its Early Discriminatory Industrial Legislation.

In 1910, after a period of bitter warfare and economic reconstruction, the long-time British colonies of the Cape and Natal were united with the ex-Boer Republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State to form the Union of South Africa. This Union was to a great extent the coming together of white South Africa to deal with the so-called "Native Problem". In the industrial sector of the economy, this desire to solve the "Native Problem" resulted in the enactment in 1911 of two racially discriminatory laws, the Native Labour Regulation Act and the Mines and Works Act. These Acts were the foundation of the Union of South Africa's industrial colour bars.

In the reconstruction period following the Boer War the problem of uniting the white colonists of South Africa was the principal preoccupation of its British administrators.¹ Article 8 of the Treaty of Vereeniging which ended the war, was the first important step in this direction; it stipulated that the question of African political rights be shelved until the ex-Republics attained self-government.²

¹ DeKiewiet, op.cit., p.142.

² Correspondence Respecting Terms of the Boer Force In the Field, Cd. 1096, (1902).

In other words, the Africans remained the politically powerless labourers of the white colonial elite. The positive side of Britain's white unity policy was High Commissioner Milner's plan to "denationalize" the Boers.³ This was to be accomplished by outnumbering them with British immigrants, and by a long period of Crown Colony rule in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State with an "English only" policy in government schools.⁴ Such "reconstruction" would be financed by taxing the Transvaal gold mines, considered by the administration to be "wasting assets" suitable for quick plunder.⁵ Because of their reliance on the mines, the British authorities rarely refused requests by the mining companies for co-operation in the area of recruiting and employment policy. This tendency was reinforced by the conviction that the miners, and therefore their labour force, would not be around for long.

But Milner's "fatally unrealistic" plan failed, and by 1906 the British sought supremacy by a political union of all their South African colonies.⁶ Developments in the Transvaal did more than anything else to hasten this change of course. By 1906 the colony had gained self-government under the Afrikaner Het Volk party, and it had the wealth and the railway links with Mozambique to make a withdrawal from

³ L.M. Thompson, The Unification of South Africa 1902 - 1910. (London, 1960), p.16.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Van de Horst, op.cit., p.158.

⁶ Thompson, op.cit., p.16.

the South African Customs Union feasible.⁷ A leader of Het Volk was also developing "frank and cordial relations" with a leading Transvaal mining magnate.⁸ In the same year the Zulu rebellion in Natal and the so-called "Indian Problem" there and in the Transvaal indicated to the alarmed whites that unity against the colonized black and brown peoples was imperative. So strong was this fear that the famous Selbourne Memorandum containing the British proposals for union was judged by the historian of South African unification to be a "call to white South Africa to unite in its own interests."⁹

The call fell on the attentive ears of "far-seeing" Afrikaners who saw political union as a means of achieving white unity and Afrikaner dominance.¹⁰ The deputy leader of Het Volk, J.C. Smuts, soon became the driving force behind the Afrikaner movement for colonial union. With his keen intellect, boundless energy, and Oxford legal training, he grasped the initiative from the British officials and by drafting its future constitution became the principal architect of the Union of South Africa.¹¹ Smuts was supported by certain English-speaking politicians, the most prominent of whom was the Cape's "Whiggish" Prime

⁷ Ibid., p.57.

⁸ W.K. Hancock, Smuts: The Sanguine Years, 1870 - 1919. (London, 1962), p.237.

⁹ Thompson, op.cit., p.67.

¹⁰ Keppel-Jones, op.cit., p.153.

¹¹ Thompson, op.cit., p.95.

Minister, J.X. Merriman. Though both men believed that the policies of the "Imperialists" and mining "magnates" were detrimental to white South Africa,¹² they did not always agree on the best means of continuing and extending white domination. To "maintain the supremacy of our race", Merriman wrote to Smuts in 1906, the future union must have a system of franchise to provide a "safety valve" for African discontent and a barrier against the "venal" Poor Whites.¹³ Smuts disagreed, arguing instead for universal white suffrage and the denial of any political rights to Africans.¹⁴

Thus the diverse pro-Union forces - British "imperialists", Boer "racialists", and Cape "liberals" - were all in favour of continued supremacy of the white minority over the black colonized majority. Yet they feared different forms of African pressure. Naturally all whites opposed the kind of violent rebellion which occurred among the Zulu in 1906, but large scale use of cheap African labour in the Transvaal mines was not opposed by the pro-Union mining concerns. Speaking through the ostensibly pro-British Transvaal Progressive Party, the companies sought to keep their African workers "in line"

¹² Ibid., p.71.

¹³ Letter from J.X. Merriman to J.C. Smuts, 4th. March 1906, Smuts Papers, edited by W.K. Hancock and Jean Van Der Poel, (Cambridge, 1966), pp.238-41.

¹⁴ Letter from Smuts to Merriman, 13th March 1906, Smuts Papers, op.cit., pp.242-3.

without directions from London.¹⁵ Others, including Merriman and F.H. Creswell, the future leader of the Labour Party, saw the African cheap labour policy as the most important obstacle to the employment of Poor Whites in the mines.¹⁶ Many whites were also convinced that the presence of so many Africans in the mining centres would break down the barriers, particularly the "sex barrier", between black and white.¹⁷ As South Africa approached unification, the vast majority of its white population wanted the African to be close at hand to provide cheap agricultural and industrial labour, but feared that his presence would lead to their loss of social and political supremacy.¹⁸ The answer, as one Natal farmer bluntly told the South African Native Affairs Commission, was to keep "your heel on his neck...."¹⁹

The South Africa Act of 1909 brought about the Union of South Africa and perpetuated the political impotence of its African population. The franchise was denied to Africans in all provinces but the Cape, where the high property qualification and literacy test

¹⁵ Thompson, op.cit., p.79.

¹⁶ Letter from Merriman to Smuts, 5th April 1907, Smuts Papers, op.cit., pp.335-8. F.H. Creswell, House of Assembly Debates, April 8, 1911, col.2440.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ The Report of the South African Native Affairs Commission, 1903-5. (Cape Town, 1905, 5 vols.), vols. II-V.

¹⁹ Ibid., vol. III, ans. 22,085.

remained.²⁰ The Act also provided for the central government to have all important powers.²¹ With war clouds on the horizon, the British government wanted a strong united Dominion in South Africa; consequently the Act was agreed to without its colour bar provisions being seriously questioned.²²

The first Union election, held in 1910, brought the predominantly Afrikaner South African National Party into power with a decisive majority.²³ The party was formed by the pre-election amalgamation of the mostly English and Cape based South African Party with its Afrikaner Bond, the Orangie-Unie of the Orange Free State, and Het Volk of the Transvaal.²⁴ The opposition was formed by the Unionist Party, which was dominated by the same mining magnates who had controlled the Transvaal Progressives. The newly formed Labour Party under Creswell held only four seats.

Though the government was officially led by Louis Botha, most of its policy was formulated by Smuts. Early in 1911 when the legislative base of the Union was being established, Smuts was Acting Prime Minister in addition to holding the three important portfolios of the Interior,

²⁰ South Africa Act, 1909, Section IV, Sub-Sections 35 and 36.

²¹ Ibid., Section IV, Sub-Sections 59-67, Section V, Sub-Sections 85-91.

²² Thompson, op.cit., p.398.

²³ Election Results: S.A.N.P. 66 seats, Unionist 39, Independents 12, Labour 4. The S.A.N.P. later became the South African Party, S.A.P.

²⁴ Keppel-Jones, op.cit., p.159.

Mines, and Defence. His pre-occupation, almost obsession, with achieving white unity and keeping the African powerless²⁵ reflected the wishes of the bulk of the white electorate and were embodied in the Union's early industrial legislation.

Two such laws were enacted with the intention of placating, on the one hand, the influential mining companies, and on the other, their white labour elite. Hoping that they would ensure white unity in the all-important mining industry, the government designed the Native Labour Regulation Act with the discriminating mining magnate in mind, while white labour was to be bought-off with the Mines and Works Act. Both laws were passed in 1911, and the debates and committee hearings accompanying their passage illustrate the determination of the mining companies to continue to employ cheap, tractable African labour. These documents also reveal the ambivalence of the proponents of a white labour policy in the mining industry. The white labour advocates were torn between certain racist instincts demanding the expulsion of black labour from the mines and similar instincts prompting them to support measures to keep the mines' African workers regimented and therefore more attractive labour than the Poor White alternative.

The Native Labour Regulation Act had two important purposes. By regulating recruiting and employment conditions, the Act was intended to ensure that the mining industry received an adequate

²⁵ Hancock, op.cit., p.319.

African labour force. The Act also imposed draconian disciplinary codes upon African workers. This would further restrict their freedom of movement in the labour market and thereby make such wage colour bar devices as the "maximum average" more effective.

The Act purported to "give protection to the native labourer"²⁶ by laying rules relating to recruiting and labour contracts. It stipulated that within designated "Labour Districts" all recruiting agents, labour contractors and compound managers had to be licensed, and that all labour contracts had to be in writing and certified by a government official.²⁷ In the House of Assembly Debates both the government and the Unionist Party agreed that the African workers only needed "protection" against independent recruiters, labour contractors, and concessionaires; the recruiting practices of the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association and conditions in the compounds run by the mining companies were portrayed as being beyond reproach. Yet certain witnesses who testified before the Select Committee on the Native Labour Regulation Bill claimed that the African workers were not at all happy with the recruiting and compound practices of the mining companies.²⁸

Abuses in the recruiting system were a serious threat to the mines' African labour supply. The evidence presented before the

²⁶ Mr. H. Burton, Minister of Native Affairs, House of Assembly Debates 1911, col.1161.

²⁷ Native Labour Regulation Act, 1911.

²⁸ Native Labour Regulations Bill Select Committee, op.cit., evidence of Mr. Enoch Mamba, former labour agent in the Transkei and member of the Transkei General Council, and Mr. S.A.M. Pritchard, Director of the Transvaal Government's Native Labour Bureau, pp.4, 31-2 and 308-9.

Select Committee certainly justified the Minister of Native Affairs' claim that from the time organized recruiting began in about 1890 it was the practice of recruiters to make "huge advances" to Africans, which were later "represented in contracts greatly in advance of the amounts". These same recruiters had in many other ways "cheated, misled and made misrepresentations to the native".²⁹ The greatest of these malpractices from the African point of view was the signing of a contract for a certain mine - probably one in which the African had previously worked - and then being hawked around the Rand and contracted to the highest bidder.³⁰ But this was not mentioned in Parliament or by lobbying mine managers because the W.M.L.A. was also very unpopular among African miners for not giving its recruits the option of choosing the mine they were to work in. Thus the government was legislating against only some of the recruiting practices disliked by Africans - those perpetrated by the "little men" who competed with the Chambers' recruiting organization.

The same was true of the government's position in relation to abuses in the employment and welfare of African workers. The Minister of Native Affairs, Henry Burton, denounced the "lack of proper compound accommodation" for those working with contractors, and regretted the contractors' ability to "make a profit out of the [labour] transaction

²⁹ Debates, February 10, 1911, cols.1122 and 1125.

³⁰ Native Labour Regulations Bill Select Committee, op.cit., p.4, evidence of Mr. Pritchard.

and also out of the housing and feeding of the boys".³¹ But what the government failed to mention was that the African mine workers preferred the shacks, poor food, and lower wages they received when employed by contractors to the better conditions but loss of freedom found in the mining compounds. When asked by a Select Committee member if the "native" did not love "good food", the Transvaal government's chief labour inspector replied that "He loves his freedom more".³² In passing an Act which encouraged an increase in the use of compounds the government was therefore providing the African with "protection" which he did not want, and ensuring that the mining companies rather than small contractors would make money from the accommodation, feed, and clothing of African miners. Yet it was fear of greater African freedom under the contractor rather than a desire to enrich the mining companies which prompted both the government to introduce the law and the bulk of the parliamentarians to vote for it. When a division was called after the second reading of the Bill, the result was ninety "Ayes" and three "Nayes". The lonely dissenters were the Labourites Creswell, Sampson, and Madely.

³¹ Debates, February 10, 1911, col.1126. Born in the Cape of British "stock", Burton was previously a lawyer and an Afrikaner Bond member of the Cape Assembly. Hancock, Smuts Papers, vol. IV, p.305.

³² Native Labour Regulations Bill Select Committee, op.cit., p.4.

There can be no doubt that all the measures embodied in the Act to "give protection to the native" were inspired by enlightened self-interest on the part of the mining companies. In Parliament Lionel Philips said that the "mine-owners were as anxious as anyone that the welfare of the native should have been the first consideration in the mines, ... if only in their own interest".³³ Another member speaking for the mines was sure that reduction in recruiting abuses would increase the number of Africans employed in the mines.³⁴ This self-interest was most starkly revealed, however, in the 1911 Annual Report of the Transvaal Chamber of Mines. Referring to a regulation in the Native Labour Regulation Act, the Report stated that "The standard age for recruits has been raised from 16 to 18 years to ensure physical efficiency."³⁵

The attitude of the mining companies to accident compensation for African workers further shows their indifference toward "humanitarianism" which did not pay any direct dividend. The Chamber of Mines strongly protested against paying any compensation,³⁶ and were probably instrumental in keeping the compensation rates stipulated in the Act very meagre: £10 for death and £30 for permanent incapacitation.³⁷

³³ Debates, February 10, 1911, col.1134.

³⁴ Colonel D. Harris, Debates, February 10, 1911, col.1140.

³⁵ Transvaal Chamber of Mines, Annual Report for the Year 1911. (Johannesburg, 1911), p.xliv.

³⁶ Telegram to Minister of Native Affairs, 30th March, 1911, Transvaal Chamber of Mines, Annual Report, 1911, op.cit., p.12.

³⁷ Buell, op.cit., p.47.

This differentiation prompted "some mines" to postpone reporting accidents until the injured worker died.³⁸ The Native Labour Regulation Act made no provision for special compensation for Africans disabled by Miners' Phthisis; they received the paltry amount allotted for accident compensation. Thus after the (white) Miners' Phthisis Act was passed in 1912, the black victim of the disease received roughly one-tenth of the compensation paid to his white counterpart.³⁹

But the really blatant colour bar in the Act was contained in the section which enumerated "Offences for Native Labourers".⁴⁰ Clearly intended to protect the employer by depriving the African worker of any industrial power, this section made it a criminal offence for Africans to leave their place of employment - "desert" - or to otherwise not perform their "duty". If found guilty of these "offences", an African worker was liable to a fine of ten pounds or two months imprisonment. Not surprisingly, these penal sanctions discouraged strikes or the wielding of any other form of industrial power.⁴¹ For a momentary refusal to work or an act of minor carelessness on the part of an African could result in a fine amounting to a hundred days' work. It is also significant that despite widespread knowledge of "native grievances", the Act contained no provision for punishing those guilty of physically abusing African workers.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Section 14, Sub-Section (i).

⁴¹ Van der Horst, op.cit., p.180.

Even in its administration the Act was to be a travesty of all concepts of justice. For it was to extend the current Transvaal system to the remainder of the Union, and under that system the government labour inspectors acted as prosecutor, judge, and jury. They could even arrest and try an African worker for an alleged "insult" directed at themselves.⁴²

In Parliament two opposing views were expressed on these penal sanctions and the system of regimented cheap African labour they reinforced. Strongly in favour of the regulations were the mining companies who stood to profit from industrial "stability"; opposed to them were the representatives of a white labour force fearful of a mass of tractable Africans undermining their position. The decisive factors, however, were the views of the ostensibly non-committed majority of white colonists and the white workers' ambivalence towards the "white labour policy".

The opponents of the regulations and the African labour system found a forceful spokesman in Mr. F. W. Creswell. Formerly a mine manager and now leader of the Labour Party, Creswell believed that the "Poor White" problem could be solved by driving the Africans from the mines and replacing them with unskilled whites who would, unlike the Africans, be paid a "civilized wage". A cursory glance at Creswell's speeches gives the distinct impression that he was a kindly missionary. He described the Native Labour Regulation Act as a measure

⁴² Native Labour Regulation Bill Select Committee, op.cit., Mr. Pritchard, p.5.

which "attempted to discriminate between the various classes of slave owners in the interests of the most powerful."⁴³ In an apparent display of indignant outrage, he went on to condemn an "Assembly of civilized men [who] proposed to make it a crime to leave an employment in which life was endangered".⁴⁴

The real motive behind the labour leader's feigned humanitarianism was revealed by his statement that the African labour system would "ruin the working class of the white population."⁴⁵ Creswell considered an increase in employment opportunities for whites to be "essential to the well being of the Union." And this could only be accomplished if Africans were barred from the industrial job market and allowed to develop "in their own way".⁴⁶

The mining concerns insisted that such a policy would "ruin" the country, and that "They were going to prevent that ... by the very instrument [Creswell] despised so much, and that was the humble black."⁴⁷ As it was penal sanctions like those in the Native Labour Regulation Act which kept the black "humble", the mining industry.

⁴³ Debates, February 10, 1911, col.1132.

⁴⁴ Ibid., col.1131.

⁴⁵ Ibid., April 8, 1911, col.2440, emphasis added.

⁴⁶ Ibid., February 7, 1911, col.1030.

