

FOREWORD:

This pamphlet is dedicated to the African miners of the Witwatersrand who took part in the great strike on the gold mines from August 12th to August 17th, 1946. There has never been such a strike in the history of our country - neither in numbers, nor in police savagery; neither in significance nor in its repercussions. What was done, and what was achieved in the strike can never be undone. The strike closed a chapter in South African history, and opened another.

The gold mines are the backbone of South Africa's economy, supporting the whole structure of heavy industry, of light industrial manufacture and of farming. And the African workers, illiterate, backward, tied by Government policy to a primitive peasant existence in the countryside, are the Backbone of the gold mines, and the force which makes mining pay £17 million per year in dividends to its stock-holders throughout the world.

Yet these were the men, always regarded as amongst the backward of the African workers, who struck the first gigantic blow of their people for the demand which their organisations have year after year, pushed into the foreground - 10 shillings a day. That they failed to achieve that demand is of secondary importance. Primarily important is the fact that that demand has been made on a mass scale by the basic workers of this country, and will never be abandoned until it has been won. That demand electrified the African people as nothing has done in recent years. The ripples spreading outwards from the strike continue to agitate the surface of a thousand issues - the future of native representation in the Union, the role of the South African Trades and Labour Council in its dealings with black workers, the conflict growing up between the militant church and the Government. Long after this pamphlet has been printed, those ripples will continue to arise, and to break on distant shores.

It is the heroism of those African miners, and of the little band of volunteers who worked without cessation throughout that week, that has started this profound cycle in our country's life.

The pamphlet itself is of two parts. The one part is a true and accurate account of what has happened since August 12th, written from first hand observation by one who participated in those events. The other is a record culled from the pages of the Daily Mail and the Star of events on the mines themselves during that week strike.

these two papers because we think they are accurate and the events, and unbiased and objective in their

outlook. Both papers are the property of great mining houses. Both of them showed throughout the strike, as they have always in the past, that they place the personal interests of their owners above truthful reporting. Readers of this pamphlet will see that even in the court-case which arose from this strike, the accuracy of press reports was proved to the hilt, by testimony from witnesses under oath.

Nevertheless, during the strike, the mines became virtually concentration camps, with miners locked in and outsiders locked out. No ordinary observer had any opportunity to observe what really happened. Even at the time of writing it is almost impossible to get from the workers their version of what really went on. Even when this information was needed for the purpose of defence of those charged in court after the strike, the Chamber of Mines refused to grant defence attorneys access to compounds to interview witnesses. This pamphlet therefore, relies on press reports to tell the tale of those seven days. Biased and hysterical as the press was, the real, inescapable facts of wanton police brutality employed to herd the slaves back to work is still clearly established. So is established the discipline, patience and heroism of the strikers, and the hysteria and panic mongery of the daily press.

A careful reading of the reports of the "Star" and "Rand Daily Mail", themselves leaves one in doubt as to whether the reporters of these papers actually saw any of the incidents they described, except those which happened outside mine property. All other reports bear a confused and illogical appearance, as though they have been reported not by trained observers but second hand by compound managers or Police officials. Only one reporter so far as we are aware has definitely seen the events for himself. He is Mr. Bob Crisp, South African correspondent of the Chicago Tribune, whose position gave him entrance where less important figures were barred. He has since joined the People's Defence Fund which was formed to provide relief for the Strike victims, legal aid for the people accused in trials arising from the Strike, and publicity to the events of the strike.

This pamphlet leaves much unsaid. Chiefly, it leaves unsaid the feelings and the aspirations of those 100,000 men who carried through the strike in conditions more customary in Hitler's Germany than in the civilised world today. It is nothing more than a record of events, and at that inadequate and unfinished, because the events of the strike have started a chain of history in South Africa

which/.....

which is itself unfinished and without end.

Some day this strike will reach its conclusion with the establishment of a living wage for all South African workers. That will be the time to assess calmly, and sum up all the significance of it. That will be the time when the miners strike of 1946, and the 100,000 who conducted it, will take their rightful place in the history of progress and liberation of South Africa.

JOHANNESBURG.

OCTOBER, 1946.

It is cold on the highveld at 3 a.m. It was cold and clear at that hour on the 12th August. From hundreds of shaft-heads along the Reef, thousands of African miners poured back to their compounds, the night shift finished. Plodding tiredly along through the dark, back the long road from shaft to compound, they passed other groups huddled together waiting for the cage to take them underground. Early starters - 3 a.m. till 11 a.m. - the worst shift of the mines' 24-hour day.

But on Sub-Nigel it was different on this morning. No early starters gathered at the shaft-head; no tattered Africans in hob-nailed boots waiting for the cage going down; no shivering, sleepy men pouring in to the shafts to replace the sweaty, exhausted men who poured out. Yes, 3 a.m. on August 12th was different at West Springs. And at Modder "B", and Vlakfontein, and Van Ryn, and Van Ryck, and New Kleinfontein.

