

provide alternative workers.

Meanwhile the BMWU's rival, the Union of Johannesburg Municipal Workers, has come out in favour of the striking workers, and called for the reinstatement of all of them. Mavi has not been impressed. He has made a scathing attack on what he sees as 'cashing in on the plight of the workers' and asks, 'where were they when people asked for wage increases?' (Star, 09.09.80). Probably being registered.

The BMWU is receiving new members daily.

Turner Brothers (Eastern Cape): All 27 workers stopped work after the dismissal of the chairperson of their workers' committee.

No further information available to the editors.

Table Bay Cold Storage (Cape Town):

We reprint, below, a letter in connection with the meat strike (from RDM, 27.08.80):

I WOULD like to comment on the article (RDM July 21) by industrial relations adviser, Mr Andrew Levy, in which he urges employers to adopt a more conciliatory and realistic attitude towards strikes and, indeed, to the trade union question in general.

In the Financial Mail (Aug 11) he is further quoted as saying that "the (Johannesburg City) Council has its head in the sand".

We concur with his assessment of the council's handling of the recent municipal workers' strike. However, actions speak louder than words, and it is unacceptable that Mr Levy should place himself in the vanguard of enlightened management. It is important to note that Mr Levy is NOT a dispassionate observer of the recent spate of strikes.

In fact he was the industrial relations adviser to the employers in the recent Cape Town meat strike and acted as their principal spokesman at a number of meetings. In this case the line adopted by the employers deviated considerably from the enlightened prescriptions which their adviser Mr Levy so frequently espouses.

In his "Mail" article Mr Levy states that "with all the talk of change, and the new deal, many employers continue to handle strike action with antiquated methods, regarding strikes as a sign of disloyalty, ingratitude, the work of agitators, and responding by firing their employees, and refusing to confront the issues giving rise to the action." We agree.

But precisely this "head in the sand" attitude characterised the handling of the recent meat strike.

The issues involved in the strike are well known. Approximately 80 workers at Table Bay Cold Storage, after weeks of requesting that management recognise their democratically-elected committee, went on strike. The management's response to this was a catalogue of all the "antiquated methods" cited by Mr Levy in his article: resisting "negotiation and discussion and investigation"; accusations of "agitators"; wholesale "firing of their employees"; hiding behind "statute books" and the "red herring of unregistered unions". In short: "refusing to confront the issues giving rise to the action".

As Mr Levy says, unsuccessful strike handling will inevitably "widen the issue in dispute". And the issue was dramatically widened when two weeks later the rest of the meat industry came out in support of the striking Table Bay workers.

In the intervening two weeks the workers in all the meat factories had attempted to discuss the issue at Table Bay Cold Storage with their employers. Their efforts proved fruitless. Indeed the employers actually prepared themselves for an industry-wide strike.

When the 800 meat workers walked out they informed management that they were walking out for one day in solidarity with the Table Bay workers. On their return they were locked out by the employers (assisted by squads of riot policemen). The issue "widened".

The workers received the support of Cape Town's entire African and coloured community, a large section of the enlightened white public and their representatives and, without exception, the English-language Press.

The moderate nature of the demands, the workers' commitment, and the extent of public sympathy failed, however, to impress the employers.

The immediate legacies of their obduracy are 800 starving meat workers and their families, and an entire industry which must have suffered a severe financial setback in the short term and is now employing a less productive work force than might otherwise be the case.

The long-term legacy is more profound. It is the existence, in Cape Town, of 800 starved, determined and embittered workers (and the thousands who supported them), whose anger and understandable bitterness will be directed not at the "agitators" (for there were none) but at the employers who so consciously refused to heed their voice.

And this is important. For as long as there are "meat employers" and "Johannesburg City Councils" they will, in the eyes of the workers, be the benchmark for all employers. These employers who adopt a more conciliatory approach, those who take heed of Mr Levy's words, will not receive a second thought, as long as the actions of prominent employ-

ers — like the meat employers — hold these fine words.

