1   Privileged race, precarious class
White labour from the mineral revolution to the Golden Age

In 1973, *Washington Post* journalist Jim Hoagland published a reportage on the current state of South African society, tracing how apartheid ideology facilitated the exploitation of black labour in the service of white economic prosperity and foreign capital. In his book, Hoagland recounted his observation of a typical work process in the industry that formed the backbone of the South African economy – gold mining:

Willie, the white miner, crouched inside a four-foot high pit, or stope as it is called by the miners. He had already marked the face of the rock wall for drilling. A black labourer, known to the company not by name but by an identity number, sat on the floor of the pit, his arms and legs wrapped around a jack-hammer drill. As Willie dropped his hand as a signal, the black labourer started to drill. At the end of the eight hour shift, Willie would insert explosive charges into the hundred holes being drilled in the rock face, and the blasting apart of the gold and ore would begin. Willie … earned about R300 a month. The black labourer (technically miner is a rank that only whites can hold in South Africa) made R20 a month. The work they did is not all that different, a mining supervisor … conceded in response to a question. Then why the large gap in pay? 'Because Willie's skin is white', the (supervisor) replied matter-of-factly. 'It is the most valuable commodity you can have in South Africa. It is more valuable than this yellow stuff we blast out of the earth.'[1]

Although racially discriminatory practices and patterns of exploitation had long characterised life in Southern Africa, the mineral revolution of the second half of the nineteenth century and the resultant development of industrial capitalism were definitive in shaping the political, economic, and social order of modern South Africa. The economy's dependence on the availability of a large and exploitable labour force meant that issues of labour were always entangled with issues of race. This emerges with

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[1] J. Hoagland, *South Africa: civilisations in conflict* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1973), pp. 196–7, quoted in R. Davies, 'The white working-class in South Africa', *New Left Review* 82 (November–December 1973), p. 51.

Figure 1.1 Underground drilling in a gold mine on the East
Rand, 1972.
Source: Chamber of Mines Annual Report, 1972

particular clarity in the position, politics, and subjectivities of white workers.

While the early decades of the twentieth century witnessed instances of fierce white working-class resistance to the interests of capital, by the interwar period white workers are understood by scholars to have entered a class compromise with the racial state and capital at the expense of black labour. This rendered them a 'labour aristocracy', enjoying the benefits of legislative race-based job reservation, inflated wages, and social security in exchange for political and industrial acquiescence. The concept of a labour aristocracy had its origins in mid- to late-nineteenth-century Britain. It sought to explain the appearance of a 'highly-skilled and (consequently) strongly-unionised stratum of the working class that was economically, socially and politically allied to the middle class of the time' and distinguish them from the true proletariat. Friedrich Engels scoffed at how such 'aristocrats of labour' were eager to perform their 'bourgeois respectability' in service of this alliance.[2] Later, in the context of the First World War, Lenin extended the notion to explain the nationalist and reformist character of European labour movements. He saw European workers as a 'privileged upper stratum of the proletariat in the imperialist countries [which] lives partly at the expense of hundreds of millions of members of uncivilised nations'. Lenin further pointed to the co-optation of union leaders and representatives into state-based structures, leading to their mollification as they come to share in the privileges and perquisites of power. The term was therefore deployed to explain the conservatism evident either within certain sections of a working class, or of a working class as a whole. The 1960s and 1970s saw it taken up by socialist historians in the United States and United Kingdom to explain dynamics within their respective organised labour movements at the time.[3]

During the same period, Africanists observing the unfolding of decolonisation on the continent adopted the term in an effort to explain why regularly employed, organised African workers seemed to play an important role in the liberation struggles of their countries, yet after independence fell in with ruling elites. In contrast to the Western industrialised context in which the notion of a labour aristocracy was

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[2] P. Waterman, 'The "labour aristocracy" in Africa: introduction to a debate', *Development and Change* 6, no. 3 (1975), p. 57, 58.