It was like Christmas Day or Good Friday. The workers streamed out and away, back to the compounds. The cages came up full and went down empty. The sound of voices and scraping boots died away from the shaft-head, and the cages came up empty, and did not go down. The great fly-wheels at the top of the headgear turned slower and slower. And stopped. The pound and rumble of rock being ground to dust grew softer and softer, and died away. The lights went out in the crusher station. The coco-pans stopped suddenly in the course of their endless journey from mill to dump. An eerie silence settled over shafts.

The great mines strike had started.

Back in the compounds it was different. Between the high brick walls, in pools of light thrown from great naked floodlights, there was excitement, tenseness, anger. The hour of three had passed, and still the early starters had made no move. The midnight shift - 11 p.m. to 3 a.m. - was pouring back into the compound, deathly weary, icy cold in the winter night after being 10,000 feet below.

No one slept. The early starters taut, anxious, waiting. The midnight shift talking, finding out, asking. Little groups

gathering together - "This is the strike" - "The Strike" - "The Strike".

Only the compound managers working; phoning Johannesburg - "Send Police" - phoning the Native Affairs Department - "Send someone to do something" - phoning the General Manager - "The Kaffirs won't work". Rounding up the private compound police - "Chase them out of their rooms". Speaking through loudspeakers - "Go to work now and nothing will happen. Stay away from work and you will be punished". Exhorting, threatening, cursing, striking with fists and kicking with boots - only the compound managers worked.

5 a.m. 7 a.m. All quiet on the mines. No wheels turning, no crushers rumbling. In the towns, it was Monday. Like all Mondays, flat and uninteresting. People hurrying to work, bought the "Rand Daily Mail" - saw the headline "Attempt to force Mine Strike". When the Stock Exchange opened at nine, there was a mild panic. Small investors read the story - workers demanding 10/- a day minimum wage, calling general strike - reached for the phone, and told their brokers "Sell!".

Lorries, filled with police, pulled out of Marshall Square all day, headed East and West along the Main Reef Road.

Wherever Africans gathered, there was only thing to talk about - the strike, the miners, ten shillings a day. Few of them read the "Mail" but by midday everyone knew it. 50,000 workers were out on strike! The biggest strike in the history of the country! But in the towns, everything went on as usual - except at the Stock Exchange, and Police Headquarters.

From the "Rand Daily Mail", Monday August 12th 1946:

Several Injured in Skirmishes: Police Take Swift Action.

"Attempts were made last night at several mines on the Rand to prevent the native shifts from going on duty. Swift action by mine officials and contingents of police, who had been standing by all day, resulted in the shifts going down for their normal duties.

A number of natives who were on their way to work

are believed to have been injured in skirmishes. The Police have made a few arrests, and many more arrests are expected.....

At the City Deep.....some of the agitators attempted to storm the main gates to the mine in an effort to prevent the natives from going on duty. The mine officials acted promptly, and policemen from Johannesburg were sent to the area to assist them. On the arrival of the police everything became quiet, but the police made an arrest.

.....at Robinson Deep, a number of agitators, shouting insults and catcalls, attempted to induce the miners to return to their compounds.

Once again the mine officials stepped in quickly, and soon had the backing of a strong force of policemen. The shift went on duty.....

It is thought that yesterday's trouble was a sequel to a meeting held a week ago on the Newtown Market Square, when 1,000 natives agreed to call a general strike of native mine workers on all Reef Mines. A number of meetings were held on various mines yesterday to confirm ~~this~~ this decision.

The natives are demanding better conditions and an increase in the daily wage to 10/....."

The office of the African Mine Workers' Union, on the first floor of a decrepit and shaky Arcade in Market Street, was closed and locked. All day, workers in blankets and in suits came in from the mines to see their Union leaders, and drifted from the closed office to the hall of the non-European Trade Union Council next door. Everyone wanted to see Marks; to report to Marks what was happening on his mine; to ask Marks what should be done next. But J.B. Marks, President of the Union, had been at Benoni since 3 a.m., with the workers who elected him to his position. The other Union organisers were out along the Reef.

The Johannesburg District Committee meets at 5.15 every Monday. Marks was missing when the Committee gathered at its offices in Progress Buildings. He was still, according to reports, in Benoni.

The members were grave. This was the most serious matter that had come before them in many years. The agenda was suspended to discuss it. There was no time for philosophy or long, involved analysis. In the office next door, dozens of members of the Party were gathering, as their work ended for the day, waiting to hear what was expected of them, and what was to be done.