⁴⁷ Ibid., Colonel Harris, col.1039.

exerted considerable pressure in and out⁴⁸ of Parliament to ensure that the Act contained the necessary humbling mechanisms. In Parliament Mr. Patrick Duncan, a former Private Secretary to Lord Milner and now the Unionist member for Fordsburg, justified the draconian regulations by pointing out that the African "semi-savages" were too lazy to work without such threats and, besides, they cost a great deal to recruit and therefore could not be allowed to "desert" or be disobedient.⁴⁹

The outcome of this conflict between the mine-owners and their white labour force was decided by the racist fears of the otherwise non-committed white population. The position that J.X. Merriman - never a friend of the "magnates" - took in Parliament illustrates their dilemma well. Like Merriman, most whites wanted the mines to save the Poor Whites by barring Africans from mine employment, yet their fears as part of a white colonizing minority prompted them to back restrictions on the freedom of African industrial workers.⁵⁰ Thus they were helping the mine-owners retain their cheap African labour and thereby reducing any incentive they might have to employ Poor Whites. Because of his fears about the breaking down of racial "barriers",⁵¹

⁴⁸ Native Labour Regulations Bill Select Committee, op.cit., evidence of Chamber of Mines Representatives Perry, Nathan and Skinner, pp.102-5.

⁴⁹ Debates, February 13, 1911, col.1153.

⁵⁰ Merriman to Smuts, 11 April 1906, Smuts Papers, op.cit., p.257.

⁵¹ Native Labour Regulations Bill Select Committee, op.cit., p.245; Merriman was a member of the Committee.

Merriman wanted the Act to go further than mere restrictions on African freedom. He wanted such freedom as currently existed to be eliminated by the extension of the Kimberley system of closed compounds to the Rand. To emphasize the need for these compounds and other strict controls on African mine workers, Merriman quoted evidence indicating increased miscegenation, reminded the House of the Africans' alleged habit of boasting of their sexual relations with white women, and warned that freedom encouraged the "barbarians" to commit crimes.⁵² Though there were "too many vested interests" among the Rand's commercial community to make an extension of the Kimberley compound system possible,⁵³ fear of the sort displayed by Merriman was sufficient to ensure passage of the penal sanctions contained in the Native Labour Regulation Act.

The Act's major impact was to increase restriction on the freedom of African mine workers by adding a legal code of conduct to existing monopsonistic recruiting and wage practice. And as this code of conduct, along with the rest of the Act, applied only to black workers, the Act was a colour bar law. That the Act was subsequently an invaluable

⁵² Debates, April 8, 1911, col.2437.

⁵³ Native Labour Regulation Bill Select Committee, op.cit., p.249, evidence of Mr. T. Mavrogordato, Deputy Commissioner and C.I.D. chief of the Transvaal Police. The proprietors of shops and "eating houses" which catered for African workers would be ruined by a closed compound system.

aid to the mines in their exploitation of African labour was confirmed by the Chamber of Mines in 1925:

"... the legal position under which natives who refuse to carry out their contracts of service are guilty of a criminal offense...is a fundamental principle of the law of South Africa, applying to many other native matters besides contracts of service, and ... is absolutely essential in the present economic position of the Native." ⁵⁴

Accompanying the Native Labour Regulation Act was the Mines and Works Act, 1911. Like the former Act, it was intended to "extend over the whole Union the [mining regulations] system which had hitherto obtained in the Transvaal", ⁵⁵ and at that time the Transvaal mining regulations contained a job colour bar. But at the introduction of the Bill a colour bar was not mentioned; Minister of the Mines Smuts merely explained that the Bill was to encourage the safe and efficient operation of the mines, and that "all detailed work was left to be settled by regulation". ⁵⁶ In fact, very little of a controversial nature was mentioned in the Bill, and not a single word about a colour bar was uttered during the long parliamentary debates on the Bill. The sting of the Mines and Works Act lay in its immense delegation of powers to persons outside Parliament. Under Section 4, for example,

⁵⁴ Gold Producers Committee of the Transvaal Chamber of Mines, evidence presented to the 1925 Economic and Wage Commission, Statement No.3, p.1.

⁵⁵ Minister of Mines, Smuts, Debates, February 9, 1911, col.1091.

⁵⁶ Debates, February 9, 1911, col.1089.

the administration was given the right to draft mining regulations having the force of law. Perhaps more surprising was that the Act "gave the right to mine managers to frame rules also having the force of law".⁵⁷ The true significance of all this is that included among "detailed work ... settled by regulation" was the promulgation of a job colour bar in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. The colour bar was enforced by a series of regulations of which Regulation No. 179 was typical; it provided that:

"The operation of or attendance on machinery shall be in charge of a competent shiftsman, and in the Transvaal and Orange Free State Provinces, such shiftsman shall be a white man..."⁵⁸

In guiding the Bill through the House of Assembly, Smuts attempted to allay any concern about the imposition of damaging regulations on the mining industry. But while reassuring the spokesmen of the mining companies that "mining development would not be over-regulated,"⁵⁹ he was extremely reluctant to discuss the nature of the Act's regulations; he tried to dismiss it as a technical matter. Smuts' biographer, H.W. Hancock, admits that the question of future mining regulations was "explosively political" but argues that Smuts did view the Bill as a "purely technical" affair. Hancock reinforces his contention by

⁵⁷ Smuts, Debates, February 9, 1911, col.1091.

⁵⁸ Mining Regulations, issued under the Mines and Works Act, 1911, cited in the Transvaal Chamber of Mines' Annual Report for the Year 1913, pp.480-1.

⁵⁹ Debates, February 9, 1911, col.1095.

claiming that none of his fellow parliamentarians made Smuts aware of "his mistake".⁶⁰ Such an assertion is untenable. Smuts was bombarded with questions from Labour members, especially Creswell, who constantly requested to know what the new regulations would be. He also repeatedly demanded that the government make the condition of the white workers the "law of the land" and "leave as little as possible to regulation."⁶¹ In effect, Labour was asking for the job colour bar to be sanctioned by an explicit statute of the Union of South Africa.

Smuts' parliamentary strategy indicates that he was opposed to a statutory colour bar but willing to placate white labour with colour bar regulations having the force of law. This policy was a compromise between white labour and the mining companies, and was designed to maintain white unity - the prime objective of Smuts and the government. The compromise was essentially that the Act assured the continuation and spread of the Transvaal colour bar mining regulations without an open hassle or the enactment of a statutory colour bar. It was important to avoid the enactment of a statutory colour bar because this would be extremely difficult for the mining

⁶⁰ W.K. Hancock, Smuts: The Sanguine Years, 1870 - 1919, op.cit., p.320. There is other evidence indicating that Hancock was not familiar with this law, Horwitz, op.cit., p.439.

⁶¹ Debates, February 10 and February 24, 1911, cols.1114 and 1391.

companies to challenge should dwindling profit margins ever necessitate such a desperate measure.

The position that the mining industrialists took on the Mines and Works Act shows that in 1911 they were not unduly concerned about the job colour bar. Far from criticizing the Bill, Mr. Lionel Philips, the mining magnate, praised the government and the Bill, which in his opinion was introduced "with the view of protecting the great mining industry of this country."⁶² This unqualified endorsement of the Bill suggests that the mining companies were unaware that it was to be a vehicle for a job colour bar, but correspondence between the Chamber and the Mines Department and the Chambers' Annual Report for 1911 shows that they did know the nature of the regulations to be issued under the Act.⁶³

Yet for a number of reasons the Chamber did little to protest the entrenchment of the job colour bar which it later branded as a monstrous iniquity. First of all, profit margins were quite high and therefore Africanization of more job categories was not a pressing issue. Secondly, as the white labour force was still a small elite comprised mainly of artisans and supervisors, it was not too expensive to subsidize their high living standard. Thirdly and most importantly, the mines realized that the colonial situation rather than the job colour bar regulations was the real barrier to the increased use of cheap and manageable African labour. The Mining Regulations merely reflected

⁶² Debates, February 9, 1911, col.1097.

⁶³ Letter from Chamber to Mines Department, 4th. February, 1911, Annual Report for the Year 1911, Appendix I, p.49, and Chairman's Address, p.lxii.

South Africa's colonial situation, as the Chamber of Mines acknowledged in a statement to the 1913 Economic Commission:

"The object in giving preferential treatment to the white man had its foundation in the desire to preserve the status of the white race, and, in fact, there has been hitherto in this part of South Africa a sharp distinctive line between the classes of work which may be regarded respectively as the recognized sphere of activity of white men and natives." 64

Thus the mines realized that the colonial situation restricted the "sphere of activity" of their cheap African labour, and that any change in this state of affairs would be difficult to bring about. They were also aware that the colonial situation demanded that they use migratory African labour, though they knew that costs could be greatly reduced "if more permanent conditions of employment prevailed."⁶⁵ But the mine bosses were realists who rather than waste money in futile confrontations with the colonists, preferred to campaign for an increase in the recruitment of "Portuguese Africans". These men had less choice than "British Africans" to accept long contracts and the Native Labour Regulation Act's harsh code of conduct.⁶⁶

Though the Native Labour Regulation Act and the Mines and Works Act were backed by different segments of the white colonial community, they were both a barrier to the operation of a free "colour blind" labour market. Neither law was inspired by the dogmas of either

⁶⁴ Transvaal Chamber of Mines, Statement No.13 to the 1913 Economic Commission, in Chamber's Annual Report for the year 1913, p.479.

⁶⁵ Transvaal Chamber of Mines, Annual Report for the year 1911, p.xliii.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

classical economic liberalism or socialism. The mining companies took advantage of the political powerlessness of the African worker to keep him industrially powerless and therefore more readily exploitable; white labour used the African's political and industrial impotence to erect legal barriers against African competition on the job market.

CHAPTER THREE

The Poor White Influx and the Struggle for the Colour Bar.

1911 - 1918.

The period of rapid industrial expansion between 1911 and 1918 was marked by bitter and sometimes violent struggle between the forces of white mining labour and the mining industry. At the heart of the conflict was the increased influx of Poor Whites into the towns and the demand, voiced by trade unions and the Labour Party, that they should have a "civilized wage" and legal protection from "native competition". In effect, the white labour movement wanted to transfer pre-industrial South African race relations, whereby whites never competed with Africans, into the industrial society. The legal job colour bar was to be the vehicle for this transfer, and consequently white labour demanded its consolidation and extension. At the same time the mine owners pleaded for its abolition or restriction, for they were growing increasingly alarmed at the prospect of footing the bill for maintaining the "civilized standards" of a large number of Poor Whites. The mining companies' disdain for white labour grew as production costs soared and as the cheap and increasingly experienced and industrious black workers proved quite capable of operating the new machines being introduced. Yet it was abundantly clear that

the Poor Whites were not prepared to enter into competition for the new semi-skilled jobs with the despised "Kaffir". They were, on the contrary, prepared to fight for the legal protection to which they believed the colour of their skins entitled them. This position was reinforced by the development of a less exclusive and much more militant British labour movement, and by the emergence of radical "socialist" groups. For the trade unionists and "socialists" saw the threat to the "civilized standards" of the Poor Whites as the beginning of a trend which might undermine the standards of all South Africa's white workers.

Both the black and the white aspirants to the new semi-skilled mining jobs were refugees from rural impoverishment. In the period from 1911 to 1918, however, the influx of whites was far more significant than that of Africans. The extent of the gravitation of rural whites towards industrial centres is indicated by the remarkable white population increase experienced by the Transvaal between 1904 and 1918. In those years the white population of South Africa increased by 304,975, and no less than 202,070 of the additional whites resided in the Transvaal, the most industrialized province.¹ The rural areas of the Cape and the Orange Free State actually experienced an absolute decrease in population in the years between 1911 and 1918.² Census figures also demonstrate that the expanding mining industry was absorbing many newly

¹ Census of the European or White Races of the Union of South Africa, 1918, Part 1, p.2.

² Ibid., Final Report and Supplementary Tables, p.24.

urbanized whites. In 1911 only 30 per cent of the white miners were born in South Africa, but by 1920 that figure had risen to almost 90 per cent.³ Figures for the over-all influx of Africans into industrial areas are impossible to obtain but between 1910 and 1918 there was little or no increase in the employment of Africans in the gold mines; the great increase had occurred between 1905 and 1910, when employment went from 91,707 to 199,614.⁴

The mining companies were not pleased that the later influx was predominantly white. They had sound economic reasons for preferring to employ Africans rather than ex-rural whites in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. The preference was based on the success of the mining companies in transferring the pre-industrial master-servant legal relationship to the mining industry. For the Native Labour Regulation Act ensured an industrially impotent and therefore tractible African labour force; in contrast the white miners were a "rootless, shiftless tribe" whose increasing militancy was feared by the employers.⁵

The legal sanctions of the Native Labour Regulation Act and the increased use of monopolistic techniques also enabled the mining companies to continue paying extremely low wages to African workers.

³ Carnegie Commission, op.cit., Vol.2, p.199.

⁴ Transvaal Chamber of Mines. Annual Report for the Year 1910, p.xl.

⁵ Hancock, op.cit., Vol.I, p.364.

In 1912 the Chamber of Mines formed a second recruiting organization, the Native Recruiting Corporation, whose primary function was to recruit "British South Africa natives".⁶ But the mines who were members of the new corporation also signed the Native Recruiting Corporation Agreement, which resulted in the average wage per shift of some African miners employed on piece work dropping from eight shillings to one shilling and nine pence.⁷ This agreement was part of the widely used "maximum average" system, which the 1914 Native Grievances Enquiry condemned for "actually penalizing efficient work".⁸ The cash wage of Africans decreased slightly between 1912 and 1918 from an average of 1/11.6d to 1/11.5d per shift - while a great increase in living costs meant a sharp drop in real wages.⁹ The average of 18/9d per shift paid to the skilled and unskilled white miners in 1914 made them the highest paid miners in the world.¹⁰

In the decade after Union, the mining companies continued to claim, despite evidence to the contrary, that any increase in African wages would mean a decrease in employment.¹¹ They argued that the African

⁶ Van der Horst, op.cit., p.211.

⁷ The Report of the Native Grievances Enquiry, (U.G. 37 - 1914), para.265.

⁸ Ibid., para.267.

⁹ The Report of the Low Grade Mines Commission, (U.G. 34 - 1920), para.193.

¹⁰ Statements Presented to the Economic Commission (1914) by the Transvaal Chamber of Mines, Statement No.4, "Cost of Production in other Countries", p.2.

¹¹ Dominions Royal Commission, "Minutes of Evidence Taken in The Union of South Africa in 1914", Part 2, cd.7707 (1914), Evidence of Mr. C.W. Villiers, Representing the N.R.C. & W.N.L.A. para.1598.

only worked to earn cash to pay for taxes and other necessities. They also stuck to the other justification for low African wage rates, i.e. that in addition to his industrial wage the African had the produce of his land on the reserve to live on. Yet in their campaign against the job colour bar the mines contradicted themselves by stressing that the African was developing into an ambitious industrial worker who was "getting more of a spendthrift and taking less money home" because he was becoming "more used to luxuries".¹² By 1917 the African was certainly not driven to the mines solely by taxation and rural impoverishment; he was often inclined to go there and remain longer because he had acquired certain proletarian ambitions and tastes and now considered as necessities certain items that had earlier been luxuries.¹³

As well as paying him considerably less, the mines also compensated the African miner far less than his white counterpart for industrial accidents and Miners' Phthisis. Realizing that this was yet another factor contributing to the cheapness of black vis-a-vis white labour, the Labour Party unsuccessfully campaigned for Africans to be included in the Workmen's Compensation Act.¹⁴ Thus while other production

¹² Ibid., paras.1520-1522.

¹³ The Report of the State Mining Commission, (U.G.19 - 1917). Minutes of Evidence, of Mr. H.G. Falwasser, paras.8702-8732.

¹⁴ Simons, op.cit., p.130.

costs soared and the price of gold fluctuated, the cost of African labour, both in terms of wages and "fringe benefits", remained stable.

Another important reason for the mine owners' determination to extend the use of the African worker was his increased efficiency. This trend was in marked contrast to the decreased efficiency and the continued aversion to physical labour displayed by both the ex-rural Afrikaners and the immigrant workers.¹⁵ In 1914 the Dominions Royal Commission heard very impressive evidence from both mining company and government officials about the ability of Africans to undertake specialized and "very dangerous" mining work. Not only could Africans do such work, Government Mines and Industries Secretary Smyth emphasized, but they were actually doing so in places outside the Transvaal "without an accident occurring once in a year".¹⁶

But on the Rand the African's ability to be an efficient and safe worker was reduced by the migratory labour system and the job colour bar. The job colour bar prevented Africans from gaining the industrial experience which would lead to greater efficiency, and increased

¹⁵ Dominions Royal Commission, op.cit., evidence of Mr. K. Shanks, Inspector of White Labour, p.64.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.6. Similar evidence about the capacity of African workers was presented by Mr. P.R. Frames, Managing Director of Premier Diamond Co. and R.N. Kotze, the Government Mining Engineer, pp.41 and 48.

efficiency per worker would mean that fewer African workers would be required.¹⁷ The regulations of the 1911 Mines and Works Act and, more importantly, trade union and public pressure also prevented the mining companies from using Africans to operate the machines being introduced because of the shortage of African labour.¹⁸ If the mining companies could Africanize the expanding semi-skilled sphere rather than allowing it to become the legally protected preserve of the Poor White, production costs could be held in check or even reduced. Thus the real competition between Poor White and Poor Black was for the semi-skilled jobs,¹⁹ and it was the job colour bar rather than the industrial ability of either party which would decide the issue.

The Chamber of Mines was far more concerned about the job colour bar than the inefficiency inherent in the Rand's migratory labour system. The system was certainly profitable enough for the companies to prefer continuing it to conducting a vigorous campaign for the creation of an African labour force living permanently on the Rand, as had been recommended by American Surgeon General Gorgas and the

¹⁷ Statements Presented to the Economic Commission...., op.cit., Statement No.14, "Employment of Labour", p.2.

