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***From the Backs of the African Mine Workers': Working Time,
the Racialised Value of Labour Power and Organised White
Labour on South African Gold Mines: 1933-1978***

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From the Backs of the African Mine Workers':
**Working Time, the Racialised Value of Labour Power and Organised
White Labour on South African Gold Mines: 1933-1978**

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Abstract

Covering nearly fifty years, this article presents detailed historical evidence of the struggle of organised white labour on the South African gold mines to reduce working hours - which remains stable for almost a century. The explanation for this is found in Karl Marx's understanding of the value of labour power – which amounts to the costs of the reproduction of the working-class family and which is measured in terms of the time spent labouring in production underground. In this case, the value of labour power is racialised. Organised white labour's demands to reduce their working hours cannot be met as this would impact on the considerably lower value of the labour power of black African mineworkers, on the sustained depressing of which the gold mining industry depended.

Keywords:

Introduction

The legislatively stipulated working week of 48 hours did not change on South African gold mines from 1911 until 1997 (Stewart 2016). This article traces an aspect of this perhaps unprecedented stability in working time in the twentieth century.

The article, firstly, briefly places the period under review in its historical context.

It then, secondly, argues that the reason the gold mining industry consistently rebuffed organised white labour's working time demands was that reducing the working hours of organised white miners would have impacted on the time black African mineworkers spent at the rock face underground. For reducing the working hours of white workers would have reduced the value of the labour power of the black mineworkers who were supervised by white miners in a racialized division and organisation of labour under segregation until 1948 and apartheid thereafter. In arguing this, the article relies on Karl Marx's analysis of the labour process (the interface and interaction of people and production technologies) under capitalism. To recall, for Marx, labour power is the capacity for producing goods and its value amounts to the wage, i.e the cost of reproducing the working-class family and is measured by the time spent working in any production environment. The historical evidence is, thirdly, then presented.

By way, firstly, of historical context, while raised as an issue almost immediately after the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand ('ridge of white waters') in South Africa in 1886 by the Amalgamated society of Engineers (ASE), with Sunday work being a 'burning question' in 1894 resulting in strike action, the implementation of an 8-hour day, passed by President Paul Kruger's *Volksraad* ('people's committee' - parliament) in 1899, was interrupted by the South African War of 1899-1902. It had to await two years shy of a full century to be implemented in 1997.

Working time demands are made in 1904, but the exclusively white SA Engine Drivers' Association fail to get shifts reduced from 12 to 10 hours. Chinese indentured labourers work 60 hours a week between this year and 1907 and the attempt to institute an 8-hour day by the 'Select Committee on the Subject Matter of the Eight Hours Bill' in the Transvaal legislature of the Responsible Government is quashed by the mineowners in 1908 (Lundall 1990:66). Working time triggers the General Strike of 1913 when organised white labour calls for a 40-hour working week. Working time issues continue to surface until the 48-hour week, as stipulated in the Mines and Works Act of 1911, is finally implemented in 1919 in the context of a labour shortage after World War II. Drowned out by the Rand Revolt in 1922, shortly after the ambiguous victory of white labour of the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924, working time is again taken up by organised white labour. After over a decade its demands eventually pressed the van Eck Commission into existence in 1947. Organised white labour continued its unsuccessful struggle for reduced working hours until it pressed the Franszen Commission, into existence in

1977/8, but the 48-hour working week was not to change for another 20 years. Then the shape of the working week changes, but not the number of hours worked.

The reason the mining industry continually denied the demands of organised white labour for reduced working hours has been noted (Johnstone, 1976), but not adequately explained. Under the racialised organisation of work black African mineworkers were not working for 48 hours, but had officially to wait idle underground for the white miner-cum-supervisor. Reducing working hours for white labour would also mean a reduction in the hours of African labour and consequently increase the value of African labour power. This the industry could not afford. It was, moreover, not so much the cost of the value of white labour power - reflected in the high wages paid to white labour - which the industry sought to reduce (as the tradition has it), as much as to decrease the value of labour power as a proportion of overall costs by increasing the productivity of cheaper African labour power.

The theoretical basis of the argument is that for Marx 'the value of labour power is determined by the value of the necessaries of life habitually required by the average labourer'. In the racialised South African context there are, however, two clearly distinct values of labour power. The 'necessaries of life' refer to the costs - or price - of the reproduction of labour or what Marx terms 'necessary labour'. Labour time needs to be expended to cover this temporally defined value component of labour power before the balance of the working day results in 'surplus labour' required to cover all other costs of production, including profit.

Three factors determine the value of labour power: the length of the working day (which stays constant in this case); the productiveness of labour (which also effectively stays constant - there being no significant new technologies on which productivity depends throughout the period) and the 'normal intensity' of labour. Increasing the 'normal intensity' of labour refers to increasing the expenditure of labour in a given time. It was the intensity of the labour power of African workers the industry sought to increase - and hence increase the 'surplus value' component of labour time, i.e the value created over and above the costs of the reproduction of labour or necessary labour.

African workers were effectively wasting labour time underground. This wasted labour time is what the industry sought to eliminate and hence increase the 'normal intensity' of African labour power. Under the legally defined racial construction of work, reducing the working hours of white labour would have also reduced the working hours of African labour. Consequently, after over forty years of institutionalised struggle and for most mining labour thereafter, neither the 40-hour working week, nor the five-day week would become a reality until 1997 even after which, until today, many mine workers, whether white or black, continue to work longer than the stipulated 45-hour working week.