Is it possible that the State actually prevented the meat employers from following the conciliatory path suggested by Mr Levy? If that is so it is important that it be made known. It is however unlikely that the State would have been able to prevent an amicable settlement of the Table Bay issue, around which all subsequent action hinged. It is clearly for Mr Levy to explain the startling deviations between his words and his deeds.

Perhaps the explanation is to be found in Alistair Sparks' words: "Many employers are able to talk about the need for black union rights and discuss it in their board rooms, yet when they actually come face to face with black aspirations and demands they seem to panic and become irrational. They revert to traditional South African responses and begin threatening to call in the police, or to fire the lot and pack them off to the 'homelands'".

Please forgive the lateness of our response. Until very recently I and four of my colleagues were detained in prison in Cape Town, an important institution in the industrial relations system adopted by the meat employers. — DAVID LEWIS, Organiser, Western Province Workers' Union, Athlone, Cape.

© This letter was referred to Mr Levy, who declined to comment. — EDITOR.



Interview: a miner

"The mine is a grave from which a man will not return".

The substantial part of this article is devoted to the single experience of a black migrant worker, Mtati, from the Transkei who took his first job on a gold mine at the age of 18. Mtati clearly describes the hardship which is involved in a days work on the gold mines. Working on the mines has always been an unpopular job among black workers. This is largely due to the low wages, long working hours, the extremely dangerous working conditions and the bad living conditions.

Workers today as well as in the past have fought against such conditions of exploitation. This resistance has involved mass desertion, refusal to be recruited, as well as trade union and strike action. Even though working on the mines is clearly unpopular, many workers have at one time or another worked on mines. This is because in the past there have usually been mining jobs available, while other better jobs have been 'scarce'.

Initially the migrant labour system assisted mining capitalists to force people into working on the gold mines. The structures of control initially developed by the mining industry were later changed and extended into a wider system of control — a central feature of which is a sophisticated labour allocation network. Through this network, labour from the bantustans is channelled into the most undesirable job sectors. The more favourable higher paying jobs (eg clerical and factory work) have been largely reserved for those workers who have urban rights.

Due to resistance from South African workers against working on the mines, the bulk of mine labour was at one stage recruited from outside of South Africa. Mining employment was generally seen as one of the last resorts before starvation. However the conditions in countries surrounding South Africa were such

that workers from those countries were forced to accept mining contracts. In 1974, 75% of the mines' labour force came from outside of South Africa.

By 1976 the pattern was changing dramatically. Malawian labour had been withdrawn after the 1975 air disaster, and the Mozambique border had been temporarily closed for recruiting purposes.

The Malawian air disaster and the border closure forced the mining industry to raise its wages in order to attract labour (this was cushioned for them by the rise in the price of gold). At the same time the unemployment situation in South Africa was reaching such proportions that, together with the tightening up of the labour control system, South African workers from the bantustan areas were being forced to accept jobs on the mines which they would never have accepted in the past.

While in certain bantustan areas workers have managed to resist mining jobs almost completely, the Transkei has traditionally been a major internal recruiting area for the mines.

From the beginning of the mining industry, a situation of dependency on mining employment was created in the Transkei. This was done through a network of traders who used methods such as cattle advances, bribery and misrepresentation to induce Transkeians to work on the mines. This historical dependence was maintained by the extension of the mine recruiting networks and the development of a rigorous system of labour control.

At the time of the labour crisis on the mines, people in the Transkei were being especially hard-hit by the deepening unemployment and the tightening up of labour control mechanisms. At the same time the mines went on a massive recruiting drive throughout the rest of the country, incorporating new areas into their network.

The resistance by local workers to mining jobs was being broken down. By 1978, 55% of the mines' labour force was being recruited within South Africa.

The situation now in the Transkei and in other bantustan areas is very different to that of 1975. Desperate workseekers are being turned away from mine recruiting centres in their hundreds.

MY NAME is Mtati. I am now 41. I came from Queenstown. I can tell you about the time that I worked on the mines. I went to the mines because I wanted to see them. Miners always have money. The money is too small in Queenstown. It was in 1957 when I joined at Mzilikazi. I was eighteen and I had standard six.

I was first at Venterspoort where I worked for three years. Then I was at West Driefontein where I did two joins from 1961 to 1976. Nothing changed to make things better while I was there but I hear they are paying more now.