There was a brief discussion. All the facts had been discussed exhaustively before, time and time again. A resolution was drafted, and adopted:

"The Johannesburg District Committee of the Communist Party expresses its full support for the action of the African Mine Workers' in striking for a minimum wage of ten shillings a day, and decent working conditions.

"We call upon all sections of the Labour Movement to express their fullest solidarity with the 300,000 African miners whose just demands are in accordance with the principles of democracy and the interests of the country.

We demand that the Chamber of Mines and the Government take immediate steps to meet the leaders of the African Mine Workers' Union in order to effect a settlement."

The meetings, usually continue till after 10 p.m. It was half past six when the resolution was taken. It was decided that the meeting adjourn till further notice. The members waiting outside were told of the resolution and asked to call at the Union office to volunteer their services in whatever capacity they were able. The secretary roped in a typist, hammering out copies of the resolution to be rushed out to the press.

Police drifted in and out of Rosenberg Arcade all day, but the office remained locked until five o'clock, when Marks returned. Later James Majore, Union Secretary, arrived from the West Rand. The office became a scene of activity. Leaflets to the workers had to be prepared, telling them to stay on strike and keep^{up}/their courage; calling on non-strikers to join in.

Volunteers had to be found to take the leaflets out to the mines at 3 a.m. Tuesday, when the shifts changed. Transport for the volunteers; a news bulletin for the trade union movement and

the press; an appeal for funds to all supporters; a loudspeaker to address the workers; paper, ink, stencils, typists.

The lights burned right through the night. The office filled with smoke; people stamped their feet to keep the bitter cold out.

At 2 a.m. cars began to gather outside Rosenberg Arcade, in response to the appeal. The drivers and the people they had gathered from the various townships, came up to the Mineworkers' Union office, crowded around the little fire in the corner, stamped their feet to keep warm, yawned. Marks and Majoro were giving instructions, telling each driver where to go, arranging parties of distributors to take the leaflets, getting batches of leaflets into the cars, getting the cars off.

Careful instructions had to be given. Few of the people had ever worked on the mines; few knew the places to which they were ~~going~~ going, or how to reach the workers. But all were told that the ideal time to catch the miners was at the time when the shifts were changing. Leaflets should be handed out to individuals at the mines; if the miners were willing to take them, batches should be given to them to be distributed inside the shafts and the compounds. If no one was to be seen, leaflets could be thrown over compound walls. No one said it, but all were aware that this work needed caution, and a sharp lookout for prowling police. Most of the Africans were dressed in blankets, looking like miners, disguised against the police, and protected against the cold.

By 2.30 a.m. the cars had left, each group going its own way, carrying European men and women, African men and women, Indian men. In the Union office, work went on. The first issue of the daily "Strike Bulletin" was written, typed and duplicated. Stacks of the Bulletin stood on the tables ready for posting to the press, trade unions, ~~and~~ church bodies, women's associations, when work ceased at 4.30 a.m. and the few survivors stretched themselves out on the benches to catch some sleep.

And on the mines, all was still quiet. No violence, no stone-throwing or breaking of compound windows. Little police action.

From "The Star", Monday, August 12th.

"There is a total stoppage of work at West Springs, van Dyck, Van Ryn, New Kleinfontein, Vlakfontein, Modder "B"; and a partial stoppage of work at Brakpan, City Deep, Robinson Deep, Hourse Mines, Sub Nigel.

"Generally the natives are remaining quietly in their compounds".

"The arrest of three natives in connection with the mine strike in the Benoni area resulted in a demonstration of several thousand natives outside the Benoni Police Station.....Police reinforcements were sent to Benoni from other centres....About 200 police were assembled at the Police Station. Armed with rifles and fixed bayonets, they dispersed the natives to their compounds. There were a few minor casualties."

Stock Exchange Report: "Prices easier Today".

On Monday, August 12, the strikers generally are remaining quietly in their compounds.

From the "Rand Daily Mail, Tuesday August 13th:

Headline: "45,000 Natives strike at 11 mines. Police in Baton Charge Disperse Benoni Mob".

"Late last night there were indications that further compounds were likely to join the strike of native mineworkers...early this morning.

"It is estimated that between 45,000 and 50,000 natives on the Rand are already on strike for a daily wage of 10/- and improved working conditions. Eleven mines are involved. Some have closed down, while others are only partially affected.

....the strike is likely to spread...Strong police detachments are being sent out to danger spots this morning to prevent this development.

"At about 9 a.m. the Benoni Police received a report that a meeting of strikers was taking place at the New Kleinfontein Mine...Inspector F.A. Low, the Commanding Officer, and a party of 34 police went to the spot, where they arrested three of the speakers.

"Soon after the police had returned to the barracks, a large crowd estimated to number 4,500 gathered outside the police station and clamoured for the immediate release of the prisoners.

..District Commandant of Police with the Nativ-Commissioner for Benoni...addressed the natives and urged them to return to their compounds, but the request was ignored.