Organised White Labour's Struggle for Reduced Hours

With the principle of the formal recognition of the South African Mine Workers Union SAMWU, later the MWU) initially agreed to by the Mining Industry Board in 1922 and finally agreed to in April 1925 and modified in 1927 and 1929, there was still with no established dispute resolution procedure negotiated by 22 September 1933 when strikes broke out at Simmer & Jack and Langlaagte Estate with 'all underground men are out at both mines'.¹ In this period of the Great Depression the gold mining industry in South Africa was 'the least affected' (O'Meara, 1983:36) and of which the miners wanted a share. These strikes were given prominence in the English press. With the MWU demanding a wage increase and reduced working hours without a reduction in pay, the Central ... Rand Mines management in Johannesburg received a response from their London head office that while the 'pressure of factors that may necessitate some improvement in wage conditions' this '... would be less serious than reduced hours.'² Chaired by Ivan Walker, the Secretary of Labour, discussions during the following ten days focused on procedure, with finality reached on the 5th October.³ The following week, on Kruger Day, 10th October 1933, not then recognized as a public holiday, 'a letter was received by the Chamber of mines 'from seven recognised unions and one un-recognised union (the Building Workers Industrial Union) who asked for a meeting to discuss introducing 'a 40 hour working week, without a reduction in the present level of weekly wages ... and that a twenty percent increase in wages be added thereto'. The matter was to be considered by the Gold Producers' Committee the following Monday'.⁴ While agreeing to meet 'the Trades Unions Joint Committee, this was not to be considered as 'involving any recognition of a Mining Unions Joint Committee or other organization resembling the defunct South African Industrial Federation'. John Martin, then President of the Chamber privately briefed the Minister of Mines, Sir Patrick Duncan, regarding the 'general position'.⁵

With 'sectional strikes' having broken out at New State Areas mines (eventually settled by penalising workers half of their leave privileges in lieu of dismissals), apparently 'not approved of by other Mining Unions' (Jhb to London 29 Nov) and the new general secretary of the MWU, Piet Harms allegedly politicising matters by 'calling DF Malan to come to the Transvaal', focus was temporarily deflected away from the joint demands of organised white labour, only to be taken up again by the Mining Unions Joint Committee (MUJC) in the first week of December. The MUJC was then told by the Gold Producers Committee that no increase of wages or reduction of hours could be

¹ Cable to London from CM&IC, 22 September 1933, BW Archives, Box 103, File 263d.

² Cable to Johannesburg, Central Mining and Investment Corporation, 6 October 1933 BW Archives, Box 103, File 263d.

³ Memo BW Archives, Box 103, File 263c

⁴ Cable to London, Central Mining and Investment Corporation, Ltd, 11 October 1933 BW Archives, Box 103, File 263d.

⁵ Private Mail letter from Johannesburg, 18 October 1933, BW Archives, Box 103, File 263d

granted, a position later to be endorsed by the government; neither would the proposal for some alternative, such as a bonus along the lines of that adopted in 1924, be granted.⁶

The next year the Chamber granted an extension of holiday leave from two to three weeks a year after a year in employment and four weeks leave - paid for thirty days instead of the previous 24 - as this would be 'helpful to the Industry when dealing in the future with the questions of further employment and shorter working hours' (Jhb to London 10 April 1934). The MUJC felt they had achieved 'nothing whatsoever' after a campaign of twelve months or more. Their men had been refused increased wages and shorter working hours and which the government endorsed. After the MWU accepted the proposed holiday arrangements the MUJC followed suite.

Shortly after the Second World War, organised white labour, under the banner of the MUJC, again took up the struggle for reducing working hours in a concerted manner by engaging the Chamber of Mines over the demand for a five-day working week. The 1911 Mines and Works Act had specified a 48-hour working week which stretched from Monday to Saturday. This post-Second World War demand for a five-day working week continued to be made for the next 30 years. It would take a government appointed commission - the Commission of Inquiry into the Possible Introduction of a Five-day Working Week in the mining industry of the Republic of South Africa - to settle the issue. This Commission was finally forced into existence in 1977 by the threat of a strike by one section of organised white labour, the MWU which was well supported by its members. Chaired by DG Franzsen, with a Second report appearing in 1978, Franzsen's first report usefully tracks the outlines of this engagement and on which this article heavily depends for the overall structure of the institutional narrative. A further important source providing much needed detail is Wessel Visser's history *Van MWU tot Solidariteit – geskiedenis van die Mynwersunie, 1902-2002* (2008).

Once back home having been demobilised after the Second World War, many miners found black African workers doing their jobs. With the militancy of the white miners' unions essentially snuffed out after the 1922 Rand Revolt, organised white labour was effectively co-opted into institutionalised corporate industrial relations arrangements after the ambiguous political victory of the 1922 of the Pact Government's IC Act of 1924 - which reserved jobs for white workers (Johnstone 1976; Davies 1979; Yudelman 1983). Further disabled by internecine strife within the MWU throughout the 1930s and 1940's (Visser 2008), organised white labour languished in a period of quiescence, even though a number of working time issues had nudged the improvement of working time forward (chiefly by means of increasing the holiday leave allowance and having optional paid days off) even if real wages declined in the 1930s (Yudelman 1984:256).

The impetus for what became an institutionally sustained push by organised white labour for reduced working hours is not clear, but part of the

⁶Letter 10 April 1934 from Jhb to London, BW Archives, File 263d.

reason may well have been the 1946 black mineworkers strike. On the 28th June 1947, the MUJC approached the Gold Producers' Committee of the Chamber with the demand of over a decade before 'to accept in principle a 40-hour week without reduction in pay' (Franszen 1977:15). After a meeting on the 5th September 1947 between the Chamber and the MUJC, the industry declined the request on the grounds that the working profit on thirteen mines would be eliminated and that if 'coupled with another of the Committee's requests', this would affect sixteen mines (Ibid). This refusal led the MUJC to approach the Prime Minister which led to the establishment in 1950 of the Commission on Conditions of Employment in the Gold Mining Industry.