¹⁸ Ibid., Statement No.11, "Duration of Shift", p.1.

¹⁹ The Report of the Mining Industry Board, (U.G.39 - 1922), para.23.

Government Mining Engineer.²⁰ For by 1913 many of the African workers, though migrants, had gained considerable experience on the mines. This was particularly true of those from Mozambique, who comprised the bulk of the African labour force and were its "most valuable portion...."²¹ In 1913, seventy-seven per cent of these "East Coast Natives" were "old mine boys", i.e. Africans who had previously worked on the mines. The African miners from Mozambique were also on eighteen month contracts and had therefore become much more efficient than their South African counterparts, who only stayed for an average of six to eight months.²² But the cost of the less efficient South Africans was reduced by the tendency for rural conditions to induce some to "voluntarily" present themselves for mine work;²³ the cost of recruiting and transportation was thereby reduced. Though they made much of such costs when trying to justify low African wages or to widen the scope of African employment, the mining companies were not unduly alarmed at the price of recruiting. "After all", a Chamber representative told the 1914 Dominions Royal Commission, "the whole [recruiting] figure is less than fourpence a

²⁰ W.C. Gorgas, "Recommendation as to Sanitation concerning Employees of the Mines of the Rand made to the Transvaal Chamber of Mines", printed in the Chamber's Annual Report for the Year 1914, p.347. Dominion Royal Commission, op.cit., evidence of Government Mining Engineer, R.N. Kotze, p.44.

²¹ "Statement Submitted on behalf of the Transvaal Chamber of Mines to the Select Committee of the House of Assembly on European Labour in April, 1913, by Mr. J.G. Lawn", printed in the Chamber's Annual Report for the Year 1914, pp.401-4.

²² Ibid., p.403.

²³ Dominions Royal Commission, op.cit., evidence of C.W. Villiers, p.52.

shift...."²⁴ This was obviously considered a small price to pay for a system which permitted an industry with such a high accident and sickness rate to dispense so easily with its victims.

As cheap African labour became more competent, expensive white labour was losing its skills. In 1914 the Government Mining Engineer said that its so-called "white miner" was not a miner at all, but an overseer who "does not do any actual work."²⁵ And according to the government's Inspector of White Labour, most white tradesmen were in a similar position. For in South Africa the immigrant tradesman was "supplied with natives to carry his tools, and to lift, turn over, etc., and render other assistance in things he was accustomed to doing and did without difficulty before coming to South Africa."²⁶ Neither was this situation created entirely on the white workers' initiative. The employers, "whether from environment or a desire to have a cheap labour force trained for future exploitation" nurtured their white employees' aversion to physical labour by encouraging them to regard themselves as the "aristocrats of labour".²⁷ When asked by the Royal Commissioners to elaborate on his reference to the employers having

²⁴ Ibid., evidence of Mr. Neuhaus, p.57.

²⁵ Ibid., evidence of R.N. Kotze, p.46.

²⁶ Ibid., evidence of R. Shanks, p.64.

²⁷ Ibid.

"cheap labour trained for future exploitation", Mr. Shanks exposed the essential motive behind the mining companies' drive to Africanize the semi-skilled trades:

"There is apparently a feeling on the part of the employer," he testified, "that it would be better if he could have natives skilled in every department and skilled white men to teach the natives to become skilled, so that when they were skilled he could dispense with the white men's services very largely and deal with the native, who is very docile and not particularly given to organization or standing up for his rights and for a higher standard of living." ²⁸

In line with this strategy the mine owners emphasized the white miners' costly aristocratic pretensions in their campaign for an extension in the use of African labour by the abolition or restriction of the job colour bar. The Chamber told the 1914 Economic Commission that the white miners' custom of "unlawfully" delegating work to the African had resulted in the whites becoming overseers unaccustomed to practising the mining trade and therefore "frequently" less skilled than their African sub-ordinates.²⁹ This being so, the colour bar mining regulations were a "political" device designed to "bolster up incompetent white men" rather than to aid efficiency and safety as the

²⁸ Ibid., p.68. It is important to note that the mines at no time tried to Africanize jobs that were skilled in the sense of requiring craft apprenticeship training.

²⁹ Statements Presented to the Economic Commission...., op.cit., Statement No.14, p.1.

government and white labour claimed.³⁰ Fearing that the presence of Poor Whites in the mining centres would create trade union and public pressure for them to employ these people at a "civilized wage", the mining interests constantly called upon the government to expedite their return to the land by creating farming settlements and breaking up the land into smaller holdings.³¹

But the main reason the companies gave for their opposition to the restriction of African employment by the colour bar was that it was unjust to the African. Chamber representatives assured the Dominions Royal Commission that they wanted "equal opportunity between the native and the white man", and complained that the Regulations of the Mines and Works Act thwarted their lofty goal.³² Yet in their appeals for "equal liberty" for all workers they failed to demand the repeal of the draconian regulations of the Native Labour Regulation Act or to suggest wage increases for Africans to give them parity with white workers. They even claimed that their opposition to a minimum wage for all workers was in the African workers' interest, for if such a wage were based on the "requirements of whites", it would "practically exclude" Africans from the job market.³³ In short, the mining interests

³⁰ Dominions Royal Commission, op.cit., evidence of C.W. Villiers, p.54.

³¹ For example in Debates, December 9, 1915, cited in Cape Times, December 10, 1915.

³² Dominions Royal Commission, op.cit., evidence of Mr. Neuhaus, p.58.

³³ Statements Presented to the Economic Commission...., op.cit., Statement No.5, "Minimum Wage", p.2.

wished to extend the sphere of African employment only if the African labour force remained tractible and cheap.

Though the Chamber appeared to consider the restriction of African employment by the colour bar to be a moral question,³⁴ they were reluctant to force a confrontation over the issue. As early as 1913 they expressed the opinion that the colour bar mining regulations were ultra vires, and regretted that they had not been challenged in the courts.³⁵ Yet they did not bring the necessary court action themselves until after the white labour movement was crushed in the 1922 Rand Revolt. This confirms what the Chamber itself admitted, that it was the industrial power of white labour and not the Mining Regulations that ensured the maintenance of the industrial colour bar in the years between 1911 and 1922.³⁶ The Chamber's stance also shows that despite theoretical assumptions that the "rationality" of capitalist industrialization works to destroy pre-industrial barriers to social mobility, the captains of the mining industry found it more rational to tolerate the job colour bar than to risk a costly confrontation with their powerful white labour force.

The only grass-roots support for the mines' half-hearted anti-job

³⁴ Ibid., Statement No.14, p.1.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Transvaal Chamber of Mines, Annual Report for the Year 1918, p.92.

colour bar policy came from the nascent African political organizations. The thorough colonization and utter powerlessness of South Africa's African population was reflected in the policies of these organizations, the most important of which was the South African Native Congress - later called the African National Congress. Formed in 1911 by young African lawyers, it was for the next decade a mere caucus of intellectuals and traditional leaders who sought to mitigate the exploitation and degradation of their people by prefacing appeals for British "fair play" with extravagant professions of loyalty to the Empire.³⁷ Their impotence in the face of discriminatory laws and practices was so great that they campaigned for equality of opportunity on the grounds that the white man was superior and therefore need not fear African competition.³⁸ The other important African group was the African Political Organization, and though it was open to all non-whites, most of its members were Coloured and its policies were orientated to their needs. Organized in 1902, the A.P.O. abandoned its early flirtation with "Cape Socialism" when, after Union, the white labour movement made the job colour bar and territorial segregation the foundation of its "socialist" policy.³⁹ Deluded by the doctrines of economic liberalism, and apparently forgetting that the mining industry had inspired such repressive laws as the Native Labour Regulation Act,

³⁷ Simons, op.cit., pp.133-4.

³⁸ Ibid., p.135.

³⁹ Ibid., pp.126-7.

the S.A.N.C. and the A.P.O. believed that dynamic capitalist industrialization would break down caste barriers and establish a society of freedom and equality of opportunity.⁴⁰ Perhaps because they had no power, the African proto-nationalists were either unable or unwilling to admit that freedom and equality would only come with African political power.

The response of white mine labour to the mines' Africanization drive was quite different. They reacted to the Africanization attempt and the accompanying indifference of the mining companies to the lot of the Poor White by identifying with the Poor Whites as members of the same racial colonial elite. The intensity of this identification grew as the influx of Poor Whites into the towns made urban whites intimately aware of their plight. A Royal Commission investigating the problem in 1913 found that certain urban Poor Whites were living on "terms of equality" with Africans, and that "whilst these whites are sinking in the scale, the natives are rising and the poor white children are becoming the dregs of the population".⁴¹ To white labour, the "native" was "rising" and the Poor White "sinking" because the mining companies, in their drive to maximize exploitation of South Africa's low grade ore, preferred to hire the cheap, manageable Africans, thus leaving the Poor Whites jobless. And not only the Poor White would suffer if the mines' black labour policy triumphed, warned the white miners' union leader

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.124.

⁴¹ The Report of the Commission on Assaults on Women, (U.G. 39 - 1913), paras. 98-100.

Thomas Mathews, when giving evidence before the Dominions Royal Commission. Eventually all well-paid white workers would be replaced by poorly paid Africans, who would be housed, fed, and clothed by the mining companies. Then, quipped Mathews, "What use will there be for shops, for theatres, for churches, or for any other civilized institutions".⁴² The inference was that the black labour policy would not only bar the Poor White from mining jobs, but would also mark the beginning of a process that would undermine the position of the whole colonial working class and petit bourgeoisie; only the mine shareholders, most of whom resided in Britain, stood to gain from extensive Africanization of mining occupations.

These fears contributed to the growth of the Labour Party and to the formation of its white labour policy. Formed in 1910, the party represented not the Afrikaner Poor White labourers and unemployed, but the British artisans, clerical workers, and petty traders of the Witwatersrand. Indeed, in 1910 there were very few Afrikaner industrial labourers for the Labour Party to represent; the mines employed very few, and there was little other industrial production.⁴³ The leadership of the Labour Party reflected its British artisan and white collar constituency. The party's first Chairman was H.W. Sampson, British-born president of the Typographical Union and secretary of the Trades Council,

⁴² Dominions Royal Commission, op.cit., p.72

⁴³ Carnegie Commission, op.cit., Vol.2, p.199.

and the party was led in parliament by another Briton, F.H. Creswell, who had quit his job as a mine manager to protest the industry's Africanization policy.

The white labour policy of the Labour Party was designed to solve the Poor White problem and to safeguard the "civilized standards" of all South African whites. The ultimate aim of the Labour blue-print was complete segregation of the races. This would prevent the "unfair" competition of the poorly paid non-whites. The plan, incorporated in the party's 1910 election manifesto, demanded the exclusion of blacks from industrial jobs, the expulsion of Asians from the country, and the restriction of African land ownerships and occupation rights to the reserves.⁴⁴ This segregationist stand was again officially endorsed by the party at its Annual Conference in 1912.⁴⁵

The exclusion of Africans from industrial jobs was that part of the plan intended to rescue the Poor White. While the parliamentary exponents of the mines' viewpoint advocated a return to the land and reliance on self-help, Labour leader Sampson outlined the "advantages of the state working...the Rand with white labour in preference to the present system of private exploitation by means of coloured labour".⁴⁶ To reinforce this argument, Labour members frequently asked questions in the House concerning the cost of the large "native" recruiting apparatus - an inference that in the long run African labour was not in

⁴⁴ Simons, op.cit., p.146.

⁴⁵ Walker, op.cit., pp.550-1.

⁴⁶ Debates, Feb.22, 1916, cited in Cape Times, Feb.23, 1916.

fact cheap. An attempt was also made to create the impression that the black mine workers were dangerous subversives - a kind of "Black Peril" accusation having absolutely no basis in fact. At one point in this campaign, Sampson actually requested that each mine be required to "secure safety by having a body of employees...ready armed and proportionate in number to the blacks employed".⁴⁷ This attempt to conjure up images of "restless natives" was in marked contrast to the claim by Mr. Merriman - by now a supporter of the mine houses - that the Poor White was the "most dangerous element to the future of the country".⁴⁸

The segregationist stance of the Labour leadership was supported even by the party's most radical elements. This radical caucus - some have been called "genuine" socialists⁴⁹ - was as vehemently segregationist as Sampson and Creswell. One such radical, W.H. (Bill) Andrews, demanded in parliament that white lads replace African telegraph line repairmen, and that Africans be prevented from learning rivetting, which was a "white man's job".⁵⁰ Others, like S.P. Bunting, worked outside Parliament. Bunting, an Oxford-educated lawyer, warned the all-white electorate in the party's 1914 election manifesto that the mining magnates were attempting to "dispense with white workers, and run the economy with white overseers, and cheap, unenfranchised, unorganized Kaffirs."⁵¹ Bunting's diagnosis was fundamentally correct,

⁴⁷ Debates, March 9, 1915, Col.220.

⁴⁸ Debates, Dec. 9, 1915, cited in Cape Times, Dec. 10, 1915.

⁴⁹ Simons, op.cit., p.129, referring to W.H. Andrews.

⁵⁰ Debates, March 18, 1913, col.949, and March 14, 1912, col.1100.

⁵¹ Simons, op.cit., p.173.

but instead of advocating the enfranchisement and organization of black workers, he argued that it was in their interest as well as that of the white worker to bar them from the industrial economy. Ignoring the inability of the reserves to produce enough food for all Africans, Bunting insisted that it would be better for them to remain there rather than to work in the mines for very low wages.⁵²

The white mine workers agreed with the Labour Party intellectuals. The tragi-comic mixture of racism, "socialism", and economic self-interest which characterized their position was epitomized in the evidence given by Mr. Tom Mathews, General Secretary of the South African Mine Workers Union, to the Dominions Royal Commission:

"...seeing that the average Kaffir is bred as a slave he has no right to usurp our position as free men, or drive us from these mines....I hold that the average Kaffir should be allowed to get free, but in the meantime as he is here as a semi-slave, I have the right to fight him and oust him." 53

Mathews' subsequent admission that "we want to drive out the Kaffirs if we can"⁵⁴ clearly illustrates the similarity between the immigrant miners' desire to be rid of the African labourer as an industrial rival, and the historical yearning of the Boer to be rid of the African pastoralist as a rival for the occupation of land.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Dominions Royal Commission, op.cit., p.71, Mathews was shortly to die from Miners' Phthisis.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.72.

Yet the parallel went further. As the Boer resisted his inclination to banish his African squatters because he coveted their labour, so the white miner - in practice an overseer - could do less work and more "bossing" if the African remained to do the manual labour.⁵⁵ Consequently the white miners sought a compromise whereby the African could remain but would not compete with whites for jobs, especially the semi-skilled and minor supervisory jobs which the urban Poor White could fill. They found this compromise in the extension of the job colour bars of the Mines and Works Act to bar Africans from all jobs considered "white man's work". The corollary of this demand was the principle that white holders of such protected jobs should be paid a "civilized wage". Thus while Labour Party and trade union officials paid lip service to the "ideal" of segregation, their efforts to protect the "civilized standards" of white workers were in practice restricted to extending the job colour bar and agitating for a guaranteed white wage.

To achieve this, the white workers had first to organize strong unions and win recognition for them. By 1913 a number of unions, particularly the Mine Workers' Union, were well enough established to press for recognition. The Chamber of Mines resisted and even tried to break the unions, but after a series of violent strikes in 1913 and 1914 they finally recognized the South African Federation of Trades - a body representing a number of unions - as a bargaining agent.

⁵⁵ Ibid., evidence of the Inspector of White Labour, R. Shanks, pp.64-9.

These strikes revealed both the extreme militancy of the white labour movement and the influence of socialist thought on it. At the beginning of the 1913 General Strike, the "Worker", official organ of the Labour Party, told its readers that there was "no reason in principle" why murder and arson should not be part of the tactics of "industrial war".⁵⁶ That this was not mere rhetoric, and that it alarmed the government, is reflected in the wording of a telegram sent to London by South Africa's Governor-General during the 1914 General Strike:

"It is most important to remember that the Trades Hall leaders have made ordinary men afraid of being called a 'scab' and they relied on the maintenance of this terror... in carrying on, not an industrial struggle, but a so-called class war".⁵⁷

The strikes of 1913 and 1914 were undoubtedly battles in a "class war", but the war was being conducted within South Africa's white colonial caste. Within this caste a new working class solidarity developed during the 1913-14 "industrial war". The Afrikaner miners, who had been used in the past to break strikes, backed-up the strike calls of the British union leaders.⁵⁸ Coupled with this industrial

⁵⁶ Cited in, Correspondence Relating to the Recent General Strike in South Africa, Cd.4348, April 1914, p.215.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.170.

⁵⁸ Simons, op.cit., p.159.

co-operation were efforts by the Labour Party to woo Afrikaner Nationalists who had broken away from the South African Party on the grounds that it was too closely tied to British imperialism. Led by General Hertzog, a Boer war veteran, the Nationalists represented the interests of Afrikaner farmers, traders, and Poor Whites who felt threatened by the policies of British capitalists, particularly the mining magnates. As the privileged position of the British working class was threatened from the same quarter, it is not surprising that the Labourites claimed that they and the Nationalists represented the "real forces of progress in South Africa".⁵⁹

Yet the industrial struggles of 1913-14 were a class war which was in reality an element of the greater South African race war. For the kind of "progress" envisaged by the Labour Party and Nationalists had as its central theme the emphatic economic and political supremacy of all whites over non-whites. And in trying to Africanize mining jobs rather than offering them to Poor Whites, the magnates showed their indifference to the racial degradation of the Poor Whites. Further Africanization would also bring economic decline and therefore racial degradation to the white workers displaced and to the traders, farmers, and professionals who depended on their spending power. The ability of the white colonial elite to remain emphatically and identifiably "superior" to the black colonized majority was being

⁵⁹ "Worker", July 3, 1913, cited in Simons, op.cit., p.159.

threatened by mining capitalism, whose decision makers were not bona fide colonists and therefore did not share the colonists' extreme fear of racial degradation. Hence to maintain and increase racial supremacy, the white proletariat and petit-bourgeoisie had to wage war against a class that was a sort of non-resident member of the colonial caste.

