

Finally about 70 police arrived and tried to arrest the ring-leaders..... There was an intense struggle for about an hour, during which time 20 natives were injured..... the work~~s~~ elements scattered into neighbouring dumps, and the rest of the natives started work.  
From a letter to the Editor: (49)

"At this juncture it would not be untimely if the Government or the Chamber of Mines were to present to the public a concise review of the native wages question, if only to allay the suspicion that exists in some minds that this apparently prosperous country may be heading for a disaster of the first magnitude.

C.O. Ormerod."

The press had reported that the miners were back at work. There was no way of checking the accuracy of their reports, or of discovering the real facts. It was decided that no leaflet should be prepared for the miners for that night. But after business houses and factories closed, work started again on the preparation of leaflets, calling the workers to come to the Market Square on Sunday morning and to stay at home on Monday. At a different centre, leaflets to the miners were prepared and roneoed till the early hours of the morning, calling the miners also to the Market Square, and telling them of the preparations for a general strike in support of their demands.

The Daily Mail during this week suppressed three letters. One was from Senator S.J. Smith, a leading member of the Labour Party, and one of the most prominent of Durban's public representatives:

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"..... The testing time of the liberals is now at hand. There is a strike of the natives on the Gold Mines - they are using the only weapon they have to raise their standards of life. This is ~~the~~ the key contest. The Gold Mines set the average economic level of natives throughout the country - if the Mine natives are liberally treated, a liberal wage policy will spread rapidly to

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the national benefit. At this vital turning point for the Native workers; I declare myself to be on the side of the strikers in their struggle. ...." (46)

Uys Krige, poet, author, war correspondent, also couldn't manage to pass the exacting eye of the Editor. He wrote: "At the beginning of this war, when the youth of South Africa were being exhorted by our country's leaders for a better world, General Smuts said .... 'Our Government .. will be known as the Government that sets about seeing that there was social justice and decent living for the underdog...' On another occasion he said 'South Africa will be more democratic after the war, and there will be equality and justice as well as more freedom, not only in the political sphere but in the economic sphere. These improvements will also apply to ~~the~~ Non-Europeans...'

"From my casual reading of the local press... I remember a few interesting items..... Mr. Norbert Erleigh chartered a flying boat the other day, to go and wath the Aga Khan being weighed in diamonds at Dar-Es-Salaam... ... The Rand Daily Mail told us that the Grand National Hotel changed hands for £240,000. Yesterday I read that the Turf Club will probably be sold for a half a million. At the beginning of the week you informed that Mr. Harry Oppenheimer has paid £20,000 for a horse - 'the highest recorded price for a racehorse imported into South Africa.'

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"I have chosen these names at random .... There are others in South Africa who have not had the good fortune to 'come out of this war as poor as the rest' - wished them by General Smuts six years ago.

"During the past few days, eight men have been killed and hundreds wounded as a result of asserting one of mankind's fundamental rights - that of withholding labour - and asking in Johannesburg, one of the richest cities in the world, 10/- a day.

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"Must we conclude that after a world war in which millions of people laid down their lives to gain for us the several freedoms so eloquently advocated by General Sumts, Churchill, and President Roosevelt, South Africa has become a paradise for plutocrats, and

a place which is not (in a temper to tolerate' the poor?"

Senator Basner wrote. And got suppressed. "As far as I can judge the strike of African miners and the Government handling of the situation has left the African section torn between feelings of rage and frustration, and has filled the European section with a sense of uneasiness and foreboding about the future. (47)

The only redeeming feature in the sad events of the strike has been the universal condemnation which met the Rand Daily Mail's immoderate editorials and its methods of reporting the events. Even in quarters least favourable to the strikers your attitude was deplored and your sentiments repudiated.

I can only express my disgust at such open partisanship and your open hostility to the cause of the African mine workers. Your two editorials on the strike will go down in the history of South African journalism as examples of the evils of a press committed to the interests of a financial group and not to the interests of the community. ...."