The van Eck Commission

Chaired by van Eck, the report of this Commission (UG No 28 of 1950) was curiously never published. The MUJC did suggest to the van Eck Commission, by way of verbal evidence, that 'a five-day week was intended' (Franszen 1977:15).⁷ The MWU delegation proposed to van Eck that workers be divided into two shifts on each mine. Each shift of men would work two Saturdays out of four each month, this being a 40-hour week, Monday to Friday, with the additional average of four hours generally worked a week to be paid as overtime. The proposal is an interesting one and was made by the MWU, Franszen reports, 'to meet the special circumstances of the gold mines in this country' (1977:16, citing Par. 58(111), van Eck Commission). It suggested a formal 40-hour 'man-week', but amounts to maintaining the *status quo* of a 48 hour 'mine-week' established by the MWA of 1911. This proposal is tantamount to an eight-hour day and a wage increase by way of overtime rates to be paid for Saturday work. This is the first time a distinction is drawn between the 'man-week' (the hours an individual worked per week) and the 'mine-week' (the hours the mine operated). The van Eck Commission found that this would result 'in some reduction in output ... that would not be in proportion to the reduction of hours worked by daily paid men' (Franszen 1977:16, citing Par. 326(4)(ii), van Eck Commission).

⁷ Where, in submitting evidence to van Eck, the unionists had appealed to shorter hours in the British coal mining industry, the Gold Producers appealed to the 'social structure' in South Africa and the political constraint on mining operations of the racially defined 'non-scheduled person', i.e only whites could qualify as miners by virtue of holding a blasting certificate.

In challenging the MUJC's evidence for a 40-hour week without a reduction in pay the Gold Producers' Committee of the Transvaal Chamber of Mines was forced to acknowledge that:

As there is no past experience in the Gold Mining Industry on which to base this conclusion [concerning the probable effect of the adoption of a 40-hour week] only estimates and opinions based on knowledge of mining conditions in the industry, acquired over a long period, can be given (Gold Producers Committee, 1948:4).

Working hours had been stable since the eventual implementation of the MWA over thirty years before. The Chamber's concern related to how a reduction in working hours would impact on the output of black workers. For 'much of the output of the Native labourers is dependent on their physical effort and as the time of this physical labour is already less than 48 hours per week...' a decrease in output was anticipated were white workers to be granted a reduction in working hours. The phrase 'already less than 48 hours a week' referred to the number of hours actually spent working during a shift. In the absence of accurate data and relying on estimates born of practical experience, a loss of production on mines, ranging from between 12-24%, was anticipated. The overall average loss of production across the gold mines was estimated at 18%. The gold mining industry was compelled in the interests of maintaining production levels to defend the length of the working day and the then current configuration of working hours for individual workers in the six day mine week.

Intimately linked to the demand of organised white labour for reduced working hours was the length of the black migrant workers labour contract. In this instance, the length of the labour contract was given as a reason for rebuffing white labour's demands by the Gold Producers' Committee who led evidence that the forty-hour week:

'...must be ruled out because of the unrest that would be created amongst the Native labour force who, in order to complete their contracts of service calling for a specified number of shifts to be worked *would be obliged to spend approximately seventeen percent more time at the mines* than they do under present conditions' (1948:3) (Emphasis added).

Needless to say, the van Eck Commission did not result in a reduction of working hours.

Undeterred, the MUJC in the same year, as well as the following one, again raised the issue of a 40-hour working week with the Chamber continuing to decline the request, but agreed to a concession that six days, in addition to annual leave, could be taken on a voluntary basis as from August 1951. In 1952, the Mechanics Unions' Joint Committee then requested the Chamber that members have an 'occasional' Saturday morning off, later to become every second Saturday a month. Both requests were declined, with a Conciliation

Board being appointed over the dispute, but not reaching a settlement, the artisans' unions' joint committee dropped the issue.

Raising the Demand for the 40-Hour Working Week beyond Organised White Labour

It is perhaps important to note that it was not only white organised mining labour who were at the time making demands for a five-day working week. Concurrently with their series of tabled proposals, the demand for a 40-hour working week was raised for the first time by the very different constituency opposing the recently formed apartheid policies of the South African State. At the historical Congress of the People in Kliptown in 1955, a broad non-racial and cross-class alliance of civil society, the broad-ranging Freedom Charter, articulated the same demand with specific reference, among others, to mine workers:

There shall be a forty-hour working week, a national minimum wage, paid annual leave and sick leave for all workers and maternity leave on full pay for all working mothers.

Miners, domestic workers, farm workers and civil servants shall have the same rights as all others who work.

The demand was not, on the face of it, an unrealistic one, good trade union organisation in the Garment Workers' Union having already won it (O'Meara 1983:94). Industry-based research had noted that long working hours were 'specifically mentioned' by black workers as a disadvantage of mining for: 'The underground shift is continuous, without a food break, and the time spent underground is long' (Parsons 1977:26, citing Hudson 1954:35). Namibian mineworkers were certainly working twelve hour shifts at this point (Cooper 1999). A 40-hour working week, in a regular working time arrangement, remains to be met even today even though, under the irregular hours (which workers often resist) of continuous operations, a forty-hour week, measured in terms of the 'man-week', is possible and occurs on some platinum and coal mines as has been shown elsewhere (Stewart 2010).

Repeating the Demand for the 40-Hour Working Week

In any event, in line with the Freedom Charter's demand for a 40-hour week and despite the fact that some, largely black women workers beyond the mining sector had won it, in June 1961 the exclusively white male MUJC yet again proposed the 40-hour working week be phased in over five years with no loss of pay. The Chamber again politely refused.

In the following year, 1962, the MUJC repeated the demand for a 40-hour work week, but settled for a full day off for every four weeks (paid occasional leave) for all 'European' employees. The day off, however, would be offset against any future reduction of working hours. Even this minimal concession was, by their own agreement, to be re-absorbed in any future reductions of working time. Again, the importance of the value of the labour time of black African workers would have cast its shadow over negotiations, at least as far as the industry was concerned.