[3] Waterman, 'The "labour aristocracy" in Africa', p. 58. See, for instance, E. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men: studies in the history of labour* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964); G. Stedman Jones, 'Class struggle and the industrial revolution', *New Left Review* 90 (1975), pp. 35–69. Also E. J. Hobsbawm, 'Artisan or labour aristocrat?', *Economic History Review* 37, no. 3 (1984), pp. 355–72.

developed, most of the African labouring population worked in farming or in the informal economy. Urban wage earners and union officials formed but a small section of the workforce, most often employed in large capital-intensive foreign-owned industry or in the state sector. Scholars such as Giovanni Arrighi and John Saul regarded them as a privileged stratum. Invested in the political and economic status quo, these workers aligned their interests with those of international capital and local elites, rather than with migrant workers and peasants.[4] Such arguments were later criticised for taking too homogeneous a view of Africa's industrial working class when empirical studies revealed much more complexity and ambiguity in the conditions, values, status, and power of workers and their organisations vis-à-vis the state and other workers in different countries over time.[5]

Reflecting on the prospect of a workers' revolution in apartheid-era South Africa, leftist scholars invoked the labour aristocracy thesis to explain why white workers were unlikely to support such action. Robert Davies highlighted how white workers enjoyed high incomes and privileged employment opportunities, resulting in elevated status, in exchange for their support for the racial state and the interests of capital. This, he argued, meant that white workers participated in the exploitation of the black majority through the extraction of surplus value. In this way, they were bound in an alliance with the bourgeoisie that simultaneously detached them from the bulk of South Africa's proletariat. Davies, writing, like Hoagland, in 1973, concluded that since 'the white working class is a strategically necessary support for the settler bourgeoisie, the likelihood that the latter would sacrifice the former *en bloc* … is minimal'.[6] Without white workers, the settler bourgeois state 'would be reduced to a relative handful of exploiters incapable of resisting the onset of indigenous black revolt, as elsewhere in the continent'.[7]

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[4] G. Arrighi and J. S. Saul, *Essays on the Political Economy of Africa* (New York NY: Monthly Review Press, 1963); P. Werbner, 'Rethinking class and culture in Africa: between E. P. Thompson and Pierre Bourdieu', *Review of African Political Economy* 45, no. 155 (2017), p. 9.

[5] Waterman, 'The "labour aristocracy" in Africa', p. 63.

[6] Davies, 'The white working-class in South Africa', 56.

[7] Editors, 'Introduction', *New Left Review* 82 (November–December 1973), p. 38. Critique followed that, because white workers were mainly supervisors, they were not a labour aristocracy but a 'nonworking class'. H. Simson, 'The myth of the white working class in South Africa', *African Affairs* 4, no. 2 (1974), pp. 189–203; H. Wolpe, 'The "white working class" in South Africa', *Economy and Society* 5, no. 2 (1976), pp. 197–240. Davies later designated white workers in supervisory work as part of a 'new middle class', because they performed a function of capital. But those who still did actual productive labour, he maintained, were actual workers, albeit very privileged ones, and

Yet, as Hoagland's sketch reveals, the basis of the material and social privilege possessed by white workers such as Willie was paper thin. This chapter presents the structural and subjective formation of the white working class in the context of South Africa's industrial and political development since the late nineteenth century. In so doing, it argues for a reinterpretation of the nature of white working-class privilege. It shows that, rather than a labour aristocracy, white workers represented a privileged precariat – benefiting from the advantages bestowed by their white skin, but remaining precariously dependent on state benevolence to protect them from black labour competition. The members of the whites-only Mineworkers' Union, to which Willie undoubtedly belonged, exemplified this position of labour vulnerability concealed by race-based status. With this argument, the chapter lays the foundation for this book's assertion that the shape and legacy of white working-class formation are crucial for understanding white workers' responses to reform efforts from the 1970s onwards, and to the dismantling of the racial state from the 1990s.

The mineral revolution and the making of South Africa's racial order

From its inception in the mid-nineteenth century, the social landscape of mining was highly mobile and cosmopolitan and was shaped by the demands of its industry. The diamond fields of Kimberley and, later, the promise of gold on the Witwatersrand attracted hundreds of local and foreign fortune seekers. The capital-intensive nature of excavating the mineral deposits soon saw individual enterprisers displaced by larger companies. On the Rand, the first shaft was sunk in 1888, and by 1895 some 130 producing and working companies were in operation, controlled by some eight mining houses. These were dominated by European, mostly British and German, entrepreneurs and financiers who, from 1889, organised in Johannesburg as the Chamber of Mines. A 'unifying and cost-conscious institution',[8] the Chamber saw to the coordination of the various companies' labour and wage strategies in order to maximise profits. It also represented the industry's interests to

hence labour aristocrats. R. Davies, 'Mining capital, the state and unskilled white workers in South Africa, 1901–1913', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 3, no. 1 (1976), pp. 41–69. See also criticism of the 'labour aristocracy' concept in Lewis, *Industrialisation and Trade Union Organisation*, pp. 17–18; Greenberg, *Race and State*, pp. 276–7.