But because the white workers had power as members of this colonial caste, the mining companies treated white miners very differently from their black counterparts. When Africans on several mines struck work in 1913, the owners called in soldiers and police officers who promptly killed eleven Africans and wounded thirty-seven others.⁶⁰ The survivors were driven back to work by bayonets and rifle butts, and the strike leaders were given six months hard labour. In contrast, no white strikers were prosecuted, and those who were arrested during the strikes received "courteous treatment".⁶¹

While unwilling to force a violent confrontation with white labour over the job colour bar, the mining industry continued to campaign for its abolition. In Parliament they pressed for revocation of the colour bar Mining Regulations, despite their knowledge that without a showdown trade union and public pressure would probably force them to maintain a job colour bar in practice.⁶² The logic

⁶⁰ Simons, op.cit., p.168.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.160.

⁶² Transvaal Chamber of Mines, Annual Report for the Year 1918, p.92.

behind this strategy is not difficult to detect. While a reasonably good supply of black labour was maintained and the world price of gold remained high, a relatively restricted, custom enforced job colour bar was not a serious threat to profits. If these circumstances changed, however, and profits dropped, the Chamber of Mines would then mobilize all its power to oust the colour bar, and a colour bar enforced only by tradition and worker pressure would be much easier to oust than one sanctioned by law.

For Labour, on the other hand, the colour bar mining regulations were an embryonic beginning - a foot in the door - for their "civilized labour policy", and after the 1913-14 strikes it continued its parliamentary campaign for their extension. Coupled with this demand was a renewed call for a "civilized wage" for all white workers. During a debate in 1914, F.H. Creswell, the Labour Party leader, summed up the party's stand on the colour bar and "civilized" versus "uncivilized" labour:

"So long as the policy is persisted in basing the mining industry upon uncivilized servile labour, largely imported, and so long as no legislation is enacted securing to mine workers standard rates or rates upon which civilized conditions of life can be maintained the only effect of abolishing the colour bar... regulations would be to increase the profits of the mining companies...."⁶³

⁶³ Debates, May 12, 1914, col.2442.

The government tried to compromise between the extremely divergent aims of the Labour Party and those of the Chamber of Mines. Although it had shown where its sympathy was forced to lie by enforcing "law and order" during the strife of 1913 and 1914, the governing South African Party hastily reassumed its classical Liberal posture. In keeping with this stance, it showed no willingness to undertake the large-scale re-settlement of Poor Whites on the land, as suggested by industrialists; it displayed a similar lack of enthusiasm for the proto-apartheid policy objectives of the Labourites and Nationalists. The government believed it had fulfilled its obligation by employing more whites on the state-owned railways, and by promoting white labourers to the rank of "porters, shunters, firemen, ganger, and ticket examiner."⁶⁴ This feeble effort to "save" the Poor White nevertheless cost the South African Railway £90,000 in 1914.⁶⁵ Maintaining the "civilized standards" of even a small number of Poor Whites was an expensive business, and the hard headed capitalists who controlled South Africa's mining industry were not prepared to turn their mines into charitable institutions.⁶⁶

The First World War provided these men with an excellent opportunity to increase the Africanization of their labour force. South

⁶⁴ Minister of Railways and Harbour, Debates, April 27, 1914, col.1967.

⁶⁵ Ibid., col.1968.

⁶⁶ "Statement by the Chamber of Mines to the Relief and Grants-in-Aid Commission", Johannesburg, 8th June, 1914, printed in the Chamber's Annual Report for the Year 1914, pp.93-6.

Africa's participation in the war created a shortage of white labour on the mines, for the majority of white miners were British and large numbers of them volunteered for military service. This, together with a shortage of African labour in the later war years, led to an increase in the use of machines and to the employment of Africans in semi-skilled and supervisory positions.⁶⁷ The "encroachment" of Africans in the semi-skilled area was not dramatic - there were seventy-three employed as drill sharpeners in 1918 - and it was more important to the Chamber for the precedent it set than for the short-term economic gains. The same was true for the 1917 innovation "whereby a number of suitable and experienced natives could be raised to the rank of gang leaders" who would, the Chamber insisted, "assist" rather than replace the European supervisors.⁶⁸

A spirit of co-operation forged by the war-time crisis and wage increases induced white labour to accept this incursion reluctantly. The policy of giving cost of living bonuses to "white employees" began in 1915, and the amount of the bonus increased as the war dragged on and the cost of living soared.⁶⁹ This bonus scheme was linked to the Chamber's general strategy of ensuring that they had a sufficiently

⁶⁷ Transvaal Chamber of Mines, Annual Report for the Year 1918, p.44.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp.92-3.

⁶⁹ Transvaal Chamber of Mines, Annual Reports for 1915, 1916, and 1917, pp. xllvi, 44, and 116 respectively.

numerous and contented white labour force to keep the industry going. To accomplish this, they gained exemption from military service for certain employees, especially those "engaged in the control of Natives in Compounds...."⁷⁰ And after protests in 1916 and 1917 about Africanization in the semi-skilled trades, the mine owners decided in 1918 to keep relations with white labour cordial by signing a Status Quo Agreement with the trade unions whereby there would be no change in the occupational spheres of either racial group.⁷¹

Some Africans did gain job promotion prior to the Status Quo Agreement but the war-time lot of the majority was not a happy one. While the wages of white workers rose with the cost of living, African wages remained static.⁷² This brought considerable hardship, especially to those workers who had become domiciled in the cities and had adopted an urban lifestyle. The cost of the minimal amount of clothing required by an African mine worker went from 18/- to 38/-, and the underground worker paid 20/- at the end of the war for a pair of boots which cost him only 12/6 in 1914.⁷³ When this situation generated "Native Unrest" in 1918, the Chamber claimed that only the cost of "luxuries" had gone up and suggested that "While there is no doubt that the

⁷⁰ Chamber, Annual Report for the Year 1914, p.42.

⁷¹ The Report of the Mining Industry Board, (U.G. 39-1922), p.5.

⁷² Chamber, Annual Report for the Year 1918, p.88.

⁷³ Ibid., p.90.

increased cost of such articles is a real grievance to the natives, it is surely wrong to argue that they suffer any hardship through being unable to buy the same number of them at the same cost as before the war."⁷⁴

The war also brought hard times to the Labour Party. The party was almost eliminated as a parliamentary force by the British - Afrikaner polarization caused by the war and the Boer rebellion of 1914.⁷⁵ The tendency for patriotic British workers to abandon the Labour Party in favour of the imperialistic Unionists was accompanied by a split in the Labour leadership. Those "comrades" most influenced by Marxian socialism disapproved of the party's pro-war stance and broke away to form the International Socialist League. Though similar splinter groups were formed, the I.S.L. attracted most of the Rand's notorious "socialists", including Bunting and Andrews.⁷⁶

After a period of prolonged soul searching the International Socialist League began to preach a peculiar kind of class struggle guaranteed to resolve both the problem of the Poor White and the Poor Black. The enemy of both races was capitalism, which destroyed the "ethnological tendency" towards a "natural social apartness of black and white."⁷⁷ If there were "Industrial Co-operation" between black

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Walker, op.cit., p.561.

⁷⁶ David Iyon Jones, Communism in South Africa, I.S.L. Press, (Johannesburg, 1921), p.7.

⁷⁷ International, the official organ of the I.S.L., Johannesburg, March 17, 1916, cited in Simons, op.cit., pp.193-4.

and white proletarians, capitalism could be replaced by a socialist system based on "healthy social segregation", particularly the banning of Africans from the industrial economy.⁷⁸ Essentially, the radical "socialists" were asking the African worker to collaborate in the establishment of a new social order in which he was to be confined to his reserves, and "would remain there with his own kind and develop along his own lines".⁷⁹ As these reserves were grossly overpopulated and severely eroded, the "socialists" were proposing that the African subject himself to hardship and even large-scale famine in order to make the industrial job market safe from his competition.

The I.S.L. did not reject racism or colonialism and consequently had no conception of the emancipation of Africans as a colonized race. The inability of the I.S.L. to abandon racism is clear from editorial comment in their newsheet, "The International". An edition in April, 1916, contained a serious discussion of the differences between the "degree of mental capacity" of Europeans and Africans, and in October of 1917, the editor reassured a concerned reader that socialism would not lead to such "evils" as mixed marriages.⁸⁰

The International Socialist League's defence of colonialism was more subtle. They failed to acknowledge, or perhaps to recognize, that the most significant socio-economic distinction in South Africa

⁷⁸ Ibid., June 16, 1916, cited in Simons, op.cit., pp.193-4.

⁷⁹ Voice of Labour, May 10, 1915, cited in Simons, op.cit., p.155.

⁸⁰ April 7, 1916 and October 19, 1917, cited in Simons, op.cit., p.194.

was between the black colonized and the white colonizers rather than between proletarians and capitalists. Thus while not openly condoning colonialism, the League insisted that class and not racial emancipation should be the goal for African workers. This tended to undermine the stance of African proto-nationalist groups. Indeed the white "socialists" did not hesitate to attack any activity resembling African nationalism as counter to the interests of African workers. Such moderate groups as the South African Native Congress were condemned for their "reactionary, middle-class and religious-cum-racial tendencies...."⁸¹ The use of violence by more militant Africans was also rejected, for the "socialists" anticipated that this would produce "such evils as the white workers justifiably fear".⁸² And the "evil" the white workers feared most was any alteration to the colonial system which might lead to the loss of their privileges as members of a colonial-racial elite.

Given this commitment to racial segregation and colonialism, the "socialists" only sought African support for the overthrow of capitalism because the white workers were disinclined to do the job themselves. During the war years, those British workers who did not rally to the "vote British" Unionists stayed with the reformist Labour Party; it was therefore left to the more "enlightened" I.S.L. to make the revolution for them - with the help of the African proletariat.⁸³

⁸¹ International, June 21, 1918, cited in Simons, op.cit., p.207.

⁸² Ibid., December 6, 1918, cited in Simons, op.cit., p.211.

⁸³ Simons, op.cit., p.192.

Though the I.S.L. received very little support from either black or white workers during the war, the League's persistent propaganda forays undoubtedly laid a base for the anti-capitalist mood of British miners in the years immediately following the war. Such sentiments did much to facilitate the collaboration between white labour and the Afrikaner Nationalists in the 1920's; the Nationalists, who made impressive electoral gains during the war, were long-time enemies of the British based mining companies.

When the war ended in 1918 the industrial scene was quiet, but the problem of black versus white labour had not been solved. The patriotic spirit and industrial boom of the war years had merely postponed the clash between the exponents of colour bars to protect the Poor White from African competition and the "economic rationalists" who wished to maximize the use of cheap African labour. The mines were content to achieve minimal progress towards Africanization and to avoid a confrontation over the job colour bar in times of prosperity, and white labour was unwilling to disrupt production while wages were rising and the Empire was at war. Yet the rising subterranean tide of anti-capitalist sentiment among certain British workers and the revived anti-imperialism of the Afrikaner Nationalists would surface when war time prosperity disappeared.

CHAPTER FOUR

Compromise and Conflict, 1918 - 1922.

White miners returning from war service found their African counterparts more formidable competitors than ever before. Yet because South Africa was experiencing rapid industrial expansion and her gold was fetching high prices, serious industrial strife was again postponed. Under these boom conditions there was full and lucrative employment for white miners and large profit margins for the mining companies. But when circumstances later changed, the mines sought to cut costs by cutting both European employment and wages. To do this they had to provoke a violent confrontation with a numerically stronger and more militant white labour movement.

The tranquillizing post-war industrial boom was accompanied by various social developments. Foremost among these was the paradoxical growth of the Poor White problem at a time of industrial expansion. While 4,300 new factories employing 30,000 white workers were registered in 1919 and 1920 alone,¹ the number of Poor Whites increased by 11.6% between 1916 and 1920.² With the dearth of new

¹ Simons, op.cit., p.220.

² Second Interim Report of the Unemployment Commission, May, 1921. U.G. 34-21, p.16. The total white population increase was 5.1%.

land for expansion and the preference of farmers for African rather than white squatters,³ numerous landless whites were forced to swallow their pride and set out to sell their labour in the urban areas. Many were disappointed. In 1919 the government labour inspector in Johannesburg reported that "to all intents and purposes the labourer's and the handyman's work is performed by natives, and there is consequently no demand in the towns for this class of [poor] white man [and] the number of demands from farmers for white labourers is very small".⁴ Yet certain occupations were open to the Poor Whites who drifted into the burgeoning industrial towns, especially semi-skilled jobs on the tramways and in other municipal and government services. And since the mining companies were unable to fill new semi-skilled and minor supervisory jobs with Africans, the companies reluctantly added a substantial number of ex-rural Afrikaners to their payrolls. This influx was such that by 1920 ninety per cent of the Rand's white miners were South African born.⁵ But even with such mitigating factors as the industrial colour bar and sympathetic municipalities, many Poor Whites could not find urban employment. So alarmed was the Durban labour inspector at their plight that he

³ Jones, op.cit., p.10.

⁴ Annual Report of the Factories and Labour Divisions, Department of Mines and Industries, 1919, p.23.

⁵ G.V. Doxey, The Industrial Colour Bar in South Africa, (London, 1961), p.116.

considered the "question as to what should be done for the unskilled white is too gigantic to be dealt with in a few words...."⁶

In the post-war years the white trade unions showed more concern than ever for these unemployed Poor Whites as fellow members of the colonist racial caste. With the increased influx of Afrikaners into its ranks this relationship was reinforced by more concrete class ties. And as its numerical strength - from 10,500 in 1915 to 132,000 in 1920 - and organizational ability were generally enhanced since 1914,⁷ the union movement was in a better position than before to oppose management attempts to open new jobs to Africans rather than to Poor Whites. The Poor Whites now in urban occupations helped to reinforce this trend themselves, for they soon became "good trade unionists and loyal agitators for their class, always of course within the limits of their colour".⁸

The leaders of this enlarged and active labour movement now vigorously propagated the "civilized labour policy", never mentioning the old "white labour policy". The latter had aimed at the "ideal" of a totally white mine labour force, but after Union its propagators rarely campaigned for anything more radical than legal job colour bars.

⁶ Annual Report of the Factories and Labour Divisions, op.cit., p.23.

⁷ Simons, op.cit., p.220.

⁸ Jones, op.cit., p.10.

Now the Labour Party bosses who had once dreamed of driving all Africans from the Rand, sought to protect "civilized standards" with a "civilized labour policy" which included a minimum legal wage for whites as well as statutory job colour bars. At the 1919 Trades Union Congress, a resolution which was clearly part of the "civilized labour policy" blueprint stated:

"That this Congress demands that legislation be introduced to secure for all white workers a minimum wage consistent with the necessary standards of comfort for the white man and his family in South Africa." ⁹

The skilled white workers whose representatives led the labour movement did not need such legal protection, but they nevertheless "strongly supported" measures to protect their less skilled fellow whites from African competition. ¹⁰

These new demands came at a time when white mine labour was enjoying a more privileged position vis-a-vis African labour than ever before. By 1920 mining regulations had reserved thirty-two occupations, involving 7,057 workmen, for whites, while in practice trade union and public pressure had resulted in nineteen other occupations being strictly reserved; altogether 14,658 white mine

⁹ Annual Report of the Factories and Labour Divisions, op.cit., p.39.

¹⁰ Low Grade Mines Commission, op.cit., p.28, para.171.

workers were protected by either the legal or the conventional colour bars by June, 1921.¹¹ These men were not only protected from the job competition, but they collected wages many times higher than their African counterparts. A semi-skilled white received twenty shillings a day for the same work for which an African of equal skill and efficiency was handed a mere three shillings.¹² The white "worker", moreover, continued to do little or no manual work for his high wage. Even those holding what were virtually unskilled jobs - trammers and waste packers, for instance - were rarely found doing more than "lending a hand where required...."¹³ Not only was the British trained skilled miner a "boss", so also was the recently arrived Afrikaner "labourer".

The post-war inflationary gold prices¹⁴ encouraged white labour to use its power to push for an even more privileged position. There were forty-seven strikes organized by white miners in 1919 and sixty-six in 1920; in contrast, the strife-torn year of 1914 saw only twelve such strikes.¹⁵ Yet since the mining companies were making handsome profits they invariably acquiesced; they certainly made no vigorous

¹¹ Ibid., p.27. Hancock, op.cit., vol.2,p.65.

¹² Mining Industry Board, op.cit., p.172.

¹³ Low Grade Mines Commission, op.cit., p.26, para.156.

¹⁴ Starting in July, 1919, gold buyers started paying a premium on the standard price of 85 shillings a fine ounce, Simons, op.cit., p.272.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.220.

efforts to dispose of their many redundant white proletarian "bosses" or to rescind the Status Quo Agreement which prevented further Africanization of semi-skilled jobs. The maintenance of the Status Quo Agreement illustrates the reluctance of either white labour or the Chamber of Mines to risk disruptive confrontation during the boom period.