Two years later in August 1964, the demand for the 40-hour working week was again made by the Federation of Mining Unions (FMU), tabled as the introduction of a five-day working week. This time the Chamber took their time to respond and much was to happen within the ranks of organised white labour before they did so.

Having repeated this demand, organised white labour presumably felt they were getting somewhere, or at least the MWU heralded 1964 as the 'year of real successes' for the union. Three out of the six 'successes' relating to working time: 'the five-day week discussions', 'the paid holiday of Republic Day discussions' and 'negotiations on miners' service years' (Sitas 1979:35). The issue of the public holiday, which appears to have drawn their attention away from the Chamber, had meanwhile become a source of tension in the relationship between a number of MWU leaders and the National Party (NP) parliamentary mine-study group. The latter had, it was felt by the trade unionists, not played a sufficiently strong role in securing white workers' interests. One of the MWU's leaderships' concerns related to the parliamentary group's failure to secure Republic Day as a paid holiday for the mining industry for which they had come under considerable pressure by an 'action committee' within the MWU (Visser 2008:180).

The Monthly-paid Experiment

The sense of success within the MWU was consequently to be short lived. In March of 1965, Wessel Visser suggests, a political bomb exploded in the ranks of MWU members. The issue related to how working time was spent underground. The MWU leadership, forever tussling for power as Visser's history all too clearly shows, had, under the leadership of the secretary general, Eddie Gründling, apparently already agreed to a year-long experiment (from August 1964 to June 1965) on twelve mines that would potentially permanently transfer traditionally reserved jobs to black workers, implicating the loss of between 5 000 and 6 000 jobs previously reserved for whites (Wilson 1972:115; Visser 2008:181). The MWU's general secretary Eddie Gründling was nevertheless to declare not much later that he would rather have 9 000 well paid workers in the mines than 16 000 '*wat sterf van die honger*'⁸ (Visser 2008:186).

⁸ Who were dying of hunger.

In the uproar that ensued, even the Minister of Mines at the time, Advocate Jan Haak, denied that he had been fully informed of the implications of the experiment. In the context of already tense relations with the NP parliamentary study group and with the ‘action committee’ continually breathing down the neck of the MWU leadership, Gründling in particular, Visser suggests this issue, which amounted to a major threat to white miners’ jobs, shook the MWU down to its very foundations (Visser 2008:181). The whole affair was to result in not only a political storm, a referendum within the ranks of the MWU and at the MWU’s urging, the appointment in May 1965 of a Commission of Inquiry - *Insake Proefnemings op Sekere Myne*⁹.

The matter went back to 1954 when the MWU general assembly launched an investigation around the possibility of getting poorly remunerated daily-paid white workers onto a more regular and stable monthly-paid basis. The idea mooted was that young men who had not yet been able to source better paid contract work, as well as those too old to perform it any longer, would work 26 shifts a month. The Gold Producers’ Committee of the Chamber was prepared to experiment with putting these daily-paid men on a monthly salary and raise their status by relieving them of certain duties as prescribed in the mining regulations. It appears that daily-paid men at the time were supplementing their income by taking on additional supervisory work by standing in for men on leave or filling vacant posts to the detriment of their health. This can only mean that these men were working inordinately long hours literally dashing around underground attempting to supervise too many gangs of black workers. When this happens the pace of work during working hours is unbearably intense. The envisaged higher monthly wage would enable them to be relieved of having to perform additional duties and jeopardise their health just to make ends meet and instead afford these workers better conditions of leave and a higher pension (Visser 2008: 182-3). At the time the wages of many white workers were on the bread-line and ‘in vele mynwerkersgesinne het daar brood gebrek geheers’¹⁰ (Visser 2008:182).

In exchange for converting daily paid men to being paid monthly, a suitably experienced ‘non-scheduled’ person, i.e a black ‘boss boy’, would be permitted to inspect working areas prior to starting work as black workers in the gangs would, as noted, spend up to an hour or more waiting for the white miner before being permitted to start work (Visser 2008:182). It is clear that at the time ‘Large numbers of man-hours’ were being lost due to black workers having to wait for the white miner (Wilson 1972:115). The ‘boss boy’ would also be permitted to handle explosives. In short, the rules defining the roles and function of the ‘scheduled person’ would be relaxed for the duration of the monthly-paid experiment.

Organised white labour agreed to the experiment as it would protect the overworked daily-paid men. The Chamber, on my account, clearly sought to increase the intensity of work by mopping up the idle labour time of black workers by permitting black boss boys to take over an aspect of white miners’ jobs and ensuring closer supervision. It was further anticipated that ‘*ertsproduksie*

⁹Experiments at certain mines.

¹⁰In many mineworkers’ families a shortage of food reigned – literally ‘a lack of bread’.

*in die myneopgestootsou word*¹¹ (Visser 2008: 182) (my emphasis) in the context of a fixed gold price, rising costs and the shortage of white labour - but which the MWU claimed the Chamber had exaggerated (Visser 2008: 183).

The monthly paid experiment was by far the most serious of the many debacles which ensued over decades within the MWU. This was a struggle over the survival of white workers who were on the bread-line and which turned around the *intensity* of their work - in this instance the key determining factor in the value of their labour power. The idea of these workers becoming monthly-paid was entertained by the industry as the labour time *within* the working day of black mineworkers could be better utilised by eliminating the wasted hours they spent underground. This would hence increase the intensity of the labour of black mineworkers by increasing its expenditure in the same amount of time. This results in *decreasing* the value of their labour power in the interests of *increasing* surplus labour and surplus value, which amounts to the same thing. This ended up becoming a struggle over control of the labour process. Organised white labour as a whole was being required to relinquish an aspect of their racially defined legal right of control over their jobs to enable the daily-paid white workers to share the same 'necessaries of life habitually required by the average' white worker.