At WNLA (the recruiting organisation) when we joined we had medical examination, injections and X-ray and our passes stamped. At the mine we started at a school for testing where they show you drilling and how to shovel. Then there was another school down the mine where we learned again for ten days.

They test you there to see who can be base boy. You take things like buttons with GZ or CZ, GC, MG, and then put them in the right glass. And other tests like that. I did well in the tests. I was a base boy on all three joins.

The worst thing about the mines is that it is heavy work. All the jobs are hard work.

We must wake up very early. We must be at the face to start work at 7am. If you want breakfast you must get up at 3am. If you get there late they say - no more, it is finished. For breakfast we get isidudu, bread and coffee. You have to be there early to get it.

The compound is close to the bank. We walk there. There are so many people to be

taken down. Thousands. We wait and they take us down about 5am. There are two lift cages. One goes up while one comes down. They take 20 upstairs and 20 downstairs. If you go down 20 stations it takes half an hour. I do not know how many feet deep it is. On the way we must stop and get into another lift cage which goes down again.

From the station it is far to the face where we work. It is an hour walk from station to face. We must be there by 7am to start. The whites come down last and do not have to wait at the bank.

We work in a Section. We always work at the same face. There are maybe five or six Sections on a station. There are maybe 30 or 50 workers on a Section. One chief and three white bosses. We are four base boys. There are eight drill boys with eight spanner boys. Then maybe eighty shovellers. Then there are six tram boys. One of them can push the trams that we fill. There are also twenty timber boys.

When we get to the face it is my job to spray water to settle the dust. Work must start with shovelling from last night's blasting. We must clear the way so the drillers can start. We do not spray anymore. There are water sprays on the drills. We drink the water for the drills because it is an hour walk to the station for water. The water is bad. We also have no toilets. We just do it there.

It is hard work. It is very hot and you sweat so much. We are all wet with sweat. We work in trousers, boots and helmets. Sometimes people just fall down where we're working. It's just too hot.

The drill boys hold their drills against

the rock. They must drill six or eight feet so that the dynamite is deep. It takes them half an hour. They drill twenty, thirty holes in one shift. That rock is hard.

The shovellers must then shovel the rock to where the tram lines begin. Sometimes this is far. The passages are too narrow. They shovel the rock from one man to the next in a line, from one spade to the next. Maybe the line is long. Two, three, four hundred yards. We work in the dark. Just with a helmet light and battery on your belt. You can see the gold in the rock in the light.

The shovellers fill the trams which the trammers then push back to the station. The rock gets taken up in big pipes.

We have no tea time. No food. No rest time, we must work right through. We stop work at 4pm. Before we stop we must put the dynamite charges in the holes we have drilled. The whites do that. We then walk back to the station and they blast the face. Nine hours work.

The whites get boosted first. We get out at about half past five or six. You get cold waiting to be taken up. There are ventilation pipes as big as a man. They make winds blow down the tunnels. It is not at the station like it is at the face. You cannot take down a jersey. There is nowhere to put it. If you kept it with you it would get wet with sweat.

Back at the compound we have dinner. It is pap and stew. It is the same every night. We get it twice on Sundays. The pap is cooked in big pots - they use a spade to stir it with. It is dirty food. It has no taste. They do not peel the potatoes, the carrots or the onions. They put the leaves of the carrots in. For meat in the stew we

get amathumbo (offal) and intloko yiinkomo (cow head). They cook the meat and vegetables in one pot until it is soft. Twice a week we get brisket to grill on the stove in the compound. There is no milk, no fresh fruit. You mustn't spend your money on food or you will have no money.

When I started on the mines in 1957 I got 30c a shift. In 1965 I got R6,75 a month. They give you R2,00 per month and you get the rest at the end of the contract. When we get our pay at the end of the month we get weighed and we get an injection. You have to have the injection. When you ask them what it is for they do not tell you - they just say it is for strength.

After eating you go to sleep. We do not work on Sundays. Then we only wake up at

7am. We get lunch and supper. The same stew. We spend the day sleeping or washing or we go to the beerhall in the compound. Maybe we go out. Some men sleep out and just come in for work.