But such agreements represented a truce - a lull before the storm - rather than genuine co-operation. The Chamber, though careful to avoid confrontation, kept up pressure to convince the government that the interests of the mines, especially regarding the abolition of the job colour bar, were the interests of the nation. In January, 1918, for example, the President of the Chamber of Mines reminded the government that "50 per cent of the total revenue of the Union may be attributed to the gold mining industry". The president also emphasized that should the mines be unable to recruit sufficient numbers of African labourers and to employ them economically "there would be a very large number - and here I refer particularly to white workmen - thrown out of employment."¹⁶ This theme of national dependence on the ability of the mining industry to profitably exploit the nation's mineral and labour resources was to be repeatedly invoked in the face of white labour militancy.

This militancy and the successes that frequently accompanied it also alarmed employers outside the mining industry. Mr. J.X. Merriman,

¹⁶ Letter from E.A. Wallers to Minister of Mines, F.S. Malan, cited by Cape Times, Jan. 29, 1918.

the prosperous farmer and former Cape Prime Minister who had once strongly favoured the industrial colour bar, now came down firmly on the side of the Chamber. In Parliament he passionately professed his opposition to the situation whereby many "natives" who were "remarkably clever men" were "kept down by arbitrary regulations...while in the meantime they were keeping a lot of white men watching the other men doing the work".¹⁷

Despite its own anxieties and those of employers like Merriman, the Chamber repeatedly affirmed its unwillingness to make any move towards Africanization that would outrage public opinion. For the mine owners realized the immense risks that any such move must involve. A Chamber statement issued in 1918 makes this perfectly clear:

"Public opinion is not prepared to see the substitution of coloured or native workers for white skilled or semi-skilled workers, and any attempt to employ the non-white workman on mining work at present occupied by white men would cause a strike of white employees on the mines, who would be supported by the great bulk of the population of the Rand." ¹⁸

A similar reassurance to the Rand's European population was expressed in a statement issued during strikes of African mine workers in 1920.

These strikes took everyone by surprise. Though they were

¹⁷ Debates, June 25, 1918, cited by Cape Times, June 26, 1918. When evaluating these displays of indignation it is important to bear in mind that Merriman was elected in the Cape and therefore anxious to impress Coloured voters.

¹⁸ Chamber, Annual Report for the Year 1918, p.92.

preceded by the organization of certain African and Coloured trade unions in the Cape, the strikes were clearly a spontaneous reaction to the mining companies' failure to correct certain specific grievances. Drought in the countryside combined with the inflation accompanying the post-war boom meant that African mine workers needed higher wages, both for themselves and for their families on the reserves.¹⁹

Consequently, they asked for a general wage increase and for better promotion opportunities - in other words, for a relaxation of the job colour bar. When these requests were ignored, the African miners of the Rand struck in large numbers: on February 20th., 1920, 71,033 men from twenty-one mines were on strike.²⁰ Only after brutal police action and widespread scabbing by white workers did they return to work - with a 3d. a shift raise but without any alteration in the job colour bar.²¹ The Chamber stuck to its position that this "barrier" could not be challenged while it was "upheld by the great majority of the European residents upon the Witwatersrand".²²

Yet despite the Chamber's ability to withstand the radical demands of their African labour force, it was greatly alarmed that its "natives" were able to organize a "strike in the true sense of the word". When addressing the Annual General Meeting of the Chamber

¹⁹ Simons, op.cit., p.231.

²⁰ Chamber, President's Address to Annual Meeting, 1920, Annual Report for the Year 1919, p.67.

²¹ Simons, op.cit., p.231.

²² Press Statement, Johannesburg, Feb., 21, 1920, Annual Report For the Year 1920, pp.88-9.

in 1920, its chairman, Sir Evelyn Wallers, admitted that the industry was "confronted with a new phenomenon". And its "true cause", Wallers warned, lay not so much in the conditions of African labour as in their successful adoption of the methods of white trade unionists. But the grievances of the African mine worker could not be ignored without great risk, as he would not for "very long" tolerate such unjustified restrictions on his progress.²³

It is clear from this address that the Chamber had, in Waller's words, to recognize the danger of "native imitation" and "to take measures accordingly."²⁴ Though not expressed explicitly by Wallers or any of his colleagues, such "measures" must surely be aimed at the abolition or restriction of the job colour bar and a curbing of the power of white trade unions that was such a bad example to "native" imitators. Yet these two aims were in reality one, for without challenging the power of white labour the Chamber could not hope to bring about any meaningful change in the application of job colour bars.

The "new phenomenon" of African labour organization and action also alarmed the white labour movement. This was especially true after it became clear that such activity was greatly stimulated by the partially successful strike of African miners. A few months after the strike an historic meeting of African and Coloured trade unionists decided to amalgamate into one non-white union, the Industrial and

²³ Chamber, President's address, 1920, op.cit., p.68.

²⁴ Ibid.

Commercial Workers Union. The future president of the new union, H. Selby Msimang, told his assembled colleagues that "the native and coloured workers have both capitalists and white trade unions to fight against".²⁵ Henceforth the white miners could not rely on their African "competitors" being mere pawns whose only spokesman was their employer. A group of white socialists in Cape Town called upon their fellow white proletarians to accept this historically inevitable situation whereby "we the overseeing tools of capitalism have outgrown our function, and lost our caste forever in South Africa."²⁶

The white workers of the Witwatersrand were of course in no mood to concede defeat to the profiteering capitalists and uppity "natives". Indeed the nascent African trade union activity served to widen the gap between mining management and its white employees. There could be no compromise between the "civilized labour policy" of white labour and even a partial Africanization attempt by the "bosses". Yet while gold prices remained high, the Chamber steered clear of any costly confrontation by maintaining its conciliatory attitude towards white labour.

Beginning in early 1920 the magic of gold began to lose its potency. In February of that year it was still selling at 130 shillings an ounce, but by December, 1921, the price had fallen to

²⁵ Simons, op.cit., p.241.

²⁶ Bolshevik, Vol.1, No.7, June, 1920, p.2.

95 shillings.²⁷ Coupled with an increase of 39% in production costs since 1913,²⁸ this vast drop in gold prices meant that by 1920 half of the Union's gold mines were either working at a loss or making very little profit.²⁹ The prime cause of these rocketing production costs was the high wage rates of white workers. These had soared by 57% since 1913 while those for Africans had crept up by a mere 9%.³⁰ During the same period, and despite substantial mechanization, the productivity of white underground workers had decreased by 14%.³¹ This apparent anomaly is explained by the growth of white employment and the maintenance of the "practically universally observed [principle] that every native or coloured person has to work under the supervision of a white man who is not an official".³² The bulk of the whites entering the industry during this period were untrained and inexperienced Afrikaners from the countryside who, thanks to customary and legal job colour bars, immediately became "bosses". The lesson to be drawn from the findings of the Low Grade Mines Commission was clear: these unproductive and expensive proletarian "bosses" would displace many of the mines' cheap and increasingly efficient African workers if white labour ever applied its "civilized labour policy".

²⁷ The Report of the Low Grade Mines Commission, (U.G.17 - 1930), p.18.

²⁸ Chamber, Annual Report for the Year 1921, p.131.

²⁹ Interim Report of the Low Grade Mines Commission, (U.G.45 - 1919), p.3, para.6.

³⁰ Chamber, Annual Report, 1921, op.cit., p.131.

³¹ Low Grade Mines, op.cit., p.10, para.34.

³² Ibid., p.26, para.157.

Indeed, the Commission regretted that the present power of the trade unions and public opinion prevented it from recommending means of "appreciably" increasing the complement of African mine labour.³³ Even the removal of the "doubtful legal provisions"³⁴ of the Mines and Works Act would not significantly enhance the Chamber's ability to employ more Africans; it would, however, make for a more flexible "boundary line" for African labour, one to be fixed by negotiations between management and white labour according to the industry's needs.³⁵ Another possible advantage for the industry following the abolition of the colour bar mining regulations would be the appeasement of the "educated natives" who found it so offensive. But the Commission added that this concession would not necessarily head-off a possible "explosion on the part of the natives...."³⁶ The findings and recommendations of the Low Grade Mines Commission thus indicated to the Chamber that a successful confrontation with white labour would be rewarded not so much by the opening of numerous occupations to Africans, as by the removal of redundant Europeans. A Chamber victory over white labour and the removal of the legal job colour bar might also mitigate the resentment of moderate "natives" and intimidate the activists.

The drop in gold prices meant that the expense of the superfluous

³³ Ibid., p.22, para.111, p.27, para.165.

³⁴ Ibid., p.27, para.165.

³⁵ Ibid., p.29, para.182.

³⁶ Ibid., p.29, para.180.

whites could no longer be borne, and the Chamber therefore quickly changed from a strategy of conciliation to one of confrontation. And to justify the impending clash, the mining interests adopted their standard stance: defence of the "native" so unfairly discriminated against by white labour. Politicians who in 1911 fanned the fires of racialism to get black miners reduced to virtual slave status during their period of employment now took the platform to deplore the "artificial restrictions" on the advancement of African miners. The following speech delivered by the mining magnate Sir Lionel Philips is a typical example of the enlightened self-interest of those who controlled the industry:

"It is no good our thinking that in the future, with the strides that education is making, we can adopt a policy which might have suited the country when it was in a more barbarous condition.... You cannot expect that any man who feels capable of doing more and better work should be held down by artificial restrictions."³⁷

Those who supported this "progressive" position in parliament not only sang the praises of the diligent, obedient "native" miner, but criticized his white counterpart in the strongest terms. In presenting a motion for the abolition of the "disabilities" Africans suffered under the Mines and Works Act, J.X. Merriman condemned the state of affairs whereby the "white loafer was paid exorbitant wages while he watched the coloured man work". There were two reasons,

³⁷ Speech delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Chamber, 1920, Annual Report for the Year 1919, pp. 80-1.

Merriman insisted, why the continuation of this system would ruin the nation. Firstly, the protection furnished by the job colour bar would demoralize the white workers and thereby undermine the position of the white race in South Africa. Secondly, and obviously of more immediate concern, such colour barriers prevented the African from being "taken in hand and used" to head-off the "great crisis" in the mining industry heralded by the drop in gold prices.³⁸

In response to Merriman's motion, the Labour Party leader moved an amendment calling for the removal of laws which enabled mining companies to "take in hand" and use African labour so effectively. As far as Colonel Creswell was concerned, these laws - especially the Native Labour Regulation Act - were as much colour bars as the Mines and Works Act, for they barred Africans from the freedom enjoyed by whites employed in the same industry. Consequently, not until there was an end to the "slave system" created by these laws, could the white workers safely relinquish the protection afforded by the Mines and Works Act.³⁹

The results of a Parliamentary election held two months earlier showed that the majority of whites agreed with Creswell. Now the majority of white mine workers were Afrikaners, and thus when gold prices plummeted and unemployment spread, the usual proletarian antagonism against "bosses" was reinforced by their anti-British Boer Nationalism. Rural drought accentuated this trend by bringing

³⁸ Debates, May 18, 1920, cited by Cape Times, May 19, 1920.

³⁹ Ibid.

in a steady stream of rural Poor Whites to swell the ranks of the already predominantly Afrikaner white urban unemployed. To these Poor Whites themselves and to the white labour movement and the Nationalists who claimed to speak for them, it was intolerable that the Chamber should try to help Africans "advance in efficiency and opportunity" while whites remained unemployed and destitute. This feeling was reflected in the gigantic gains the Nationalists and Labourites made in the 1920 general election. The Nationalists won 17 more seats than in 1915; they now had 44 compared with the 41 held by the South African Party and 25 by the Unionists. A surprised Labour Party found its representation had jumped from 3 to 21 - the result of a swing away from the Chamber controlled Unionist Party by disillusioned white workers of British stock.⁴⁰

While fears of Boer republican ambitions made the Labour Party reluctant to join with the Nationalists to oust Smuts, the two parties were firmly united in their opposition to the Chamber's attack on the job colour bar. Indeed with the colour bar issue dominating the election, the success of the Nationalists and Labourites illustrated the determination of most Afrikaners and Britons to maintain white supremacy in industry.

Yet the steadily falling price of gold made the Chamber of Mines equally determined to challenge that supremacy. From their point of view, everything pointed to the need for a decisive confrontation: only when the power of white labour was broken could the mines rid

⁴⁰ Walker, op.cit., pp.568-9.

themselves of some of their expensive "white loafers"; a defeat of white labour would probably convince the nascent black labour movement that militancy did not pay; and such a defeat would make an abolition of the legal job colour bar possible, thereby providing a sop to the educated Africans and hopefully facilitating greater use of African labour. Desirable though a show-down was, the Chamber could certainly not risk provoking it while it was unsure of strong government support. Such support could clearly not have been relied upon following the 1920 general election, when the South African political scene was in a state of extreme flux. The South African Party was scared into negotiating a union with the Nationalists while relying on the Unionists, the Labour Party and a few independants to keep it in power.⁴¹

Finally their talks with the Nationalists broke down and the South African Party merged with the Unionists. The Nationalists were not prepared to curb their secessionist propaganda even for the sake of Boer unity, and Smuts was thus forced to ally with the once dreaded Imperialists - or let the reins of power slip from his hands. From the time of its foundation by the notorious Dr. Jameson, the Unionists were the "kept" party of the Chamber of Mines, and its amalgamation into a new South African Party provided the Chamber with a stronger and more direct means of influencing government policy. The position of this new governing party was further strengthened by being returned with an over-all majority of twenty-two in a surprise general

⁴¹ Ibid.

election called by Smuts in February, 1921.⁴²

Shortly after this electoral success the Chamber made it clear that the new government was under an obligation to come to its aid. In the course of his Annual Address, the President of the Chamber frankly admitted that while they congratulated General Smuts, the Chamber's members should "not pretend that our rejoicing is entirely altruistic; we may reasonably hope that, now that he is at the head of a strong and united majority, he may be able to relieve us from the consequences of past action and inaction...."⁴³

The confrontation that this speech anticipated was postponed during 1921 by a moderate rallying of gold prices, but when they plummeted again at the end of the year the Chamber prepared for a head-on collision. For two years it had made vain attempts to persuade the trade unions to accept minor amendments to the 1918 Status Quo Agreement, which prohibited alterations in the two races' occupational "spheres of influence". Now this moderate demand was jettisoned in favour of a call for an immediate and major amendment to the job colour bar legal regulations.⁴⁴ Explaining this action in a letter sent to the South African Industrial Federation on December 8th., 1921, the Chamber of Mines stated:

⁴² Ibid., p.570. The new S.A.P. won 79 seats, the Nationalists 45, and Labour 9. The S.A.P. won seats from Labour by stressing the constitutional threat posed by the Nationalists.

⁴³ Chamber, President's Address to the Annual Meeting, March 21, 1921. Annual Report of the Year 1920, p.72.

⁴⁴ The mine owners wished to retrench 2,000 white men in twenty-five semi-skilled occupations, Chamber, Annual Report for the Year 1921, p.48.

"The present situation is such that should prices fall, as it seems likely to do, to its normal price of 85 shillings...no less than 21 out of 39 producing mines now remaining on the Witwatersrand would be making a loss which they would be unable to bear. The result would be that over 10,000 Europeans would be thrown out of employment."⁴⁵

In another paragraph of the same letter, the Chamber specifically excluded skilled whites from its provocative accusations and threats. As the artisans were not to blame for the industry's predicament, the Status Quo Agreement would remain in force for "skilled occupations". Having thus attempted to split the ranks of white labour, the full weight of the Chamber's scorn was hurled at the unskilled and semi-skilled whites:

"The Chamber objects to and intends to oppose the fastening upon the industry of redundant whites who, having failed in other occupations, now seek to shelter behind the Status Quo Agreement and certain mining regulations, to the detriment of the mines and all concerned therewith."⁴⁶

The offensive against these superfluous white workers was launched a few weeks later. In a second letter to the Industrial Federation on December 28th., the Chamber unilaterally revoked the Status Quo Agreement and ended the forms of piece-work and contract

⁴⁵ Cited in Chamber of Mines, Chronological Note of the Dispute on the Transvaal Gold and Coal Mines. (Johannesburg, 1922), p.1.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.2.

employment most popular with white miners.⁴⁷ The Industrial Federation responded by sending the Chamber a copy of the strike ballot paper it was forwarding to its members. Yet far from frightening the Chamber, this strike notice prompted them to aggravate the situation further: they issued a press statement demanding a speedy return to "pre-war standards" by a removal of the cost of living bonuses added to basic wages.⁴⁸ A few days later, on January 2nd., the gold and coal miners struck and the notorious "Rand Revolt" of 1922 began.

The "Revolt" climaxed a decade of intense antagonism between the mining industry and its white labour force. It thereby brought into sharp focus the major contradiction in South African society: the apparent incompatibility of increasingly large scale African participation in the industrial economy occurring simultaneously with the integration of traditional, i.e. pre-industrial, master-servant race relations at all levels of that economy. The maintenance of traditional master-servant relations between the mining companies and their African employees was ensured by the Native Labour Regulation Act, and the white miners preserved the status of master vis-a-vis their African co-workers by means of both customary job colour bars and those enforced under the Mines and Works Act.⁴⁹ Now the mining

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.3.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.5.

⁴⁹ All whites enjoyed "master" status by virtue of being exempt from Pass Laws, the Native Labour Regulation Act and other measures restricting the freedom of the non-white "servants".

industry was challenging the right of certain whites in the industry to retain their master status at work. In doing this the Chamber was motivated by short-term economic hardship, not principle; the industry could no longer afford the services of so many redundant proletarian "bosses".