Only one letter critical of the Daily Mail and attempting to think sanely of the miners case was allowed to reach the columns of the Mail. It appeared in the week after the strike. Perhaps it was professional clanishness amongst professional journalists that saved this letter from suppression. It was written by Rene de Villiers, Managing Editor of the weekly 'Forum'.

"Now that the tumult and shouting over the native mine-workers strike have died down, perhaps you will allow me to comment on one aspect of a week of tragic happenings. Because the Rand Daily Mail's attitude to the natives has in the past generally been lensighted and tolerant, the hysteria and panic it displayed last week, in its news as well as its editorial columns, came as a painful surprise.

.....Even if your leading article "More than a Strike", published last Tuesday, was not intended as such, it was mischievous as well as malicious, Nothing was better calculated to create public panic and alarm and whip up passions, unless perchance, it was the emphasis your news stories placed on the 'evil and

aggressive' intentions of strikers' marches ~~wikk~~ armed with stones and sticks, and in some cases, choppers. ....

What excuse have you to offer for the total absence of fair and balanced comment in your leading article on Saturday? After all, the emergency had passed by then. The good white citizens of Johannesburg were no longer in peril. (48)

# Why did the Rand Daily Mail not bother to tell its readers that the mineworkers have grievances, that they have no adequate channels through which to express their grievances; that workers organisations are not allowed among mineworkers (as the Lansdown Commission pointed out) and that, as a result, strikes are the only means of drawing attention to grievances, legitimate or otherwise; and finally, why did you not bother to tell them that the recommendation of the Lansdown Commission have been implemented only in two respects?

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(45) I submit that by ignoring the case of the natives, you presented that portion of the Johannesburg public which looks to you for guidance, with a completely false and distorted picture of the strike and its causes, and by implication you supported the fascist approach to labour disputes.

.....If last week was a black one for our much vaunted European 'civilisation' it was indeed black for the Rand Daily Mail. I have seldom got as near feeling ashamed of my South Africanism as I did last week. I trust the time will come when you will experience similar emotions."

Not without reason, the "Illustrated Bulletin" ran a two page article about the Rand Daily Mail in its edition of August 31st., headed "HOW NOT TO REPORT A STRIKE." Said the Bulletin..... "From the word 'go' the R.D.M. set out to create as unfavourable an impression as it possibly could. Its reports and comments were partial. It sought to excite public hostility against the miners' strike, and create a general feeling of insecurity which the circumstances certainly did not warrant.

....Consider its report of August 12. In a straight news report, the word 'agitator' is used four times in four paragraphs..... It is quite clear from the report that the word

'agitator' was used to describe any striker who tried to promote the interests of the strike... Typical.... is this paragraph:

'At Nourse Mines 4,600 workers refused to go on shift. Trouble started when 300 willing workers marched out of the compound and were stoned by agitators...' Was anybody who refused to work an agitator?

49

..... But the worst was still to come. On August 14th citizens were confronted with this headline: '4,000 STRIKERS TRY TO MARCH ON JOHANNESBURG. NATIVES ARMED WITH KNIVES, IRON BARS, CHOPPERS. POLICE USE BATONS TO FORCE THEM BACK. MANY HURT.'

The four column introduction to the story reads: '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..... With few exceptions the strikers armed themselves with sticks, iron bars, choppers, knives and other dangerous weapons.'

.....How is it humanly possible for any reporter or reporters to determine how many of 4,000 dangerous, blanketed marching natives stretching over six miles were armed? Pictures of the incident show no arms. The police answer is that the arms were secreted under blankets. But the R.D.M. says that 'with few exceptions' the strikers armed themselves. .... We find lower down how this great threat was dealt with. It appears that some 40 policemen intercepted the natives, who were ordered to stop and return to the compound. They ignored the order and, we are told, 'adopting a threatening attitude, forced their way forward. The police placed cordons on either side of the road.....the strikers SAT DOWN and there were catcalls and threats. Then acting on instructions from Pretoria the police drew their batons and charged.'