The Value of Labour Power

Two things were happening in the monthly paid experiment. Both issues related to the value of labour power of underground mine labour - both black and white. Firstly, in order to realise the value of white labour power - and hence satisfy 'the necessaries of life habitually required by the average [white] labourer', the labour expended by the daily-paid white workers was *above* its 'normal intensity'. Their rate of exploitation - the ratio of their necessary labour (covering their costs of reproduction) to their surplus labour - was therefore higher than that of the monthly paid rate of organised white labour. By agreeing to the monthly-paid experiment, organised white labour was seeking to maintain the value of white labour power by preventing the over-exploitation of the daily-paid men - who had to work at an intensified rate to earn enough to satisfy 'the necessaries of life habitually required by the average [white] labourer'. To do so meant organised white labour had to relinquish their racially privileged control over the labour process.

Secondly, the value of black labour power - not its price i.e. the wage - would be *decreased* by virtue of having to *increase* its 'normal intensity' in the same period of time and hence *increase* the rate of exploitation of black labour as the proportion of necessary labour (that which satisfies the necessaries of life' being the costs of reproduction) would decrease in relation to surplus labour. This is not to say, as Marx makes clear in the second paragraph in Chapter seventeen, that the *price* of the labour power of black workers (in this

¹¹ The production of ore would increase.

instance) has sunk *below* its value when the ratio of necessary to surplus value changes in favour of surplus value. Rather, greater value is created *simpliciter* - by virtue of the increased rate of exploitation.

This analysis arguably explains what happened next in the struggle of organised white labour over working time. For the monthly paid experiment, which caused havoc in the ranks of organised white labour, must have had beneficial effects for mining capital. Clearly emboldened, the Chamber, in the very next month after the completion of the monthly paid experiment in June 1965, finally responded to the FMU's regarding their request made in August 1964 regarding the five-day week. In July 1965, the FMU received the Chamber's rejection regarding the demand for a five-day week: their investigation of the impact of introducing a five-day week revealed an increase in costs and a loss of production. Yet, from previously having rejected the *principle* of a five-day work week outright, the Chamber at this point, however, changed tack. As stated in the Franzsen Commission Report:

... the only possibility for the re-opening of consideration of this matter lay in the acceptance of all the Unions, parties to the industry's 'Closed Shop' agreement, of a *complete re-organisation of work* in the mining industry to offset increased costs and the shortage of labour which would be brought about by the introduction of a five-day week (Franzsen 1977:17) (Emphasis added).

At the behest of the MWU the government commission set up a Commission in May 1965 - *Insake Proefnemings op Sekere Myne* - which reported promptly in August of the same year. In the light of overwhelming negative reaction among white miners to the experiment, the virulent response of the 'action committee' which threatened to split the MWU - and which included a threat by one of its members to establish a Conservative Workers Party to the right of the National Party - and threats of strike action and disruption in the industry, the NP accepted the Commission's findings to discontinue with the experiment (Visser 2008:190).

Once the implications of the 'reorganisation of work' dawned on the FMU (replacing white with black labour) and amidst strikes resulting from the monthly paid experiment disabling full production on seven of the eleven mines on in the Free State, on the 13th September 1965 the FMU sent a letter to the Chamber indicating that 'the time was not opportune to pursue the matter further' (Franzsen 1977:17).

A Longer Working Day?

In preparation for the possible introduction of a five-day working week the Chamber was meanwhile conducting research into the issue of the impact of the length of the underground shift (Morrison *et al* 1965). The research focused on the probable physical effects 'of an extra hour's work on physiological

strain and heat stroke risks' and found that an additional hour's work did *not* adversely affect acclimatised black labourers, but that 'indications are that production during the extra hour's work would be the lowest during the shift' (Morrison *et al* 1965: no page number). The assumption in the research was, of course, that no reduction of hours was anticipated were a five-day week to become a reality, but rather a longer working day Monday to Friday.

With organised white labour still reeling from the fallout from the monthly-paid experiment, strikes still taking place and having been outmanoeuvred by the Chamber, it was the MWU's turn to take a different tack. In the following year in relation to health issues, the MWU put forward the following unusual working time demand: 'a statutory limit of 20 years on a miner's working life' (Sitas 1979:35). This demand was naturally never to be met.

Faced with the demand of organised white labour for reduced working hours - with the racialised construction of the underground workplace powerfully acting as a powerful break on the value of the value of the labour power of African mineworkers - it was then the Chamber's turn, two years later in 1967, to approach the MWU with a new offer to institute a monthly-paid system. Viewed as but a modified form of the original experiment, the MWU rejected the Chamber's advances (Visser 2008:199). The new proposals would have not only cost white mineworkers' and miners' jobs, but effectively demoted half of the 'shift bosses' to ordinary workers and half of all 'mine captains' to the rank of shift boss. White workers would have effectively become supervisors over selected groups of black 'boss boys'¹² (Visser 2008:199-200).

Reorganising Production

The next year, in 1968, organised white labour raised the five-day week issue yet again, as according to Franszen, it was to do 'regularly every year from 1968 onwards by one or other or several of the recognised trade unions (1977:17-18). It appears the Chamber conducted a further investigation, but which revealed the same results - a loss of production. The Chamber was not prepared, given the prevailing economic conditions, with a number of mines closing at the time, to accept the loss of production or the cost of additional labour some mines would require to implement a five-day week. The Chamber reiterated its new stance adopted three years before and again tied their acceptance of the idea of a five-day week to the unions' acceptance of 'a major re-organisation of work practice to improve productivity by the better utilisation of both White and Black labour' (Franzsen 1977:18). Working time issues would henceforth consistently to be tied to the re-organisation of production (See Stewart 2010). If organised white labour wanted time off, they would have to dilute their racially defined objective power in production by supervising larger gangs of African labour.