In public appeals for a "free hand in getting rid of these unnecessary and useless employees",⁵⁰ the Chamber played skilfully on the economic fears of other employers. It insisted that a union victory would precipitate a large scale closing down of the mines and the subsequent ruin of South African agriculture and commerce.⁵¹ Even if the mines remained open, the "extravagantly high" wage rates customarily paid to white miners would force up the wages paid to whites by other employers. The farmers and traders would also suffer from the higher freight rates accompanying an increase in white wage rates in public services.⁵²

During this campaign the Chamber was very careful to deny that it was trying to oust the job colour bar. For this, it argued, was imposed by the Mining Regulations, not the trade unions.⁵³ Yet previously the Chamber - and the Low Grade Mines Commission - had expressed the conviction that white labour and public pressure was the real reason for the maintenance of the colour bar, the Mining

⁵⁰ Chamber, "An Outline of the Case for the CHAMBER OF MINES in its dispute with the SOUTH AFRICAN INDUSTRIAL FEDERATION", Annual Report for the Year 1921, p.134.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.137.

⁵² Ibid., pp.137-8.

⁵³ Ibid., p.134.

Regulations being clearly ultra vires.⁵⁴ Thus the mines were trying to minimize the racial issue in order to make a successful appeal for class support from other employers in the white colonist caste.

The strikers' appeals for support were couched more in racial than in class terms. In a pamphlet the miners' union told rural Afrikaners that a Chamber victory would cause a widespread ousting of whites and "national annihilation".⁵⁵ This theme was to be repeated over and over again by strikers and their supporters. Speaking on behalf of the strikers on February 3rd., an Afrikaner church minister told a public rally outside Johannesburg Town Hall:

"The government is only prepared to do what the Chamber of Mines tells them. In order to fill their pockets, the Chamber of Mines are murdering the workers: if the colour bar is abolished the souls as well as the bodies of the workers will be murdered and the authority of the white race in South Africa will come to an end."⁵⁶

The Communist Party, recently formed from the old International Socialist League, was also concerned with the Chamber's threat to the authority of the white race. Through the Party organ, the International, it appealed to policemen and civilian militia to abandon their loyalties to the "idiotic capitalists" who would

⁵⁴ Low Grade Mines, op.cit., p.27, para.165. Chamber, Statements presented to the 1914 Economic Commission, op.cit., Statement no.14, p.1.

⁵⁵ Cited in Simons, op.cit., p.285.

⁵⁶ Cited in The Report of the Martial Law Inquiry Judicial Commission. (U.G.35 - 1922), p.19.

eventually replace even them with "cheap black labourers".⁵⁷ The Communists even argued that this strategy was not incompatible with their class line, for by keeping up the standards of white workers the colour bar helped raise those of their black comrades; and besides, Africans didn't want to do skilled work.⁵⁸

Though the different elements among the strikers and their supporters agreed on the desire to uphold "civilized standards", there was no consensus on the action needed to do so. The situation was confused, with moderate union leaders vying with radical revolutionaries for the leadership of the strike movement. Initially the moderates remained in command and displayed a surprising willingness to negotiate with the Chamber. These negotiations continued until January 28th., but they were futile; the Industrial Federation insisted on the retention of the Status Quo Agreement and even proposed the introduction of other measures "for the more adequate protection of the white worker in the industry".⁵⁹ In the meantime, the radicals recruited striking miners and unemployed Poor Whites into commandos. These commandos, composed almost entirely of Afrikaners, were drilled and otherwise prepared for violent confrontation.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ International, March 20, 1922, cited in Simons, op.cit., p.299.

⁵⁸ International, March 10, 1922, cited in S.P. Bunting, Red Revolt and the Rand Strike. (Johannesburg, 1922) p.31.

⁵⁹ Letter from Federation to Chamber cited in Chronological Note....., op.cit., p.13.

⁶⁰ Bunting, op.cit., pp.21-23.

Such openly subversive activities invited government intervention in the dispute. On February 11th., Prime Minister Smuts issued a statement calling on the men to return to work and "leave the final settlement to Parliament". With the air of an "honest broker", Smuts counselled that both sides must be prepared to make sacrifices to achieve this settlement; but in the meantime the government would "protect" the mines and those who continued to work for them.⁶¹ Even before the outbreak of violence, Smuts felt that he had no choice but to back the Chamber, albeit somewhat reluctantly. He was convinced that while a Chamber victory would herald a return to their "old dictatorial attitude towards labour", a labour win must lead to the catastrophic closing down of "half the gold industry...."⁶² There is also evidence that Smuts only came down unequivocally on the side of the Chamber after its President, Sir Evelyn Wallers, had promised to eventually re-employ the white workers presently being ousted as redundant.⁶³

Yet even after Smuts' promise to protect "scabs", the leaders of the Industrial Federation tried to re-open negotiations. On March 4th., the Federation requested a "round table discussion" in an effort to end the impasse.⁶⁴ But by this time the Chamber had

⁶¹ Cited in Chronological Note...., op.cit., p.14.

⁶² Private letter from Smuts to M.C. Gillett, February 23, 1922, Hancock, Smuts, vol.2, op.cit., pp.77-78.

⁶³ International, May 25, 1924, quoting a statement by Smuts in the Johannesburg Star.

⁶⁴ Letter cited in Chronological Note..., op.cit., p.15.

definitely decided on confrontation; their reply to the "round table" request was extremely provocative:

"The Chamber will not waste further time in attempting to convince persons of that mental calibre."⁶⁵

Such "persons", namely the leaders of the Industrial Federation, were condemned by the Chamber as a "dangerous junta" whom it would no longer recognize as the legitimate spokesman of the striking white workers.⁶⁶

This communication convinced even the moderate labour leaders that the "bosses" were deliberately forcing a show-down to "Maintain or increase the price of 'Kaffirs' on the London Stock Exchange".⁶⁷ A general strike was declared. The Committee of Action, a group of union leaders and radical socialists of British stock, attempted to control the strike and to direct it along orthodox lines. But most of the strikers were Afrikaners who rejected both the leadership and the strategy of the Committee of Action. Instead they pledged their allegiance to the Afrikaner commando leaders, who were republicans seeking victory through armed revolt rather than via the panacea of

⁶⁵ Letter of March 5, 1922, cited in Chronological Note..., op.cit., p.15.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Bunting, op.cit., p.9. South African mining shares were commonly known as "Kaffirs".

the general strike.⁶⁸ The commandos did however take up the "socialist" rhetoric of the Committee of Action. This anti-capitalist spirit emanating from the British "socialists" reinforced the traditional anti-British feelings of the Afrikaners, feelings which were now directed solely against British capital. Thus when the general strike reached its so-called "revolutionary phase" it had taken on the appearance of a nascent socialist revolution.

This socialist facade and its magnification by the press dashed the commandos' hope of gaining support from rural Afrikaners. The strikers provided ample ammunition for the pro-Chamber press to launch a massive Red Scare campaign. The unfurling of the notorious "Workers of the World Fight and Unite for a White South Africa" banner at Fordsburg⁶⁹ was just one of several incidents which the papers used to "prove" the spread of "revolutionary sentiment". Violent attacks on mine officials and African miners were reported as "orgies of the Reds".⁷⁰ This kind of adverse publicity, combined with the Chamber's warning against the economic consequences of a strike victory, produced a fear of "Bolshevik" egalitarianism among Afrikaner farmers which later proved strong enough to persuade many to help suppress rather than join the revolt of their compatriots on the Rand.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.24.

⁶⁹ Simons, op.cit., p.285.

⁷⁰ Cape Times, (Cape Town), March 14 and 15, 1922.

⁷¹ Bunting, op.cit., p.31.

African labour leaders felt even less sympathy for the strike, although the Communist Party tried to persuade them that its defeat "involves the defeat of all working class organizations in South Africa, whether white or coloured...."⁷² Responding to this appeal, made at a public meeting in Cape Town on March 12th., 1922, Clements Kadalie, leader of the I.C.W.U., pledged his "unswerving loyalty" to the government and asked "natives and coloured men" to help the authorities maintain "law and order".⁷³ On the following day another official of the I.C.W.U. explained in a letter to the Cape Argus that, since his union was "endeavouring to create the existence of good relations between the white and black races... [they] found it impossible to stand on the same stage [at a proposed public meeting] with Socialists and opportunists...."⁷⁴ In the eyes of African trade union leaders "Socialism" was now definitely equated with racialism.

Potential support for the strike from British workers outside the mining industry was also alienated, both by the strike's illusory "Red" image and its more authentic nationalist features. The English language press portrayed the strike as a kind of Bolshevik republicanism,⁷⁵ and working class readers apparently shared this conviction. For though the trade union movement was considerably stronger and the

⁷² Cape Argus, (Cape Town), March 13, 1922.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Cape Argus, March 14, 1922.

⁷⁵ Cape Times, March 15, 1922.

Chamber more belligerent than during the 1914 General Strike, the Committee of Action could not muster the kind of support the 1914 strike had received.⁷⁶ The President of the Chamber of Mines adequately explained this phenomenon:

"Directly it became clear that we were no longer concerned with an ordinary industrial dispute, on however large a scale, but with an attempt to destroy by violence the constitution of the country, all the better elements of the population - and I am glad to say that these elements are now shown to comprise the great majority - rallied instantly to the cause of law and order."⁷⁷

The Chamber was clearly taking advantage of the reluctance of members of a colonizing society to engage in activities which were so disruptive of the colonial system as to promote "native unrest".

Thus when the "revolutionary phase" of the strike began on March 10th., the "revolutionaries" found themselves isolated from popular support and facing the nation's armed forces backed up by Afrikaner burghers in counter-commandos.⁷⁸ During the ensuing hostilities, atrocities occurred on both sides. Strike commandos slaughtered defenceless African workers as they huddled in their compounds, and government troops and militia shot prisoners - British

⁷⁶ Simons, op.cit., pp.293-4.

⁷⁷ Chamber, Annual Report for the Year 1921, pp.68-9.

⁷⁸ The Report of the Martial Law Inquiry Judicial Commission, op.cit., pp.5-6.

militia murdered Boer strikers and vice versa.⁷⁹ But the discipline and courage of the revolutionary commandos were no match for Smuts' artillery and aerial bombardments, and with the crushing of armed resistance the strike collapsed. The mining companies prevailed.

Following this military defeat and its attendant demoralization, the white labour movement was powerless to prevent a reorganization of the mines which made many of the white workers redundant and reduced the wages of the remainder. The mines were thereby able to cut labour costs and considerably expand their exploitation of low grade ore.⁸⁰ Predictably, within a short time of their military success the Chamber procured a legal victory which further enhanced their ability to utilize previously uneconomic ore deposits. This move came soon after a Mining Industry Board, set up to investigate the Rand Revolt, had not only cleared the Chamber of provocation - it stated that "drastic measures were needed to cope with the emergency" - but had explicitly condemned the legal job colour bar.⁸¹

In November, 1923, a Transvaal court declared the colour bar Mining Regulations issued under the 1911 Mines and Works Act to be

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp.15-20.

⁸⁰ As compared with 1921, in 1923 the number of white employees fell from 20,825 to 17,666, their average income from £495 to £370, working costs per ton milled from 25 shillings 10d. to 20s., while tonnage milled increased from 23,437,196 to 26,765,126 tons. Low Grade Ore Commission, 1930, op.cit., p.19, para.9.

⁸¹ Cited in Chamber, Annual Report for the Year 1922, pp.139-44.

ultra vires. The wording of the court's judgement provided an interesting insight into the judiciary's conception of the role of African labour in South Africa; it stressed the injustice done to the employer by such discrimination as much as that done to the employee. "Such regulations", the decision stated, "of the right of the citizen to so employ skilled and competent coloured persons or of such persons to be employed, could never have been contemplated by the legislature and were unreasonable and even capricious and arbitrary."⁸² Thus the white workers were confronted with the loss of their precious legal colour bar in addition to unemployment or wage cuts.

Yet these defeats did not weaken the white labour movement's resolve to implement its "civilized labour policy"; capitulation to the capitalists and their government lackeys might still be avoided by a change in strategy. For a number of years, but especially during the Rand Revolt, the Labour Party and the Nationalists had become increasingly aware of the common ground that existed between them. In a private letter written at the time of the Revolt, W.H. Andrews, Secretary of the Communist Party and a prominent member of the Committee of Action, predicted a coalition. "The political action of the strike," he wrote, "is disclosed by the rapprochement between the Labour and Nationalist Parties, loose and unofficial at

⁸² Rex. V. Hildick-Smith, South African Law Reports, Transvaal Provincial Division, 1924, cited in Buell, op.cit., p.61.

present, but it is possible that it will develop...into a working agreement."⁸³ The leaders of the two parties were obviously aware of the political power they could harness if such a "working agreement" were reached. The Nationalists had the support of the rural Poor Whites and most Afrikaner urban workers, and the Labour Party could rely on workers of British descent. Combined and well organized, the two parties would have little difficulty winning by the ballot box what they had failed to win with picket lines and armed commandos.

While the Chamber of Mines reaped the benefits of its victory and the vanquished were contemplating a new ballot box strategy, the government turned once again to its role of conciliation. There is no doubt that Smuts genuinely wanted to forge a compromise between the mining industry and the advocates of the "civilized labour policy". With the mining industry providing half its revenue and working class and indigent whites controlling its destiny at the polls, the government's very survival depended on its ability to compromise. The government thus was torn between the need to withstand a possible combined Labour and Nationalist onslaught at the polls, and reluctance to jeopardise the recent victory of the Chamber of Mines' "economic rationality".

Smuts summoned all his immense political and legal skill in a

⁸³ Cited in The Report of the Martial Law Inquiry...., op.cit., p.23, para.126.

valiant attempt to resolve this dilemma. Following investigations by the Mining Industry Board and the Martial Law Inquiry Judicial Commission, he drafted two pieces of legislation intended to secure industrial peace and, more important, to woo the racialist electorate.

The Apprentice Bill of 1922 was the first of the bills to be put to the test. It raised requirements for entry into apprenticeship far beyond the standard that most Africans had the opportunity to achieve. Intended to reassure the white electorate that skilled occupations would remain the exclusive domain of whites, the Bill impressed no-one; "native" encroachment threatened the semi-skilled, not the skilled tradesman. Semi-skilled industrial jobs were what the poorly educated Poor Whites sought, jobs which they could only secure by counteracting the competition of more experienced, more tractable, and more poorly paid Africans. The Poor Whites and their politico-racial allies needed the legal job colour bar to beat the powerful black competition; they were certainly not going to be bought-off by a measure as meaningless as Smuts' new Apprentice Bill.

The second and more important of the two appeasement bills was the Industrial Conciliation Bill of 1924. A direct response to the Rand Revolt and to the Mining Industry Board's recommendations, the Bill represented the government's principal concession in its battle for white labour support. The Bill also marked a significant deviation from the government's principle - not necessarily its practice - of non-intervention in industrial relations, a deviation forced upon it by the immense strength of the formalized Nationalist-Labour alliance

it was now facing.⁸⁴ The government's precarious position was revealed during the parliamentary debates on the Bill. The Minister of Mines and Industry tried desperately and usually unconvincingly, to present it as a measure to strengthen white trade unions without weakening the bargaining position of management. When introducing the Bill, the Minister assured Labour members of the government's sincere wish to "put the trade unions on a more official basis", and to establish conciliation boards and industrial councils to improve industrial relations.⁸⁵ Yet the government was equally anxious to convince the industrialists that the proposed machinery for settling disputes was "voluntary" and that "enterprise" would be in no way endangered.⁸⁶

Despite these assurances to the "bosses", the Industrial Conciliation Bill was a major concession to the white labour movement. The exclusion of all African labour from the scope of the Bill was clearly calculated to convince white labour and public opinion that the government was not "pro-Kaffir" after all. The Bill was, in short, astutely designed to wed the large trade unions and the Labour Party to "the system".

The reaction of Labour parliamentarians to the Bill revealed their passionate desire to become the mainstay of a white supremacist industrial system. The Party clearly wanted conciliation to replace

⁸⁴ In April, 1923, the two parties agreed to form a united front and formalized the arrangement in the Pact Agreement; see page 126.

⁸⁵ F.S. Malan, Debates, February 13, 1924, col.207.

⁸⁶ F.S. Malan, Debates, February 28, 1924, col.526.

confrontation, and to this end it emphasized the need for trade unions strong enough to face the employers' combinations, particularly the Chamber of Mines. Labour members insisted that industrial harmony could be achieved only if the employers recognized the "rights" of "organized", i.e. white, labour. If management maintained their opposition to such co-operation and continued to harass and victimize trade unionists, "Bolshevism" would result.⁸⁷ Then, warned Labourite Sampson, the employers would "have to deal with mobs and not organized unions".⁸⁸ Industrial "strife" would also erupt if "unorganized men" (Africans) were ever given the same "privileges" demanded by the Labour Party for "organized" men.⁸⁹ What the Labour Party and Nationalists wanted was not the overthrow of capitalism, but the granting of what they saw as white labour's rightful "privileges" as members of the colonizing racial caste. Despite Labour support for the Industrial Conciliation Bill as a step in this direction, the concession was clearly not sufficient to induce them to abandon their "civilized labour policy" - the legal job colour bar plus a legal minimum white wage.