P-10

Three facts emerge.... Firstly, that it took a mere handful of police to stop the 'dangerous march'. Secondly, the natives 'having adopted a threatening attitude forced their way forward' and in the next sentence are found to have 'sat down' and from this sitting position were indulging in 'catcalls and threats'. The second point is even more disturbing. It shows that a telephone call from Pretoria - some thirty miles from the scene - gave orders

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to launch the attack on the strikers, who,

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SATURDAY, August 17th:

From the Rand Daily Mail:

"There were two short lived strikes yesterday..... At 5 a.m. the police were informed that the 2,000 natives at Village Main had refused to go underground. .... Some of the strikers adopted a defiant attitude as the police marched in to the compound, but hurried to work when the police entered their rooms.

Later a substantial force of policemen ..... was sent to the New Pioneer Mine ..... to deal with 450 strikers there. Some of the agitators ..... had assembled on an adjoining mine dump.

A detachment of police was sent round the dump to intercept them, but they had already fled. The police chased them over mine dumps and through the veld for two miles before they could be rounded up and driven back to the compound. When they got there they all volunteered for duty. ....

Headline: "Police Protect Native Workers After Threats of Violence."

A general strike of native commercial and industrial workers, which agitators threatened would take place yesterday, again failed to materialise.

There had been threats that natives coming to work .... would be prevented from boarding trams and buses. Strong detachments of police were therefore posted before dawn at 13 strategic points in and around the city.

.....native bus drivers at the locations.....were afraid to drive in, as they had been threatened with violence. Workers were afraid to go to the buses for the same reason. When the presence of the police became known, they swarmed into the transports and arrived at their work a little late, but happy that they had not been prevented from coming.

.....agitators seem to have been more active in Alexandra Township..... Agitators boarded the buses from the southern suburbs and told the passengers that the presence of so many police rendered the strike pointless, but that all workers would be expected to strike on Monday, when 10,000 in Pretoria have threatened to cease work.

The police are aware of these possibilities, and strategic points will continue to be picketed until after the weekend.

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Headline: "It was a tough job, and they did it."

Yesterday .... writes a 'Rand Daily Mail' reporter, I went to the Police Barracks to chat with the men who have been handling the emergency.....

.... not a single man talked big. No tales of bloodshed and violence, no swanking about deeds of heroism, As one young man.... said to me: "..... Very few men ..... really like using physical violence, but if there is no alternative we use it to the best of our ability. "

"We had the whip-hand" I was told, "and we had to show that we held it. What we were up against was a direct threat to law and order - some of the weapons we picked up or took away from strikers showed that this was not an ordinary strike. Some of the poor blighters did not know what it was all about."

Editorial: "TOTAL DEFEAT".

"The native strike has ended just as it was bound to do! Quite a number of strikers have sore heads; a few are dead; and not a single one of the points for which they struck had been gained.

.....those who organised, formented and supported the movement... led ignorant and barbarous people to ask for the impossible, and it is in no way due to them that Johannesburg was not turned into a scene of riot and bloodshed. Because the strike was so well handled by the police the natives have lost less by it than was first feared. We can see no marked growth of resentment amongst the European population, as would undoubtedly have occurred if columns of strikers armed with weapons of various sorts, had been allowed to come into the centre of the towns. ....

The Labour Party acted amusingly as usual..... and was even bold enough to send a deputation to protest to Dr. Colin Steyn..... This fatuous body, headed by the Mayor of Johannesburg, complained first of "the brutal methods which the Government was adopting in dealing with the native strikers." Two conclusions are possible. One is that the Mayor of Johannesburg would not have objected to the irruption of four thousand armed natives into the centre of her city; .... The other is that the police should have confined themselves

to politely requesting the strikers to be good enough to put down the crowbars, choppers or knives that they were carrying.....