..Police reinforcements were summoned by telephone from Johannesburg, Germiston, Boksburg and later Pretoria. In the meantime all available police at Benoni, totalling 90, were paraded in front of the barracks...Major Coetzee, in terms of the Riotous Assemblies Act, again warned the strikers to

"The natives then retired to the corner.....about twenty yards away.

"When reinforcements of about 200 police arrived, the strikers still showed no signs of dispersing. Major Coetzee then gave the order to charge. The police rushed the natives with batons, and the mob scattered.....

"Three natives were injured and were taken to hospital. Three of the alleged demonstrators were subsequently arrested."

"A 'Rand Daily Mail' representative who toured the area found the strikers treating the occasion as Sunday...They sat or lay about in blanketed groups, sunning themselves behind compound walls out of the wind. Others strolled along veld paths, smoking and talking.....

"The only signs of abnormal conditions were the lorry-loads of armed police arriving in the area from the training depot at Pretoria, from Johannesburg and elsewhere.

At Vlakfontein, 20 natives who refused to work were arrested..... When night shifts prepared to go underground at several of the East Rand Mines last night attempts were made by fellow workers to intimidate them. The police, however, were on the spot, and made several arrests. Five natives were detained at South African Lands, where as yet there had been no other sign of disaffection.

On State Mines....police drove the malcontents back into their rooms, and order was restored.

The largest number of arrests was made at Springs Mine No.1 Compound, where 400 natives were rounded up. When they intimated they were willing to return to work, however, they were released.

At City Deep about 100 agitators had gathered near the gates of the main compound....Police from Jeppe and Marshall Square... were hurried to the area. Some of the policemen formed up between the agitators and the compound, while others crept secretly to the rear.

When the agitators discovered the police behind them, they dashed forward into the arms of the other group of police, and struggled desperately to escape. About 20 arrests were made."

" No newspaper in South Africa has regarded native aspirations more favourably than the 'Rand Daily Mail', or been more insistent in its pleas for a fair deal for the native population. It is precisely because of this sympathy, and because of our desire that the native should achieve a better position in the community that we have no hesitation in condemning this movement.....

The natives....emerging from barbarism to civilisation, do not know which way to turn.... These simple people have as a leader the intemperate Mr. Marx, with his wild speeches and absurd demands; and his associates many of whom are closely connected with the Communists. These people have now led the natives into one of the most foolish strikes we can remember.....

Stock Exchange Report: "The immediate effect of the news of the strike was to dry up the demand for shares..... A number of jobbers took the opportunity to "bear" a few selected counters.

Headling: "Mine Strike Discussed by Cabinet",

"The Prime Minister, General Smuts, presided over a full meeting of the Cabinet at Union Buildings yesterday afternoon.

The meeting was not called because of the strike of native mine workers, but it is understood that the matter was discussed."

Those who read the last item grew fearful. The record of the Prime Minister in dealing with strikes - 1922 General Strike of European miners on the Rand - and his oft-expressed policy of 'letting things develop, and then crushing them' is something that no-one deeply involved in the organisation of the strike could forget or overlook. When the "Daily Mail" appeared on the streets shortly after 5 a.m. on Tuesday morning, there had been little news of police violence on bloodier lines than is usual in a strike of African workers.

But the cabinet had met. The Prime Minister had discussed and formulated a policy to deal with the situation. Those who remembered the past of the man, the policy of his colleagues, read the item with fear. Not without reason.

Tuesday morning, the police intimidation, and the police illegality ~~xxxx~~ started in earnest. The Cabinet had brought its batons and its bayonets to the aid of the mining magnates, and the stock-exchange gamblers.

At 8.30 a.m. plain-clothes detectives armed with a search warrant, burst into the offices of the African Mine workers' Union. J.B. Marks, tired and heavy from thirty hours unbroken work, was still in the office. The detectives read through every document in the place, removed Issue No. 1 of the Union's 'Strike Bulletin', all the Union's books and membership records; every document they could find; packages of leaflets to the miners. Three other people found in the office at the time - Edwin Mofutsanyana and Abner Kunene, editor and business manager of the African organ of the Communist Party, Inkululeko, and two union organisers, were taken to Marshall Square 'for questioning' and held for over two hours.

In the towns, silence. Compounds, all under armed police guard, were sealed off from the outside world; no one was allowed in; no one was allowed out; no telephones; no telegraph. Each compound became a sealed fortress, fighting the battle without assistance, without knowledge of what was happening on other mines.

At midday, representatives of every non-European trade union on the Reef gathered at Rosenberg Arcade, in the offices of the non-European Council of Trade Unions. An urgent meeting, to discuss steps to be taken by the trade union movement to aid the miners. In the chair, J.B. Marks, elected President of the Council. The meeting rambled; no line of policy was put forward by the Executive; delegates called for 'action' without specifying what action. The meeting adjourned for lunch without a decision.