The parliamentary spokesmen for industry showed an even greater reluctance to accept Smuts' compromise legislation than the Labourites. Far from being willing to appease the Nationalist-Labour alliance, the "bosses" were determined to undermine both the industrial and political

⁸⁷ Debates, February 13, 1924, col.218.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Debates, February 28, 1924, col.511.

strength of the white labour movement.⁹⁰ In this struggle they again posed as the champions of the oppressed African worker, now defined as "unorganized labour". No move could have been better calculated to drive more white voters into the Nationalist-Labour camp.

Indeed the adoption of this uncompromising position by the industrialists suggests that they had seriously under-estimated the enormous changes in the socio-political context of the colour bar conflict between themselves and white labour in the years between 1911 and 1924. Perhaps the dominant socio-economic change of that era was the alarming increase in the number of Poor Whites and their migration to urban areas where they became more aware of their common plight and more easily mobilized for political action. Changes in the role and activity of African industrial labour greatly stimulated such political activity. The increased integration of Africans into the industrial economy, their greater efficiency, and the establishment of an African labour movement which opposed the job colour bar not only frightened Poor Whites holding or seeking semi-skilled jobs, but made more fortunate whites fearful of future African incursions. These changes and the fears they aroused were reflected on the white political scene by the willingness of both parties to put aside their differences in order to form a united front capable of seizing power by the ballot box and of subsequently implementing the "civilized labour policy".

The Pact Agreement which formalized this marriage of convenience

⁹⁰ Mr. E. Nathan, Debates, February 13, 1924, col.219.

was negotiated in April, 1923. It was based on the refusal of both parties to accept the government's assumption that national and mining company interests were identical and on their determination not to split the anti-government vote at the next election. In exchange for Labour co-operation in a partnership that would primarily benefit the more powerful Nationalists, General Hertzog agreed to an "explicit undertaking" not to "upset the existing constitutional relationship of South Africa to the British Crown."⁹¹ The Pact Agreement demonstrated that deep-rooted antagonism between rival national groups within the colonizing racial caste proved less important than the need to sustain pre-industrial master-servant relations at all levels of the burgeoning industrial economy. This need could only be fulfilled by the implementation of rigid legal job colour bars in industry - and the Pact was formed with that as its prime, if not its only important objective.

⁹¹ Hancock, op.cit., vol.2, pp.155-6.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion : The Implementation of the "Civilized Labour Policy" and its Implications.

Following elections in June, 1924, the Pact became a coalition government dedicated to implementing the "civilized labour policy". Although the task of putting this policy into effect was assigned to Labourites, their position within the Pact Government was not strong. The 1924 election was a victory by and for the Afrikaner Poor Whites, who were Nationalists rather than Labour men. Of the 316,000 votes cast in the election, the Nationalists received 155,000, the South African Party 151,000, and Labour 42,229.¹ Labour support was restricted to the workers of British descent, while the Nationalists were supported by many rural Afrikaners and "nearly all" the Afrikaner urban workers.² Lamenting in particular the British working class support for the Nationalist dominated Pact, the Communist Party demanded that the "Workers of the World Unite! But not with the forces of reaction".³ Such pious appeals were ignored. Two Labour

¹ Alex Hepple, South Africa: A Political and Economic History. (New York, 1966), p.143.

² Communist Party of South Africa, Pamphlet, May 25, 1926.

³ Ibid.

leaders, Creswell and Boydell, joined six Nationalists to form the Pact cabinet headed by General Hertzog. And the Labour Party ministers were backed by the "British section" of the working class, who believed that coalition with the Nationalists could end unemployment and safeguard their privileges while avoiding a break with the Empire or the outbreak of "drastic industrial strife".⁴ They were right.

To achieve these objectives the Pact Government moved quickly to create a legislative base for the "civilized labour policy" originally formulated by labour leaders from the "British section". Indeed the government's definition of "civilized labour" in October, 1924, could have been lifted from the Labour Party's early "white labour" propaganda. Such labour was, it said:

"the labour rendered by persons whose standard of living conforms to the standard of living generally recognized as tolerable from the usual European viewpoint. Uncivilized labour is to be regarded as the labour rendered by persons whose aim is restricted to the bare requirements of the necessities of life as understood amongst barbarians and undeveloped peoples."⁵

Immediately on taking office, the government appointed a Mining Regulations Commission to investigate the threat to "civilized labour"

⁴ C.P.S.A., Pamphlet, May 5, 1926.

⁵ Wage Board Circular No.5, October, 1925, cited in DeKiewiet, op.cit., p.275.

in the mining industry and to make recommendations for protective legislation. The Commission reported that the main danger was the increased efficiency and skill of the African miner combined with the greater mechanization of mining operations. Statistics relating to the Africanization of such jobs as rock drilling and drill sharpening in the years 1921 to 1924 were used to illustrate the trend towards the substitution of "uncivilized" for "civilized" labour. These and similar figures presented a picture of "the previously unskilled native converted into the semi-skilled native working a machine, and the retrenchment on the ground of redundancy of the European supervisor".⁶ And the Commissioners revealed that the previous government's Mining Engineer fully recognized, and regarded as inevitable, the ever increasing magnitude of this encroachment:

"I have no reason to doubt", he stated in his Report for 1923, "that, as natives become more skilled in various occupations, economic law will in years to come operate as it always has, and that the more expensive white man will be replaced to an increasing extent by native labour. The refusal of the white man to do what is called Kaffir work accelerates his own displacement. By letting the native do the work, he also lets the native get the training, and when he is sufficiently trained, the temptation to the employer to put him in the place of the more expensive white man becomes irresistible."⁷

⁶ Report of the Mining Regulations Commission, U.G. 36 - 1925, para.95.

⁷ Cited in Ibid., para.133.

To combat the "economic law" which led to this "temptation", the Commission came out unequivocally in favour of a statutory job colour bar. Yet in making this recommendation, the Commissioners insisted that a non-racial factor was the main reason for doing so. Conveniently forgetting what they had earlier said about the "almost phenomenal growth" in the efficiency of African workers, they explained that "in the present state of their development" Africans could not do semi-skilled work without jeopardizing "health and safety".⁸ The supposed secondary reason for recommending a statutory colour bar was of course the only real reason: "to rescue the European miner from the economic fetters which at present render him the easy victim of advancing native competition".⁹

While colour bar legislation was being prepared, the Pact Government began to apply the "civilized labour" principle to its administrative policies. It used its powers over customs tariffs, subsidies, and the granting of contracts to discourage industries from employing cheaper "uncivilized" labour. Government employment of whites at "civilized" rates of pay went up swiftly following the election of the Pact Government and its formation of a Department of Labour. Between 1924 and 1933, European employment on the state-owned railway system went from 9.5 to 39.3 per cent of the total

⁸ Ibid., paras. 115 and 69.

⁹ Ibid., para. 119.

complement, with the number of white labourers increasing from 4,760 to 17,783.¹⁰

But the new government's major weapons in its defence of "civilized labour" were two laws, of which the Wage Bill was the first to be passed. It was introduced into Parliament by the new Minister of Labour, Colonel Creswell, as a "guide" to the development of South African industry.¹¹ Without proper government guidance, Creswell predicted that in a "competitive wage production system [like South Africa's]... the lower civilization will gradually drive out the higher civilization". Therefore, "we must set our faces against the encouragement of employment merely because ... the wage unit is low".¹² The Wage Bill itself made no explicit distinction between African and white workers, but the Wage Board it was authorized to appoint would refuse to grant "civilized wages" to Africans. Simply by setting a relatively high minimum wage, the Board could encourage employers to hire more whites.¹³ For an employer forced to pay high wages preferred to hire a white man on a permanent basis rather than a migrant African.¹⁴ Sir Drummond Chaplin,

¹⁰ Report of the Inquiry Regarding the Cape Coloured Population, U.G. 54 - 1937, para.217.

¹¹ Debates, March 30, 1925, col.1589.

¹² Ibid., cols. 1589-90.

¹³ Economic Commission, 1925, op.cit., para.221.

¹⁴ Ibid.

a former manager of Consolidated Goldfields and Administrator of Rhodesia, was absolutely correct when he observed in Parliament that the Bill was an attempt "to remove all temptation of employers to employ native labour...."¹⁵ General Smuts, now leader of the Opposition, made a predictable appeal to racial as well as economic fears. The Act would misfire, he warned, compelling employers to "level up the wage of the black man". In addition to causing "many industries" to close down, this would "produce equality where there has so far been difference...."¹⁶ The appeal failed to impress the government, which subsequently used the Wage Board to make sure that African wages did not "level up".

Complementing the Wage Act was the Mines and Works (Amendment) Act of 1926. Based on the recommendations of the 1925 Mining Regulations Commission, it explicitly confined the African mine worker to the bottom rung of the labour ladder. The Bill had a stormy passage through Parliament, and the debates show that some speakers were aware of its immense historical implications. Creswell's introduction of the Bill echoed the Mining Regulations Commission's theme of safety. It was dangerous, the Union of South Africa's first Minister of Labour insisted, for Africans to be locomotive drivers because it was not "in the nature of a kaffir to be able to do such

¹⁵ Debates, April 1, 1925, col.1659.

¹⁶ Debates, March 30, 1925, col.1602.

work".¹⁷ But the fraudulent nature of such arguments was revealed by Creswell himself when he stressed that the "great national question" was the "preservation and perpetuation of the white race". And as the mine owners could not be relied upon to safeguard the white race adequately, then legislation was necessary.¹⁸

Creswell's introductory remarks set a lively debate in motion. One of those contesting his analysis was Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, the mining magnate who was also the Member of Parliament for Kimberly. This "class legislation", he argued, was not the best way to protect white supremacy; on the contrary, "only by efficiency and application to work" would the Europeans remain the dominant race.¹⁹ Similar opposition was voiced by Mr. A. Alexander, a Jewish lawyer with a reputation for championing the under-dog. He regretted that no "native", whatever his training or ability, would ever be permitted to do the "work of a civilized man".²⁰ An anonymous Afrikaner "Honourable Member" quickly retorted that South Africa was "a white man's country".²¹ All subsequent Nationalist and Labour speakers concurred. One Labour member from Natal, Mr. T. Strachan, considered it an opportune time to propose that laws be enacted to prevent South

¹⁷ Debates, February 25, 1925, col.272.

¹⁸ Ibid., col.267.

¹⁹ Debates, April 6, 1925, col.1922.

²⁰ Debates, February 25, 1925, col.277.

²¹ Ibid.

Africa's Indian population from "learning trades and professions and ousting Europeans in every direction."²²

Ironically it was an Afrikaner and not a Briton who appealed for moderation and compromise. General Smuts remained faithful to his self-appointed role of conciliator between Afrikaner Nationalists and British Imperialists. He suggested to his fellow M.P.'s that "we ... put our heads together to see if some other way out can not be found".²³ Smuts argued in vain that his introduction of the colour bar Mining Regulations was different. Those regulations simply recognized "a practice which was impossible for any government to alter".²⁴ The transition from colour bar by regulation to colour bar by statute would, in Smuts' opinion, produce "evil results beyond the foresight of any man here to perceive".²⁵ Not surprisingly, government members were equally unable to perceive any great difference between his policy and theirs. Thus after a vigorous debate the House of Assembly passed the Bill in February, 1925, by 44 votes to 31. But the Senate rejected this decision, and a joint sitting of both the House and the Senate was convened under Article 63

²² Debates, May 4, 1925, col.2765.

²³ Debates, February 25, 1925, col.2768.

²⁴ Ibid., col.281.

²⁵ Ibid., col.285.

of the South African Constitution to decide this crucial issue.²⁶

At this Joint Sitting, Smuts was once again the most vocal opponent of the Bill. But, as before, the government did not heed his warning that "we are putting ourselves, by this bill, dead against the opinion of the world".²⁷ An acute observer and clever politician, Smuts recognized that Africa was becoming a far more "civilized" continent, "a continent in which not a single state will pass a law like this". And if South Africa insisted upon passing such a law, "We are simply cutting ourselves adrift from everyone else...."²⁸

But Prime Minister Hertzog was not afraid of cutting South Africa adrift. Indeed he thought it was natural for South African "native" policy to be different from that of the colonial and mandate powers, whose people "live far away there in Europe...." South Africa was not a mandate power obliged to act as an agent for the progress of Africans. The converse was true. South Africans lived in a country "which we say is our country, a country which we intend

²⁶ The Senate was neither popularly elected nor automatically dissolved when general elections were held. It thus remained dominated by the S.A.P. when the government changed hands in 1924. The constitution was changed by the Senate Act of 1926, which enabled a government to dissolve the Senate when elections were called or when a new government took office. W.P.M. Kennedy and H.J. Schlosberg, The Law and Custom of the South African Constitution. (London, 1935), pp.188, 245-7.

²⁷ Joint Sitting of Both Houses of Parliament, May 7-12, 1926, col.28, cited in Buell, op.cit., p.63.

²⁸ Ibid.

to keep, which we will maintain as a white country...."²⁹ This was the Pact Government's response to Smuts' appeal for compromise. Yet in the light of the former Prime Minister's record of calculated duplicity and hypocrisy, a different response was hardly to be expected; the Joint Sitting passed the Bill by a vote of 83 to 67.

The passing of the Mines and Works (Amendment) Act of 1926 showed that job colour bars became more blatant as South Africa's industrialization proceeded.³⁰ And since 1926 the system of legal colour bars and job reservation has become more comprehensive as mining and manufacturing industrialization expanded. These laws have multiplied to keep pace with the ever-increasing range of industrial occupations in which Africans could successfully compete with whites. Apartheid is merely the latest step in this long and desperate campaign to ensure that a large African industrial work force does not threaten "white standards".

Yet Afrikaner influence in laying the foundation of South Africa's industrial colour bar system was, contrary to most scholarly opinion, minimal. Neither was the British labour movement solely responsible. The thesis that Afrikaners polluted the minds of British immigrant

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ It was the opinion of the 1925 Economic and Wage Commission, in commenting on the history of industrial legislation, that "In 1856 there could have been no question of differential legislation for white and black in a subject of this kind...." op.cit., para.60, p.39.

workers with "feudalistic" racism and then in alliance with these contaminated proletarians forced legal colour bars on liberal and humanitarian industrialists has widespread appeal. Ralph Horwitz, in a recent book entitled The Political Economy of South Africa, depicts a battle between the "economic rationality" of the "imperial factor" - British officials and industrialists - and the white supremacist irrationality of the "political factor of Afrikanerdom [and] trade union tradition supported by Afrikaner ideology".³¹ In his Economics of the Colour Bar, the University of Cape Town's Professor of Commerce, W.H. Hutt, pursues the same theme to its unhistoric extreme. The British "humanitarian" industrialists supposedly fought valiantly to apply the rationality of "economic liberalism" - only to be thwarted by the interference of a state controlled by Afrikaner racists and British socialists.³² Ignoring the mining industry's success in virtually eliminating recruiting and wage competition and in getting its African labour force (but not white workers) subjected to the draconian discipline of Pass Laws and the Native Labour Regulation Act, Hutt insists that "The survival of apartheid is, indeed, the survival of a kind of socialism ... whilst the dissolution of colour injustice had been continuously assisted by competitive capitalism."³³

³¹ Horwitz, op.cit., pp.76, 35, 177, 423.

³² W.H. Hutt, The Economics of the Colour Bar, (London, 1964), pp.11, 15, 64, 180.

³³ Ibid., p.180.

Other writers have erred, though less outrageously, in their analysis of the establishment of South Africa's industrial colour bar system. Smuts' biographer, W.K. Hancock, says British administrators were willing to enact discriminatory measures because they had "absorbed pretty thoroughly the ideas of the conquered Boers".³⁴ Even the impressive contributions of Cornelius DeKiewiet, Sheila T. Van der Horst, and H.J. and R.E. Simons are not free from the assumption that British racial prejudice, and especially that of the labour movement, was like a virus infection which spread from the Boers' feudal domains into the new industrial centres.³⁵

All these writers, from those who claimed that "English capitalists ... pursued productivity in disregard and disruption" of the racial order³⁶ to those who erred only in underestimating the indigenous racism of the British element, have neglected the central theme in South African history - colonial domination. Hutt went as far as to suggest that Africans in South Africa are not "subject to colonial rule".³⁷ Yet from the founding of the Voortrekker Republics to the present day, South Africa's political structures and legislation have been designed to protect the colonist status of all white residents,

³⁴ Hancock, op.cit., p.318.

³⁵ DeKiewiet, op.cit., p.166. Sheila T.L. Van der Horst, "The Effects of Industrialization on Race Relations in South Africa", in Guy Hunter (Editor), Industrialization and Race Relations, (London, 1965), pp.97-140, pp.108, 117. This publication was sponsored by U.N.E.S.C.O. and compiled by the Institute of Race Relations, London. Simons, op.cit., p.89.

³⁶ Horwitz, op.cit., p.36.

³⁷ Hutt, op.cit., p.21.

whether they be Afrikaner landowners, British mine magnates, bywoners or British miners. And the desire for cheap African labour together with fear of African presence was exhibited as much by the British mining community as by the Voortrekkers. But the British neither copied the Boers nor were contaminated by them. Both communities adopted the same ambivalence because they were both colonists in the same environment. The Boers certainly did not teach the British their racism, which was of the more "advanced", pseudo-scientific type. Nurtured by the Anthropological Society of London, this form of racism reached the "peak of its popularity" between 1890 and World War I - at the height of British imperialism in South Africa and elsewhere.³⁸ These ideas gained widespread if not total acceptance by the British public, who read popularizers like H.S. Chamberlain.³⁹

The Simons' otherwise excellent Marxian analysis seriously neglects this important influence on the British community in South Africa. Their study thus side-steps the problem of working class racism by claiming that such "Socialists" as Tom Mathews and Bill Andrews were not racists, but simply men who "excluded the African from their visions of the ideal commonwealth [because] ... they fused their craft outlook with the colour prejudices of feudalistic landowners...."⁴⁰

³⁸ P.D. Curtin, "Scientific Racism and the British Theory of Empire", Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, Vol.2, No.1, 1960, pp.40-51, p.42.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Simons, op.cit., p.89.