The people who came best out of the affair, are the police.... The measure of their success can be judged by the relative smallness of the casualty list. Anyone could have suppressed the outbreak with heavy bloodshed; it took good policemen to protect the public at so small a cost in life and injury to the primitive tribesmen who have come under the "guidance" of a western-model trade union...." 53

Q Bob Connelly's cartoon, titled "Getting rid of the Debris" shows the corpse of an agitator, still dangling a ten-shilling note from the end of a fishing rod, while being pushed along in a cocoon-pan into a black cavern.

Saturday, August 17th:

Throughout the afternoon, little groups of African men and women called at a central depot in town for leaflets for their townships. All types of precautions were taken. Leaflets went into the townships under the noses of the police, in bundles of washing, under shopping bags of groceries, in shirt-fronts, and under blankets. Throughout the hours of Saturday and Sunday, little groups of volunteers in all the townships called from house to house leaving leaflets.

At the same time, groups of miners and of volunteers were taking bundles of leaflets from the centre of town and climbing on the trains which ran from the East to the West Rand. At each mine station, they climbed out, looked around for a mineworker not under the observation of the police, handed him a little batch of leaflets with instructions to pass them on in the compound, and climbed back on the train to repeat the performance at the next station.

From the Star: Saturday, August 17th:

"Rand Market Hesitant".

"Effect of Natives' Mine Strike".

In continuing the spirited fashion in which the Market closed last week, Johannesburg dealers were caught on the wrong foot .... on Monday, Early through High 'Change news was received of the incipient native labour strike on several mines. There was an immediate withdrawal of buying orders, which enabled sellers to dominate the market, and led to an easier trend. Little fresh 50

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selling orders appeared, but prices declined .....

Despite the spread of the troubles, the tone steadied on Tuesday morning, .....

Caution nevertheless continued to prevail, pending developments in the situation. .... As the natives returned to work, sentiment improved and was reflected in more active conditions, with rallying prices."

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Spirits had been ebbing, confidence oozing away from all the organisers of the general strike. The arrests, the unbelievable brutality of the police; the bludgeoning of the miners back to work; the police determination not to allow a leaflet to be distributed or a picket-line to form; all helped to discourage them. But there was no mood of black pessimism, no feeling yet that the struggle was over.

Throughout Saturday morning and afternoon, the leaflets went out to the townships, calling the people to a meeting at the Market Square on Sunday morning. And as the little batches of men and women with leaflets under their blankets, leaflets concealed in bundles of washing, leaflets tucked down the front of their clothes made their way into the townships, distributed their leaflets and came back for more, reports started to come in. 'The general strike will be on on Monday. The people are determined to fight now for the miners and 10/- a day. They are talking about the strike, they are ready, organised'.

All Saturday afternoon, mine-workers who had made their way to town, African men and women volunteers took little batches of leaflets in their clothing, and boarded the trains from Johannesburg which run East and West along the Reef. At mine stations - Cleveland, Teoronga, Luipaardsvlei and a score more, they got off, evaded the watchful eye of the hordes of police, handed a number of leaflets to passing miners, and rode on to the next stop. The leaflets called on the miners to keep courage, told them of the meeting at the Market Square, told them that the general strike was coming to their aid.

But the courage was ebbing out. And the confidence and fearlessness which had inspired the moving spirits in the organising of the strike. The strike committee, incapacitated by the arrest of its Chairman and several members, met in Orlando, without aim and without

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a clear vision of where to go next.

Daniel Koza, who had called for action at the meeting in Rosenberg Arcade several days before, who had castigated the Executive of the Non-European Trades Council for their failure to act boldly, turned tail, afraid. He called for the strike committee to dissolve, and give up the fight. Gana Makabeni supported. The motion was lost, and the two left the Committee never to return. The Committee, now the rump of a strike committee, adjourned with no decisions taken.

52

**Collection Number: A3299**

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

***PUBLISHER:***

*Publisher:* **Historical Papers Research Archive**

*Collection Funder:* **Bernstein family**

*Location:* **Johannesburg**

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