At 3 p.m. still no decision. Talk had come round to a suggestion of a general strike in all industries, in support of the miners, and for a national minimum wage of 10/- per day. This was the moment the police chose to burst into the meeting, and arrest J.B. Marks from the Chairman's seat.

The effect was electric. Delegates who had hesitated, called for the general strike. A unanimous vote was taken in favour. A time limit was set "...to commence within forty-eight hours", a General Strike Committee of nine was elected, with Mr. James Philips, Treasurer of the non-European Council of Trade Unions and President of the No.2 (Coloured & Indian) Branch

of the Garment Workers' Union as its Chairman. At 5 p.m. the meeting adjourned.

Again, the Mineworkers' Union machinery got busy. Again thousands of leaflets for the workers; volunteers to take them out to the mines at 3 a.m. cars, drivers, typists. But the Union Office could not be used. It was under police observation all night. The work went on in different spots in the City. Plain clothes detectives hung about Progress Buildings, where are situated the offices of the Johannesburg Communist Party and the Garment Workers' Union.

From "The Star", Tuesday August 13th:

"It is the opinion of observers that the great majority of the strikers are anxious to return to work.

"The mines on which there is a complete stoppage today are Van Dyk, Van Ryn, Vlakfontein, Modder "B" (all totally stopped the previous day) and Braakpan, City Deep and Hourse Mines (all partially stopped the previous day); and Mariavale (where there was no stoppage the previous day).

"There has been a partial return to work at New Kleinfontein, Sub Nigel and West Springs (all totally stopped previously). Robinson Deep is still partially stopped and Sinner and Jack and Rose Deep (where there were no stoppages previously) are also partially stopped. "A handful of natives went on strike at Sallies mine this morning...An attempt described as "Half-hearted" was made to ricket the shaft head at Government Areas mine last night and the shifts were late this morning."

"Police escorting natives to work at the Betty Shaft of the Sub Nigel Mine were attacked by 1,500 strikers this morning.....

"Unarmed police surrounded the strikers in an attempt to disperse them towards the compound but the natives began to pelt the police with stones picked up from the embankment. It was at this stage that some police were injured.

"Armed police who were standing some distance away, intervened to rescue their comrades. They opened fire on the strikers, picking their targets and six natives were wounded.

"The strikers dropped their weapons and made a rush for the compound. It was at the gateway that the natives were trampled to death.....

"The police were forced to open fire in self-defence" a police

official told "The Star", "and six natives were wounded. None was killed by rifle fire. Six other natives were crushed to death by their compatriots in the ensuing panic."

"When the mine scene was visited by the representative of "The Star" at 11 o'clock, the natives at this compound had already decided to return to work.

So the murder was not in vain. "The natives had already decided to return to work". The Stock Exchange plucked up heart again, and speculators and coupon clippers saw that there was no need for panic. Suits would not let the natives get away with it. Stock Exchange Report: "Despite the native labour strike developments the market was not subjected to further heavy selling on High 'Change this morning, and in fact, fresh buyers at the lower levels appeared causing a small recovery....."

At 5 p.m. the Communist Party District Committee met at Progress Buildings. Harmel arrived with a report of the proceedings of the meeting at Rosenberg Arcade earlier in the day, which he had attended in his capacity as "Guardian" reporter. The Committee decided to ask for representation on the strike committee, and appointed Harmel and Edwin Mofutsanyana as its representatives, if the proposal was accepted. Plain clothes detectives were hanging about the building all evening.

Again the work started in a dozen different spots, typing stencils, duplicating leaflets, phoning car owners, arranging distributors. By 2.30 in the morning, cars began to assemble. Sal Tule and Vundhla, organisers of the Union, had the plan already worked out; lists of mines which had to get the leaflets. Another short talk was given on how to do the job, and the cars slid away into the night.

Most of the people who went out that night had been up all the night before, and had worked the whole day in their jobs. All of them knew that the night before people engaged on the same errand had been arrested, all along the Reef. But the cars went out, and the great pile of leaflets produced earlier in the night, dwindled away until they were finished.

After they had gone, work started again on the Strike Bulletin. Issue No. 1 had been seized entirely by the police, before it had been posted. Only copy in existence was at the office of the Rand Daily

"Mail", where it had been sent by hand the night before, in time to catch the paper before it went to press. An attractive young girl went to the "Daily Mail" office, and wheedled the copy from one of the reporters, and copied it out. During the early hours of the morning, ~~she~~ when eyes were closing with fatigue, Issue No. 1 of the Bulletin was retyped, reduplicated. Issue No. 2 was written, typed, duplicated. 1000 copies stood ready for folding, posting at 7 a.m. the following morning. And by 8 a.m. on Wednesday, volunteers had done the job, and the posting was complete.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 14;

Something new entered the strike, entered the whole history of strikes of native workers in South Africa.