¹² Currently referred to as 'team leaders'.

The Role of the White Mine Stoper

The gold industry was concerned not only about the effect of reduced working hours of the white miners. It was also concerned about the effect of the absence of the white miner from his regular job in the stopes and its effect on labour productivity. Three years later, in 1971, research by the Chamber of Mines Research Organisation (COMRO) on one mine showed a drop of 40% in production if a miner was 'away' from his stope *even* if he was replaced by another white miner (White 1976:15). The extent of the movement of white stopers from one mine to another, from one stope to another or their absence from his regular working place, translated into a 10% drop in production of the mine overall, to repeat, *even* if the stoper concerned was replaced.

In contrast to much of the received wisdom in the scholarly tradition, (Moodie 1994) that by the 1970s white miners did not in fact do much underground, what this industry-based research shows is, on the contrary, the crucial importance of the white miner, 'deskilled' though he may have been in playing a largely supervisory role, was the impact his regular presence at work in the same stope had on the intensity of work (or lack thereof) of the African mineworkers underground, not only due to having to wait for the white miner at the beginning of the shift, but, even more importantly, *while at work* during the shift. The labour time of the white miner was indissolubly related to the value of black labour power. It is this, much more importantly than the expense of white labour measured in their racially protected high wage structure, which lies at the heart of the industry's rebuffing organised white labour's demands for reduced working hours.

The Working Time Struggle Continues

The white trade unions meanwhile continued their struggle for reduced working hours. As noted, from 1968 to 1974 the issue of a five-day week was raised every year by one or other of the mining unions. Arrie Paulus, now heading a revitalised MWU which had been weakened in the wake of the monthly-paid time experiment under Grundling, raised the issue publicly in 1969 (Visser 2008: 209). In that year, in research conducted by the Chamber of Mines, production shift bosses were presented with nine problems and asked to rank them. While the Chamber's research did not feature the matter of working hours in their list of issues, 'the most frequently mentioned *other* problems were 'long working hours and poor working conditions' (Lawrence 1969:I). The next year, however, the MWU won eventual recognition by the Chamber of their shaft representatives and in 1972 Republic Day was finally recognised as a paid holiday across the mining industry.

Anticipating a longer working day, 1972

Following up on its 1965 research, the COMRO conducted further research on the effect on black mineworkers of a longer working shift in

their anticipation of a possible five day working week. The significance of this industry-based research is the continued assumption that underlies it: no reduction in the number of working hours overall was anticipated. Instead, the *same number of hours* was to be *redistributed* over the working week.

There can little doubt that the research conducted in the early 1970s (Wyndham 1972; Johannes 1974) was due to the agitation of organised white labour and in particular the MWU, who had been campaigning for a five-day working week since 1947. The research paper by CHWyndham, at one time head of the Human Sciences Laboratory of COMRO, entitled: 'The possible effects on productivity and heat stroke risk of a longer working shift' had as its first sentence: 'A longer, daily shift underground in gold mines is likely to follow the introduction of a five-day week in the gold mining industry' (Wyndham 1972: i). COMRO needed to test whether black workers could sustain productivity levels during the longer shifts that would arise if organised white workers won their central working time demand. Investigations hinged over whether the then current production levels achieved in a six-day week could be maintained over five longer working days. For this would impact on the output of black labour and hence implicated the intensity of the application of African mineworkers' labour power. Could the established traditions of mining work representing socially necessary labour time - the average skill of the average worker with other conditions being fixed - be maintained in a longer working day? Only five years later does it appear the industry would realise that maintaining production was not, it would argue, a function of the *number of hours* worked per week, but rather the *number of days* worked. This hinges on the matter of the 'task' orientated character of the 'support, drill and blast' cycle underground and 'lost blasts' in the underground production environment which has received attention elsewhere (See Stewart 2010).

Long Working Hours for Black Labour

Meanwhile, black mineworkers continued to work long hours. It was certainly held that working hours were longer in mining than in secondary industry (Parsons 1977: viii). Not all workers in fact were sure of what the much expected five day working week would bring. Some workers feared that a wage cut would accompany a five-day week (Moodie 1976:19). In 1976 '... the average black mineworker spent just over 10 hours travelling to his working place, working and returning to his hostel' (Allen 2003:35). This is a sixty hour working week. Another source suggests the majority of men were on a shift of nine hours, with a 'substantial portion' of men working a 12hour shift (Horner and Kooy 1980:4). This would make a working week of anything from 57 to 72 hours. Zambian copper miners may similarly have been compelled to work 12-hour or longer shifts at the time (Burawoy 1972:248).

Whether known or unbeknown to the Chamber's researchers, the additional hour in the experiments testing the impact of longer daily working hours still *fell short of the actual working hours* of the black mineworkers

being tested. Not only did the COMRO research take the legally prescribed number of hours as the norm in their research, but the hidden assumption remained that the industry did not anticipate that the five-day work week would involve an overall reduction in working hours.

The Erosion of Racialised Control over Production

In the year to follow, in 1973, the South African Engine Drivers' & Firemen's Association sold off their racialised control over their jobs by permitting black workers to operate locomotives underground in exchange for elevation to the status of 'mine official' and higher salaries, worrying Paulus in the process (Visser 2008:209). For by gaining control over this segment of the labour market by way of having offered a racialised privilege in exchange for their control over the labour process, mining capital succeeded in narrowing the gap between the value of black and white labour power of an echelon of black workers, while cutting at the membership base of the racially exclusive MWU. Given the disparity between the value of white and black labour power in the racialised South African context, by employing black loco drivers (working at considerably lower rates of pay than white loco drivers, but higher than black labourers) this would have more than offset the costs of the higher salaries and higher value of labour power (by virtue of additional training) of the racialised 'promotion' of the newly 'elevated', white MWU workers to 'mine official' status. White hoist operators and reduction workers followed suit by forming the Technical Officials Association. The acceptance by these white workers, of the status as mine officials in the industry who were not permitted to strike, considerably weakened organised white labour, reducing overall membership to 16435 of which 7738 were blasting certificate holder members of the MWU. For Paulus, the new status of 'mine official' was simply the way in which the Chamber was eroding the united power of organised white labour in their bid to dismantle job reservation and the struggle for higher wages and against which he vehemently railed (Visser 2008:209). From this point the MWU would effectively stand alone in organised white labour's struggle against the Chamber.