The profusion of quotations from socialist pamphlets and tabloids in the Simons' book provides more than adequate evidence to discredit their own conclusions. A less impressive Marxian analysis, F.A. Johnstone's The Industrial Colour Bars in South Africa, 1910-1926, also downgrades the racism of the British workers while emphasizing their need for "strong measures of self-defence" against the "cheap labour policy of the capitalists...."⁴¹

The Marxist and the liberal writers have not sufficiently acknowledged the common interests of all white colonists, whether Boer or British, poor or rich. These colonists formed a caste or, more precisely, what Max Weber called a stand or status group. Such a group "is a plurality of individuals who, within a larger group, enjoy a particular kind and level of prestige by virtue of their position and possibly also claim certain special monopolies".⁴² Weber named three sets of circumstances in which status groups were formed. The first, that of a common life-style and occupational status, did not apply to all whites in South Africa. But according to the other two "qualifications", South African whites did form a status group. To quote Weber once again, "The second basis is hereditary charisma arising from the successful claim to a position of prestige by virtue of birth. The third is the appropriation of political or

⁴¹ F.A. Johnstone, The Industrial Colour Bars in South Africa, 1910-1926, unpublished M.A. thesis, Queens University, 1967, pp.ii-iii.

⁴² Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, (Glencoe, 1964) pp.428-9.

hierocratic authority as a monopoly by the socially distinct groups".⁴³ Within this status group of white South Africans there were several economic classes, i.e. groups with varied economic positions according to their relationship to the means of production - landowners, mine owners, wage earning miners, and unemployed Poor Whites. Weber contended that such class differences within a status group did not necessarily lead to class conflict, and he used the relationship between the planters and the "poor white trash" of the Southern United States as his "classic example".⁴⁴ South African history illustrates that intra-group class conflict can occur, but that political equality within the dominant group can lead to a resolution of the conflict which strengthens the group.

In the early twentieth century all the economic classes of white South Africans were anxious to maintain the accepted status of their group. The status was that of white colonizers possessing a distinctive and superior "civilization" to that of the colonized non-whites upon whose cheap and tractible labour the country's agricultural and industrial economy depended. This was as true of the British labour leaders - including the Socialists - as it was of the mine management. Commenting on a less extreme form of the same phenomenon, Frederick Engels wrote of England in 1858 "that this most bourgeois of all nations wants to bring matters to such a pass as to have a bourgeois aristocracy and a

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp.425-6.

bourgeois proletariat side by side with the bourgeoisie". But Engels came to the important conclusion that this was "to some extent justifiable for a nation which is exploiting the whole world."⁴⁵

In South Africa all whites wanted to remain members of the colonizing status group, which as a corporate entity exploited South Africa's colonized people more thoroughly and conspicuously than England exploited the "whole world". Nor can this thesis be undermined by simply equating the attitude of white workers towards Africans with the artisans' well known dread of competition or with the general proletarian fear of cheaper, "scab" labour. If they had feared all competition, the white workers would not have campaigned for the increased industrial employment of Poor Whites; they did so because the continued unemployment and destitution of the Poor Whites threatened the integrity of the white status group. By 1924 the South African communists seem to have grasped this fact. "It is not," they claimed, "a labour aristocracy but a racial aristocracy that sets the tone."⁴⁶

Given this fundamental commitment to the integrity of the colonizing status group, the emergence of a race-transcending proletarian consciousness amongst white workers was impossible. The Simons acknowledged the absence of this consciousness but tried to explain it by pointing out that the interests of the white miners and their African labourers were "incompatible or contradictory in the Marxist sense".⁴⁷ Because some miners were contractors and most of the others

⁴⁵ Letter from Engels to K. Marx, October 7, 1858, cited in V.I. Lenin, Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism. (London, 1934), p.95.

⁴⁶ International, Sept. 19, 1924, vol.X, No.435.

⁴⁷ Simons, op.cit., p.276.

were supervisors, there was undoubtedly a rather narrow "social basis", in terms of similar relations to the means of production, upon which to build a non-racial consciousness.⁴⁸ But surely this narrow "social basis" existed because the colonial consciousness of white job-seekers impelled them to reject occupations where they would have the same relations to the means of production as Africans. Poor Whites consistently refused to do "Kaffir work". The adherence of the Simons to a strictly Marxian analysis caused them to make the same mistake as the liberal writers: an over-emphasis on conflict within the white community and a subsequent inability to perceive the over-riding commitment of the vast majority of whites to the integrity of their colonial status group.

This does not mean that all the economic classes within the status group always agreed on what constituted a threat to the group. Nor does it follow that the opinion of a class as to what endangered the group did not change over time - and in relation to the changing economic interests of the class. Yet because the economic interests of all classes in the colonizing group depended ultimately on the stability of colonial rule, compromises were made, usually through the intervention of a government democratically elected by the white status group.

Government intervention on behalf of both management and white workers can be traced back to the earliest days of the mining industry.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp.276-7.

In the 1880's and 90's the employers were aided by Pass Laws enacted at their request, while white employees got a few semi-skilled jobs legally reserved for them; they monopolized all the skilled occupations by virtue of their training. When the mines were suffering an acute shortage of African labour after the Anglo-Boer War, the government passed a law allowing them to import cheap, indentured labour from China. The same law, the Transvaal Labour Importation Ordinance (1904), ensured that the Chinese were unable to compete with the white men by barring them from fifty-nine skilled and semi-skilled jobs.

The Ordinance was drawn up by the Chamber of Mines and enacted by the "imperial factor". But this fact is ignored, neglected, or distorted by most writers. Hutt blamed the whole thing on misguided, pro-worker state interference, and his analysis was as incorrect as the date (1907) he attaches to the measure. Yet he had to admit that "Through the Ordinance a precedent for the two 'Colour Bar Acts' [the Mines and Works Acts of 1911 and 1926] was created".⁴⁹ Had Hutt taken the trouble to find out that the Ordinance, including its colour bars, was the brain child of the Chamber of Mines, he would no doubt have hesitated before making such a bold, but correct, statement. Many other people writing about South Africa's social and economic history have ignored this important precedent. Even DeKiewiet's account fails to mention it. Only the Simons present a true picture of the origin

⁴⁹ Hutt, op.cit., p.102.

and implications of the Importation Ordinance.⁵⁰

But by 1907 these Chinese "importations" had ceased and the mining companies and their white employees once again became concerned about African labour problems. As the Chamber's recruiting organizations brought more Africans to the Rand, the fear of African competition grew among white miners and some company and government officials. This fear found expression in the "White Labour Policy" formulated by Creswell and other future Labour Party leaders. Using the jargon of pseudo-scientific racism, these British gentlemen insisted that the interests of both races would be best served if Africans were expelled from the white man's industries and sent to the reserves to "develop in their own way". The apartheid blue-print was thus sketched. But the mine-owners' plans for African labour were quite different. They wanted to recruit more Africans and to have laws passed which would give the companies sufficient control over them to make such monopsonistic devices as the "maximum average" work more effectively.

After the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1909 laws were passed which gave the companies a more tractable African labour force and provided white miners with sufficient colour bar protection to undermine support for the "White Labour Policy". The harmony of interest between the employers and white miners epitomized in the

⁵⁰ Simons, op.cit., p.83.

Transvaal Labour Importation Ordinance was thus maintained. The mines did not seriously protest against the new colour bars, which were sanctioned by Mining Regulations issued under the Mines and Works Act, 1911, rather than by explicit statute. But the measures designed to help the companies to control more effectively their African workers were openly incorporated into the Native Labour Regulation Act of 1911. As is the case with most legislation that helped the employers to counteract the advantages that a freer labour market would give Africans, the Act is given scant attention by liberal historians and social scientists. Hutt stressed those clauses which outlined the employers' obligations, but in a quick aside admitted that the Act "made it virtually illegal to organize strikes...."⁵¹ The truth is of course that by making it a criminal offence for an African to leave his employment, strikes became absolutely illegal. Goodfellow's economic history makes no mention at all of the Act's penal clauses against Africans,⁵² and Hancock and Keppel-Jones, who both discuss the colour bars of the Mines and Works Act, ignore the Native Labour Regulation Act. Horwitz mentions that the penal sanctions governing the African worker's contract made the maximum average system "completely effective", yet he gives the impression that they did so by chance rather than by design.⁵³

⁵¹ Hutt, op.cit., p.102.

⁵² D.M. Goodfellow, Economic History of South Africa. (London, 1931), p.236.

⁵³ Horwitz, op.cit., pp.81-2.

In the decade following Union, the harmony created by the legislation of 1911 was seriously upset. Many of the Poor Whites flooding into the mining towns sought mine jobs. Boom conditions, increased mechanization, and the shortage of white labour during the First World War encouraged the mines to employ more and more of them. But when the price of gold plummeted in 1921, the mines looked to the unloading of some of their redundant whites as the principal means of cutting costs. The discarded semi-skilled whites would be replaced, where necessary, by Africans. To achieve this dual objective, the Chamber of Mines attacked the "artificial restrictions" of the Mines and Works Act. The failure of the mining industrialists to protest against the "artificial restrictions" of the Native Labour Regulation Act reveals that rather than being committed to pursuing the "economic rationality" of economic liberalism, as Hutt and Horwitz seem to think, they adopted a pragmatic approach, summoning support from liberal economic theory when appropriate. Another important but previously unperceived reason for the Chamber's assault on the white labour movement and the legal colour bar was its desire to stunt the growth of African trade union activity.

The Chamber scored a pyrrhic victory in 1922. The Revolt that it successfully provoked was crushed and the colour bar Mining Regulations of the Mines and Works Act were declared ultra vires. But neither of these developments led to any "significant" promotion of African workers.⁵⁴ Even so, the bulk of the white status group was not prepared to

⁵⁴ Economic Commission, 1925, op.cit., p.120.

tolerate the insecurity that the white mine workers now faced. Most whites believed that the miners should be protected from "unfair" African competition by explicit statutes, and that greater efforts should be made by industry and government to employ Poor Whites at "civilized" rates of pay. The Afrikaner farmers were as anxious as the urban workers that more Poor Whites and fewer Africans - whom they preferred for farm labour - should be employed in the urban economy. The Nationalists and the Labour Party united in order to restore the harmony whereby both the capitalists and the white proletarians of the mining industry had laws to protect them. The "civilized labour policy" of the Nationalist-Labour Pact Government not only achieved this, but it also greatly increased the subsidized employment of Poor Whites on state-owned enterprises. The uneconomic operation of these concerns was balanced to a large extent by taxes on mining company profits and heavy import duties on mine plant and stores. The Pact thus used the power of the state to complete the incorporation into the industrial economy of a system of race relations remarkably similar to that which existed in the pastoral economy of the Boer Republics. The fundamental element of that system was the performance of nearly all menial labour by Africans whose presence in large numbers was prevented from endangering white standards by laws and conventions which the whites had the power to enforce.

This pattern can also be detected in other parts of the world where industrialization was introduced. Where rigid racial structuring

existed, these structures have generally been assimilated into the industrial system, and in colonies the industrializing elites have invariably erected colour bars to protect expatriates.⁵⁵ These developments clearly clash with the liberal and indeed with the Marxian notion of the "logic of industrialization". It has in fact become almost heresy to challenge the liberal view perhaps best articulated by the American economist Clark Kerr and his colleagues in their study of "Industrialism and Industrial Man":

"The industrial society tends to be an open society, inconsistent with the assignment of workers to jobs by traditional castes, racial groups, by sex or by family status."⁵⁶

But Professor Herbert Blumer of Berkeley has dared to launch a convincing attack on the whole idea of an a priori "economic rationality" of industrialization. In the U.N.E.S.C.O. sponsored publication, Industrialization and Race Relations, Blumer was assigned the task of drawing theoretical conclusions from eight independently conducted case studies. He decided, in effect, that the physical mobility stimulated by industrialization "need not challenge" the old order, and that social mobility could be quickly structured, leaving the "racial

⁵⁵ Herbert Blumer, "Industrialization and Race Relations", in Guy Hunter, op.cit., pp.220-253, p.245.

⁵⁶ Clark Kerr, Frederick H. Harbinson, John T. Dunlop and Charles A. Meyers, Industrialism and Industrial Man, (London, 1962), p.35. Subsequent references to Clark Kerr should be taken to include his co-authors.

system ... essentially intact".⁵⁷ Addressing himself to the belief in "economic rationality", Blumer concluded that it was more "rational" for industrialists to "assimilate" pre-existing racial structures than to antagonise the dominant racial group by attempting to break down these structures.⁵⁸ Yet even this iconoclastic analysis reveals Blumer's attachment to certain liberal assumptions. It is significant that he does not admit, despite compelling evidence in the case studies,⁵⁹ that industrialists can share the same desire as other members of the dominant racial group to maintain a racially structured society.

When he compared the various case studies, Blumer found a "startling" similarity in the relationship between industrialization and race relations in South Africa and in the Southern United States.⁶⁰ Industrialization was undertaken in the American South by what Clark Kerr would call a "middle class" industrializing elite who should, theoretically, have attempted to "order" their enterprises and "the surrounding society" in a manner "consistent and compatible" with middle-class liberal economic ideas.⁶¹ In practice, of course, they did no such thing. They preferred to employ the cheaper and more

⁵⁷ Blumer, op.cit., p.234.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp.232-4.

⁵⁹ See below, pp.151-3.

⁶⁰ Blumer, op.cit., p.234.

⁶¹ Kerr, op.cit., pp.50, 80-3.

tractible blacks only in menial "negro jobs" rather than to make maximum use of their labour.⁶² In addition, industrialization and the accompanying urbanization led to increased legal segregation and to the exclusively white trade unions campaigning successfully for blacks to be removed from such occupations as locomotive firemen.⁶³ Yet in assessing the overall reasons for employer discrimination against blacks, R. Marshall placed employer "racial prejudices" ahead of "fear of the reaction of white workers or the white community...."⁶⁴ A similar pattern of discriminatory hiring has been detected in India's most modern industrial enterprises. Another of the U.N.E.S.C.O. investigators, M.D. Morris, found definite evidence of "clustering in individual departments by language, region, religion and caste" in both the textile mills of Bombay and the Tata steel mills of Jamshedpur.⁶⁵ And it was the "hiring practices" of the employers, who were still "intimately involved in the traditional social structure", which principally accounted for this clustering.⁶⁶ Kerr explains such behaviour by pointing out that employers of this kind are members of a "dynastic" industrializing elite who, unlike the "middle class", usually protect rather than attack pre-industrial social structures.⁶⁷

⁶² Ray Marshall, "Industrialization and Race Relations in the Southern United States", in Guy Hunter, op.cit., pp.61-96, pp.73-5.

⁶³ Ibid., pp.66-7.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.76.

⁶⁵ Morris David Morris, "The Effects of Industrialization on 'Race' Relations in India", in Guy Hunter, op.cit., pp.141-160, p.149.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.153.

⁶⁷ Kerr, op.cit., p.52.

Industrial entrepreneurs in colonial territories also display a great reluctance to accept the levelling effects of laissez-faire industrial development. "Middle class" industrializing elites who were transported to the colonies suddenly lost their supposedly revolutionary zeal; they were quite prepared to erect colour bars to protect expatriates and to use the state's coercive power to recruit and control colonial labour.⁶⁸ The interference of colonial industrialists in the free play of market forces has been so blatant that Kerr puts them in a different category from his "middle class" heroes. They are called "colonial administrators" who managed their enterprises so as to balance the interests of the mother country with the necessity of preserving their "way of life".⁶⁹ In large colonial communities like South Africa, the settlers' government initiates the compromises necessary to maintain this balance.

The question remains of how to bring about profound alterations in race relations in societies with both industrial economies and an hierarchical racial structure. The meaningful changes so far effected have clearly resulted from non-industrial pressures. In the United States the voting power and militancy of Northern blacks stimulated the Federal Government to pass civil rights laws and to promote

⁶⁸ A.P. Blair, "The Experience of Expatriate Industrial Enterprise", in Guy Hunter, op.cit., pp.201-219, p.219.
L.E. Braithwaite, "Race Relations and Industrialization in the Caribbean", in Guy Hunter, op.cit., pp.39-45, pp.42-44.

⁶⁹ Kerr, op.cit., pp.63-4.

"equal opportunity" employment in the South.⁷⁰ In colonial territories the breakdown of job colour bars and industrial and community segregation came in the wake of the political changes accompanying independence.⁷¹ Thus in both the United States and in former colonies, changes in race relations were initiated not by industrializing elites but through the political action of subordinate racial groups.⁷² Consequently increased industrialization in South Africa should not in itself be expected to lead to a collapse of its entrenched racial order. The words of W.H. Andrews, a disillusioned leader of the Rand Revolt, still hold true:

"it will only be when by bitter experience white men find out the hopelessness of their colour bar that it will be possible to talk reason to them".⁷³

⁷⁰ Marshall, op.cit., p.76.

⁷¹ Blair, op.cit., p.210.

⁷² Blumer, op.cit., p.239.

⁷³ Letter from W.H. Andrews to Mr. Bacher, January 1922, cited in Report of the Martial Law Inquiry Judicial Commission, U.G. 35 - 1922, para.152, p.28.

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