From the Rand Daily Mail: Wednesday, August 14th.

"On Monday, the workers of No. 1 shaft (City Deep) after being driven out of their compound, went underground where they held a "sit-down" strike."

From the Rand Daily Mail:

"The Prime Minister, General J.C. Smuts has appointed a Cabinet Sub-Committee to deal with the Native mineworkers strike.

The Committee consists of the Minister of Mines, Mr. S.F. Waterson; the Minister of Labour, Dr. Colin Steyn; the Minister of Justice, Mr. H.G. Lawrence; and the Minister of Native Affairs, Major Piet van der Byl.

The Government is giving urgent attention to the strike. The cabinet sub-committee was in communication throughout yesterday with the mine owners and also with the native mineworkers through the Native Commissioners of the Department of Native Affairs."

The police terror really started. All pretence that the police were only maintaining law and order, or protecting private property ceased. In police uniform and under cabinet direction, strike breaking, herding of slaves to work and Gestapo brutality flared up all along the Reef.

From the Rand Daily Mail:

"Hundreds of policemen with drawn batons fought the native strikers at the Robinson Deep and Nourse Mines at 6.20 a.m. when they refused to go to work.

During the night the strikers were told that they were expected to go on shift. But they refused and took up so threatening an attitude towards the mine officials that the police were called in. About 320 policemen were sent to Nourse Mines.

On entering the compound stones and other missiles were thrown at the police and a fight took place.

Simultaneously 290 police under the Command of Captain J.A. Taillard were sent to the Chris shaft of the Robinson Deep Mine, where they were also involved in a fight with the strikers. A baton charge was made into the rooms in the compound and within a

few minutes hundreds of natives streamed out. They formed up, however and stoned the police, who charged again and scattered them.

At Nourse Mines the police had to baton charge against 700 Shangaans who changed their minds after setting out for the shaft and tried to return to the compound.

In the meantime 2,000 Basutos armed with sticks and other weapons booed the police and threatened to fight."

Under a four-column banner headline "4,000 STRIKERS TRY TO MARCH ON JOHANNESBURG?" "Armed with choppers, iron bars, knives and an assortment of other dangerous weapons, 4,000 strikers forming a six-mile-long procession, attempted to march on Johannesburg from West Springs yesterday afternoon.

They were intercepted by the police near Brakpan. When they refused to turn back they were attacked by the police. Three of them were seriously injured and scores received minor injuries.

The purpose of the march is not known. All available policemen on the East Rand and in Johannesburg were ordered to intercept them on the way and drive them back to their compounds.

..... the natives were ordered to stop and return to their compounds. They ignored the order and, adopting a threatening attitude, forced their way forward.

The police placed cordons on either side of the road leaving the road free for normal traffic. The strikers sat down and there were catcalls and threats. Then acting on instruction from Pretoria, the police drew their batons and charged.

The main group of strikers took to their heels The police followed up their advantage, and fanning out, drove the natives back along the Springs Road. Ambulances were summoned and within a short while a considerable area had been cleared. Reports were received that the natives were making straight for their compounds and had decided to return to work.

From the Rand Daily Mail:

"Strikers yesterday clashed with the police at the Betty Shaft of the Sub Nigel Mine. the air became so thick with flying stones that the armed policemen were ordered forward. They fired 12 rounds,

selecting individual targets. Eight natives were struck by bullets.

Panic immediately ensued amongst the strikers. They fled towards the compound gates, and it was at this stage that four were trampled to death. Eighty-three were slightly injured.

Shortly afterwards, it was found that all the natives, irrespective of their shift wished to go underground. The cages worked overtime to lower them."

The killing had not been in vain. The cages worked overtime, bringing down the slaves, bringing up the gold-bearing rock.

Headline: "Communists are among forces behind strikes."

"The forces behind the strike are now becoming apparent. Prominent among them is the Communist Party. The Johannesburg District Committee yesterday expressed its full support of the actions of the African Mineworkers Union in calling the strike, and called on the Labour Movement as a whole to do likewise....."

Wednesday, August 14th - third day of the strike. Alongside the headline "Communists are among forces behind Strikes" the Daily Mail changed its spelling of J.B. Marks to 'Marx'. Readers rushing to phone their brokers shivered slightly at the sinister, foreign sounding name - thought of the 'Communist Manifesto' - 'Workers of all lands unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains! You have a world to win.'