The broader social context within which this development took place is important. Enormous social and political upheaval and underlying economic distress characterised the early 1970s, both at home and across the borders of South Africa. The Namibian contract workers went out on strike in 1971, breaking the quiescence of black labour the 1960s. The 'mine wages explosion' took off in this year and into the next (Wilson 1976:15). The Durban strikes of 1972 and 1973 gave birth to the independent trade union movement. Violent compound confrontations broke out and lasted for 32 months leaving 172 men dead. Figures and 'an appraisal of events' pointed to an era ended (Wilson 1972). That the five-day week seemed a real prospect at the time is reflected in the government's *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee of Inquiry into Riots on Mines in the Republic of South Africa* which curiously did not want

‘to deny the Black worker his five-day week, for he works long and heavy shifts and, after all, earns his weekend recreation’ (Cited in Horner and Kooy 1980:15).

The withdrawal of 130 000 Malawian mineworkers in April 1974 would further shock the Chamber and could not have been far from mind when in May 1974, when the issue of long working hours and the five-day week was raised for the umpteenth time, an ‘exploratory’ committee was finally formed with discussions on ‘changed work practices aimed at reducing anticipated production losses’ in the event that a five-day work week was introduced (Franszen 1977:18). A series of counter-proposals by the unions were not deemed acceptable by the Chamber, whereupon the MWU in January 1975 formally demanded a five-day week with no changes in work practice. Discussions continued, the Chamber calculating the loss of production of a five-day week, based on the MWU’s proposals to be between 8,5% and 9%, a loss the industry asserted it could not absorb (Franszen 1977:18) despite a rise in the price of gold from just under R1 000 per kilogram in 1972 to over R3 000 per kilogram in 1974 (Mac Murray 1978:7). While both ‘mining costs per ton milled’ and ‘costs per kilogram of gold produced’ had been rising, these did not cancel out the gains of the increased price as the ‘working profit per ton milled’ had tracked the increased gold price almost perfectly (see MacMurray 1978:811).

The Threat of Strike Action over Working Hours

In a letter to the Chamber dated the 16th May 1975, the MWU formally demanded a five-day working week, without any concessions being granted on its part, to be instituted as from 2nd June, ‘failing which application would be made for the establishment of a Conciliation Board to settle the matter’ (Franszen 1977:18). To back up the demand - a clear sign of the tactics of Arrie Paulus for which he achieved as greater fame on the mines as he did notoriety in the public eye - the MWU achieved a positive ballot tally of 88,72% of its members voting in favour of strike action (Visser 2008:209). The Board was established but discussions with the Minister of Mines, SP Botha continued.

With organised white labour effectively weakened and negotiating separately with the Chamber, dissatisfied with the slow progress on this matter, the Council of Mining Unions (CMU), of which the MWU was officially a member, had requested separate negotiations on the issue. Despite the division between the artisans and miners, organised white labour was now, after almost three decades, tightening the screws in their generation-long struggle over their working hours. But as before, the CMU and the Chamber unable to reach agreement, a second Conciliation Board was established and set down for the 24th September 1975.

A Five-day Work Week

Meanwhile agreement between the MWU and the Chamber in the long, drawn-out discussions on the Monday to Friday five-day week, Franzsen reports, was finally reached. The terms were set out by the Chamber in an eight-page letter dated 24 November 1975. Agreement on the five-day working week, it appeared, had finally been struck. The agreement was, however, not straight forward. The MWU was forced to agree and recognise that the mining industry was ‘a seven-day-a-week industry where certain operations go on 24 hours a day’ (Franszen 1977:133) and that some workers would have to work six days a week - including Sunday. Rock breakers and general miners would be considered five-day-a-week, Monday to Friday workers, but management remained entitled to arrange shift to suit production requirements, but Saturdays would (after the first six months after the adjustments to the new shift arrangements had been made) be voluntary and be paid at overtime rates. Shaft sinkers, banksmen and onsetters and some development crews would be regarded as six-days-a-week workers, while dumpsmen, fuse igniters and shaft timbermen would also be five-day-a-week workers - but who would be paid overtime for Saturday and Sunday shifts. The most important aspects of the agreement resulted in the 12 days of occasional leave (paid occasional leave) being withdrawn, normal working hours would be reduced from 48 to 46 hours¹³ ‘bank to bank’, the working day in a five-day week would be of longer duration at 9 hours 12 minutes and 8 hours on Saturday. The upshot of this and a range of complex arrangements was importantly, however, that the 48-hour week was to remain unchanged. The MWU had won a five-day working week, but *without* a reduction in working hours! A similar letter went out to the white workers’ trade unions in the coal mining sector. Both letters, however, required the approval of the Government Mining Engineer.

Impatient to implement their agreement, early in 1976 the MWU had formally demanded the introduction of the five-day work week by 3 May 1976, failing which application would be made for *a further* Conciliation Board. This board was duly established and was set down, by a strange twist of fate, for the day Soweto was to explode in an uprising of the school-going youth and signal the beginning of the end of apartheid: 16 June 1976.