We only get public holidays. Easter, Republic Day, New Year's Day, Christmas Day. We get no holidays. You must finish that join first. We get no sick leave. You must work or be in bed. There is a hospital. Someone who is ill or not strong enough gets surface work. Sometimes you get tired. You feel like you cannot go to work. But you must not feel sick and lonely you must just finish that join. One day I did not go to work. I was found guilty and they gave me twenty days in jail. The mine magistrate sentenced me. I had to spend twenty days shovelling coal and I got



COMPOUND AT CROWN MINES - CONCRETE SLEEPING BUNKS HAD BEEN IN USE THE YEAR BEFORE AND ARE THE NORM IN ALL OLDER COMPOUNDS. CROWN MINES COMPOUND WAS DEMOLISHED IN 1980. (PHOTO: LES LAWSON).

no pay. That only happened once.

People get sick. Some people get boils all over them. The mines are dangerous. Many people die from accidents. The roof can fall. Most die from explosions in the walls when smoke comes out and kills them. There are injuries from the drills, from flying stones or they cut off fingers, toes or whole arms.

The mines pay when a miner must be buried. But they do not wait for the family for the burial. If the family demands the body they cannot get it.

There is a lot of smoke from engines and diesel drills. One ventilation pipe pushes clean air in and the other takes dirty air out. But the pipes are far from the face. I know two men who had phthisis. One was a shoveller and the other a driller. We had X-Ray every six months. Then they were told that they had phthisis. They were taken away. I do not know what happened. They went to hospital first.

The compounds where we live house twenty, forty eight or thirty two men. There is a stove and there are cement double bunks. We sleep on mats on the cement. Mattresses are not allowed, only pillows. You must bring your own blanket. There is no cupboard just a rack to put all your things on. Like in a train. They only wash and sweep the compound once a month. There are lots of fleas and bed bugs. There are water flush toilets.

That is what my time on the mines was like. I worked there for nine years and things never changed. I finished in 1976. You are a man when you come back from the mines. I am not working now. I am looking for work.

communities and transport

This section is included under our general feature on Labour Action as we believe that the issue of mass transport is basically an issue that affects the working class most directly and dramatically. This means that the working people of South Africa and their organisations, or sympathetic organisations, should attempt to prevent conflict over transport inadequacies or costs being used by other classes and groups for their own personal interests.

Many examples could be found where individuals or organisations have used community anger to advance themselves politically or financially. This has to be guarded against. See the WIP editorials in numbers 12 and 13, and the articles on rents, transport and education in this and earlier issues.

Previously, in WIP 10, we had provided information on the 1979 bus boycotts in Natal. In WIP 13 we printed two contributions on bus boycotts, while the discussion on events in the Western Cape also took up this issue.

Below we supply some limited information on several attempts to increase fares and resistance shown to this and the inadequate services provided by many companies.

It is intended to analyse the Putco application for increases in fares in the Johannesburg area, and subsequent events, in a future edition of WIP. Articles on this issue and information that we could use, should please be sent to the editors.

Johannesburg: The bus fares on all white, coloured and indian buses rose by 10% from September 1. These buses are run by the City Council. A similar increase is expected for african buses by October 1, stated the report.

The department's general manager stated that these were the first increases in two years, and that the service would still run at a R10,5-million loss - a loss that is made up by ratepayers.

Gazankulu: Powers concerning road transport within Gazankulu were transferred from the central to the local government on July 1. From that date road carriers in Gazankulu lost all rights to appeal to the National Transport Commission. All complaints and enquiries were to go to the Gazankulu Road Transportation Board.

This appears to be the case in most of the bantustans, and serves to partially deflect another conflict point onto the regional authorities.

Lukoto Bus Service (Venda): 28 students started boycotting the Lukoto Bus Service on April 28 and were still hiking to and from school on May 13 (Post, 13.05.80) in protest against raised bus fares and poor timetables.

The buses charge R5,00 per month for a 10 km route. A rival company charged the same for six months on the same route.

A petition has been handed to the Venda Transportation Board for consideration.