More organisations rallied to the support of the workers. From a meeting in Durban's 'Resistance Hall', scene of many a send off to Passive Resisters on their way to gaol in protest at the Ghetto Act, came news of £100 for strike funds collected from the Indian community. From the Passive Resistance Council of the Transvaal Indian Congress came a resolution of full support. From the South African Federation of Progressive Students, with headquarters at the Witwatersrand University, came a circular to members of the public pleading for money to aid the strikers. Mrs. Margaret Ballinger M.P. and Senator Basner, both native representatives, walled at the South African Trades and Labour Council Offices to protest at the raid on the African Mine Workers Union Office, and to demand aid from the European Trade Unions for the strikers.

Senator Basner sent a telegram to the Prime Minister, contradicting the statement that the recommendations of the Lansdowne Commission had been "carried out practically in full!" The Government was well aware that the recommendations had not been carried out. It was totally incorrect to claim that the strike had been caused by agitators. Mrs. Margaret Ballinger, M.P. sent a similar telegram. Both were shocked that General Smuts was "not unduly concerned" at the death of six African workers, and the injury sustained by 400 more.

The Rand Daily Mail fanned the flames of panic among the stock-market gamblers, and the coupon clippers, egged on the Government and the police to new brutality and excesses. Its editorial, carried the headline "Strikers in Arms."

"Two days of the native mine strike show some natives dead; many injured; some policemen injured; None of the organisers of the strike, or of the European Communists who are supporting it, has so far been killed or injured."

No word of regret for the deaths here; only regret that death has not been extended far enough, and has not overtaken 'organisers' or European Communists.

"It has been proved that this is not a labour dispute in the ordinary sense of the term. It is more like a war.

"We do not see what else could have been expected. The mine natives are as raw as any to be found in Africa. How can such people know anything of trade union procedure or the orderly conduct of strikes?

"We should like the average Johannesburg citizen to consider what would have happened if those four thousand natives from Springs, all of them armed with some weapon or other, had not been intercepted by the police, who, incidentally, deserve the gratitude of the public for their courageous and skilful behaviour in this difficult affair. The city might not have presented a very pretty picture.

(The strikers sat down Then, acting on instructions from Pretoria, the police drew their batons and charged. No mention here that 4,000 men were stretched over six miles - a straggle of one man every two-and-a-half yards, dressed up by the press like Hitler's march on Paris.)

"We also hope the Cabinet sub-committee which is handling the matter will not be weak in dealing with it! If there is weakness now there will be much worse trouble later....."

The mining magnates, from their offices in New York and London, from their armchairs at the Rand Club and their Offices at Corner House, had spoken.

From the Mail: Wednesday, August, 14th.

Bob Connolly's cartoon shows an African miner walking forward a glowing bowl in the sky, labelled ten shillings a day, his arms outstretched towards the bowl while his feet totter at the edge of a precipice. An agitator is pushing him over the edge, into the dark depths below, labelled 'Chaos'. Caption: 'The situation at a glance.'

Wednesday, August 14th:

In the Johannesburg magistrates court, 62 African mineworkers appeared charged with contravening Section 19 of the Native Labour Regulation Act., by refusing to commence work on the mines the day ~~was~~ before. They were remanded to August 28th, and bail was fixed at £1 each on condition of good behaviour - that is to say, on condition that they returned to work and did not continue the offence.

After them appeared J.B. Marks, Benny Sischy, Meshack Motogai and Heratius Mabandla, all charged under the riotous Assemblies Act with having incited native mineworkers to strike. They were all remanded to August 22nd.

Opposing the application made by the defense for bail, the prosecutor, Mr. Vermooten said that Marks' release would prejudice the police investigation, and be tantamount to allowing Marks once again to participate in what the crown alleged a crime. Marks, he said, was President of the African Mineworkers Union, which had

issued a leaflet calling the miners out on strike. Fifty thousand miners had already responded, and it was believed that attempts would be made that day to get the other two-hundred-and-fifty thousand to join them.

Mr. Levitan, solicitor for the defence, said that the police had raided the office of the Union the day before and seized all the documents there were. The police, therefore, already had any evidence there might be. As President of the Union, Marks had the right to participate in the decision of this perfectly legal body. Nor could he be blamed, as the Prosecutor implied, for the clashes between workers and the police. Information showed that the police were responsible.

Marks was a South African citizen, entitled to bail. There was not the remotest possibility of his not being available for examination when wanted. He had been available all the previous day, and when the police wanted to arrest him, they found him.

In all cases, the magistrate refused bail, but said the men could apply again for bail when the police investigations were completed.

All four were taken back to the 'awaiting trial' section of the cells at Marshall Square,

Mahomed Ismail Wania Yussuf Doodah, Abraham Manala and Hosea Tshehla appeared before the magistrate in Krugersdorp, charged under the Riotous Assemblies Act with having incited mineworkers to stay away from work. Three were released on bail of £10 each, but Hosea Tshehla was taken back in the pick-up van, to the cells.