Increasing the Value of Black Labour Power

In what turned out to be the critical turning point for relations between capital and white labour amid the continuing social and political turmoil in the mid-1970s, the Chamber, in addition to its stance regarding ‘the total re-organisation of production’, indicated that it required certain concessions from organised white

¹³ What is significant is that if one assumes an 8-hour day in a 49-week year and that all white workers took the 12 additional days leave which then fell away in this agreement, this releases 96 hours a year per worker which claws back the 98 hours a year resulting from the reduction in hours from 48 to 46 a week.

labour regarding additional duties to be performed by black ‘artisan aides’ in order to offset increased costs and production losses. Black artisan aide training had started in earnest the year before, opening up new opportunities for job advancement and enhancing the occupational status of black mineworkers, thereby creating a new intra-working class occupational differentiation among black workers and threatening the livelihoods of the white artisans (MacMurray 1978:22). This new development struck directly at the racialised social relations attending the organisation of work underground. The value of the labourpower of black workers was the central issue. This related to introducing a measure of artisanal skills and training into the black mining working class. For Marx, of course, one of the factors in ‘the determination of the value of labour power’... ‘are the expenses of developing that power’, namely skills development and training. The gap in the value of white and black labour power was finally starting to narrow.

The Artisan Unions in the Council described the industry’s proposals as ‘suicidal sacrifices’, whereupon they withdrew from the Conciliation Board on the 23rd June 1976 and withdrew their demand for a five-day working week until ‘a more propitious moment’ (Franzsen 1977:21). The MWU had already withdrawn from this Board on the 4th June.

(At the same time as this was all taking place with organised white labour, the industry was seeking to improve the ‘efficiency’ of African labour by increasing contract length and reducing turnover (Davies & Head 1995:4), a full account of which has been written (See Stewart 2012). Taken together, the changes in industrial working hours and the increasing length of the migrant labour contract signalled that labour time, as before in the record, remained closely tied to the racialised social form exploitation assumed both in the organisation of production underground and through the institution of the migrant labour contract.)

What must be clearly understood at this point is the significance of the unexpected withdrawal of the CMU and the artisan unions from the Conciliation Board on the 23rd June 1976. The point is that the tortuous five-day work week agreement finally negotiated between the Chamber and the MWU *had to be accepted* by other trade unions representing organised white labour. From that point on, now effectively divided, the MWU continued to press ahead without the artisan unions for the *implementation* of their 24th November 1975 agreement with the Chamber. The first meeting date set for the 16th June Conciliation Board only took place on the 15th July when the Chamber then backtracked, indicating that:

... it had never visualised a situation where a major proportion of the union men would opt to continue on a six-day week as at present while members of the MWU worked a five-day week and that this created problems of such magnitude that the industry could not agree to the introduction of a five day week on those terms (Franzsen 1977:21).

The Chamber cited the clause that ‘agreement with other mine employee organisations’, a condition of the 24th November agreement, had not been secured. It was thus that part of the white working-class Davies (1979) is rightly accused of ignoring (Richardson and van Helten 1982:84) - namely the skilled artisan unions - who broke ranks in this generation-long struggle

The meeting deadlocked with the MWU the next day taking a strike ballot and later announcing that ‘a majority of its members were in favour of striking in support of a five-day week’ (Franszen 1977:22). This resulted in the establishment of the Franzsen Commission on the 5th August 1976, a direct result of the Prime Minister having promised its establishment on condition the MWU withdrew their option to go on strike over their demand for the five-day week.

The Franzsen Commission: 1977-1978

In 1978, after over 30 years of campaigning for a five-day week, the MWU miners’ union and other artisan unions finally permanently settled for the industrial working time arrangement of the Eleven Shift Fortnight (ESF) (Visser 2008:211) in the wake of the Franzsen Commission. The ESF is a five-and-a-half-day work week, with two Saturdays worked every month. This changed the arrangement of hours of the working week, but did not reduce the number of hours worked. This was a compromise between mining capital’s preference for maintaining the six-day week¹⁴ and the five-day week preferred by organised white labour. This shift system was to become something of an industry standard.

Having been a member of the Commission and having failed to secure the five-day week, the General Secretary of the MWU, Arrie Paulus, rejected the eventual outcome and was criticised in trade union circles regarding the strategy the MWU adopted in this struggle. Its introduction was the cause of ‘bitter dispute’ between the Chamber of Mines and the MWU (de Vletter 1981:112). In short, the Commission found that the eleven-shift fortnight was as far as the industry could go to accommodate the aspirations of white mineworkers, with no reduction in working hours (Lewis 2001:14). The Commission considered that the industry move ‘at some point in the future’ to the shorter working hours of the five-day week, but which has been largely ignored in the industry (Lewis 2001:14). To this end, the Chamber, as ever, had conducted its own investigations. The broader social context must surely have framed the deliberations of those whose job it was to prepare the report to the Commission. It had been established that ‘Bank to bank time appears to be an area of growing concern among Black mineworkers.’ The possible strategies for improving this situation amounted to re-evaluating hoisting procedures and providing ‘some compensatory reward’, but ‘not necessarily monetary’, despite the fact that workers expected overtime pay for time spent at work ‘in excess of

¹⁴ The industry would really have preferred ‘rostering’, i.e. continuous work schedules, despite acknowledging the ‘onerous’ administration such arrangements require (Chamber of Mines 1978).

the normal shift' (Parsons 1977: 26, 54). There was no mention in the Chamber's investigation of the possibility of reduced working hours.

Conclusion

The historical evidence is conclusive that the gold mining industry consistently denied organised white labour reduced working hours, despite their various requests, appeals and demands for the period under review. What is also clear is the reason for rebuffing the temporal demands of organised white labour: reducing their hours would also reduce the working time of disenfranchised and unorganised black African mineworkers. With a differential racialised value of labour power, measured in terms of the labour time both sets of workers spent at the rock face in exchange for these two different sets of costs required for the reproduction of their families, the gold mining industry could not afford to reduce the hours of privileged white labour as increasing the value of their labour time would also have increased the value of the labour time of black workers.

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