Twenty Africans, employed on the Witwatersrand Gold Mine, appeared in the Germiston Magistrates court, charged with failing to go underground when ordered to do so by their compound manager, Mr. Gernetzky.

Mr. Gernetzky, in evidence, said that when he asked the natives why they would not go underground, they said they wanted 10/- a day. He told them that they would be arrested if they did not go down. They replied that they would prefer to be arrested.

The magistrate said he was prepared to take into account that the accused and the other natives had probably been misled by irresponsible agitators and people

irresponsible agitators and people with evil intentions. He reminded them that they were given free food,, a beer ration and free medical attention by the mine, and that they had been perfectly satisfied until pamphlets had been issued to them. 19 pleaded guilty, and at the request of the mine management their contracts were cancelled. On who pleaded not guilty, and whose contract had expired, was cauthione dna discharged.

A further fifty-three African workers from Simmer and Jack then pleaded guilty to the same offence. Their contracts were also cancelled, and the magistrate said it would be for themselves and the mine management to decide whether they returned to work or not.

In the afternoon, officials of all the non-European Trade Union, representatives of the African National Congress and other African bodies, assembled at Rosenberg Arcade in the offices of the Council of non-European Trade Unions. James Phillips was in the Chair. The meeting, he explained, had been called to meet a deputation from the Johannesburg City Council to discuss the maintenance of essential services during the general strike. Councillors McPherson, Weinbrenn, and Legum were present. They were asked to state their case.

They appealed to the meeting to keep essential services running during the strike, in order to avoid outbreaks of disease and unnecessary suffering for the people. After a long debate, the meeting agreed in principle to keep essential services going. The issue now turned on what constituted "essential services". Water supply was easily agreed upon. There was a debate on sanitation, and it was finally agreed that hospital services as distinct from cleaning would be maintained. Councillor Weinbrenn, Chairman of the Municipal Water, Light and Gas Committee, appealed for the maintenance of electric power. "Think, gentlemen," he said, "what would happen if tomorrow morning your wife gets up and wants to make a cup of tea for the family. She plugs in the kettle, but there is no power." As soon as he had finished his appeal, well inter-larded with references to his activities ten years ago to organise African trade unions an African trade unionist jumped to his feet. He had only one question to put to the representatives of the City Council. "How many houses built by the City Council for Africans were wired for electricity?"

There was no reply. The meeting voted overwhelmingly against maintaining the power supply.

From the "Star" - Wednesday August 14th:

"General Smuts told the Transvaal Head Committee of the United Party in Pretoria today that he was not unduly concerned over what was happening on the Witwatersrand Gold Mines today, because the strike was not caused by legitimate grievances but by agitators. The Government would take steps to see that these matters were put right. The agitators were trying to lead the natives and the country to destruction. The agitators secretly distributed pamphlets, and incited the natives. The natives had to be protected from these people."

"General Smuts said that a few years ago the Lansdown Commission fully investigated the working conditions and wages of the native mine workers, and the recommendations of the Commission were carried out practically in full by the Government.

"4,000 - 5,000 strikers coming from Simmer and Jack to Johannesburg were dispersed by police this morning. 800 later told the police they were prepared to go back to work."

The Stock Exchange; "The market was less firm at opening this morning."

Visions of Karl Marx over Johannesburg, and the 'March' on the cities had caused a minor panic. But there was no panic outside the brokers offices.

In the Native Representative Council, the Government sponsored 'Advisory Parliament' of the African people, there was no panic.

From the Star: "Councillor Mosaka gave notice of motion 'That the chairman makes an official statement on the events leading up to the present disturbance on the gold mines of the Witwatersrand; the number of mines and labourers affected; extent and nature of the disturbances; including the number of persons killed, injured or arrested; the steps which the Government is taking to deal with the situation; and whether any negotiations have been entered into with the African Mine Workers Union with a view to the settlement of the strike, and if not why not,'"

"The Chairman, Undersecretary for Native Affairs, Mr. F. Rodseth,

Collection Number: A3299

Collection Name: Hilda and Rusty BERNSTEIN Papers, 1931-2006

PUBLISHER:

Publisher: **Historical Papers Research Archive**

Collection Funder: **Bernstein family**

Location: **Johannesburg**

©2015

LEGAL NOTICES:

Copyright Notice: All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Disclaimer and Terms of Use: Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

People using these records relating to the archives of Historical Papers, The Library, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, are reminded that such records sometimes contain material which is uncorroborated, inaccurate, distorted or untrue. While these digital records are true facsimiles of paper documents and the information contained herein is obtained from sources believed to be accurate and reliable, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand has not independently verified their content. Consequently, the University is not responsible for any errors or omissions and excludes any and all liability for any errors in or omissions from the information on the website or any related information on third party websites accessible from this website.

This document is part of the *Hilda and Rusty Bernstein Papers*, held at the Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.