[8] N. Levy, *The Foundations of the South African Cheap Labour System* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 28.

the state. Under the watchful eye and shrewd direction of the mining magnates, South Africa was producing a quarter of the world's gold supply by 1899.[9]

The chemical processes and machinery required for deep-level gold mining demanded substantial capital investment and a vast amount of manpower possessing a certain skills base. Skilled tasks such as blasting and surveying were initially performed by professional miners, drawn primarily from the mining regions of Britain and Australia. These men were persuaded to brave the dangerous working conditions and high cost of living characterising early South African mining life in exchange for high wages.[10] But the bulk of mining operations, constituting the daily drudge of shovelling tons of broken ore into skips for transportation to the surface and hand-drilling holes for the placement of dynamite, was performed by an army of African migrants from across the Southern African region.[11] Hailing from as close as the Basotho mountain kingdom to as far as present-day Tanzania, these men were typically recruited to the Rand on six- or nine-month contracts. By 1892, 25,000 were working the goldmines of the Witwatersrand, a figure that would soar to 200,000 by 1910.[12]

Gold mining on the Rand functioned within a set of structural economic conditions which would render labour a site of enduring struggle. High production costs, together with the price of gold being fixed internationally for extended periods of time, made minimising the cost of labour a central priority for mining companies.[13] The migrant labour system developed in direct response to the mines' insatiable demand for large numbers of cheap workers. The system allowed mining companies to drive down labour costs by calculating workers' wages around the level of subsistence required for a single individual, rather than a worker with a family of dependants. This allowed mining companies to effectively externalise the cost of social welfare and labour reproduction to

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[9] R. Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 65; Van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh*, p. 1, 4, 12–13.

[10] S. Marks, 'Class, culture, and consciousness in South Africa, 1880–1899' in Ross et al., *The Cambridge History of South Africa*, pp. 125–6, 132, 136.

[11] A. H. Jeeves, *Migrant Labour in South Africa's Mining Economy: the struggle for the gold mines' labour supply, 1890–1920* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1985), p. 23.

[12] T. D. Moodie with V. Ndatshe, *Going for Gold: men, mines and migration* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1975), p. 1, 7; J. Crush, A. Jeeves, and D. Yudelman, *South Africa's Labor Empire: a history of black migrancy to the gold mines* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1991), p. 104.

[13] Jeeves, *Migrant Labour in South Africa's Mining Economy*, pp. 6–9; Levy, *The Foundations*, pp. 8–9, 16.

Figure 1.2 White and black mineworkers of the Witwatersrand in the early 1900s.
Source: Patrick Pearson collection of photographs, Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

communities in the reserves, facilitating the exploitation of not only the wage earners' own labour, but also that of their rural kin.[14] In contrast to the mines of Katanga and the Copperbelt, moreover, most minework on the Rand did not require a skilled workforce. The unskilled nature of the work therefore rendered migrant labour more appealing than the expenses involved in sustaining settled labour communities.[15] Only in the 1970s would the makeup of mining's black labour force shift away from foreign peasant labour towards local, proletarianised workers.[16]

The economic imperative of a cheap and docile workforce, in combination with ideologies of racial superiority prevalent among local and foreign whites, served to justify not only this large-scale exploitation but also the authoritarian control of African workers. Black male migrants were housed in compounds for the duration of their contracts,

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[14] M. Burawoy, 'The functions of migrant labour: comparative material from Southern Africa and the United States', *American Journal of Sociology* 81 (1976), pp. 1050–87; H. Wolpe, 'Capitalism and cheap labour power in South Africa: from segregation to apartheid', *Economy and Society* 1, no. 4 (1972), pp. 425–6.
[15] Levy, *The Foundations*, p. 29.   [16] Moodie, *Going for Gold*, pp. 4–5, 40–2.

their movements closely monitored by compound police. Scope for similar control of white workers was politically more limited and constrained by European miners' experience of labour organisation against the interests of capital. By the first decade of the twentieth century, white miners with families earned 10 shillings per shift, while black migrants earned a maximum daily wage of 3 shillings.[17] Such divergent treatment served to reinforce existing social distance and racial prejudices. In time, mining's racialised patterns of labour were copied throughout the evolving South African economy.[18]

While the diamond fields were administered by the British-ruled Cape Colony, the rich goldfields of Witwatersrand lay within the jurisdiction of the overwhelmingly agricultural Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek or Transvaal, under Paul Kruger. The Transvaal's defeat in the South African War (1899–1902) brought it under British rule, and legislative apparatuses were utilised to secure the mining industry's interests, not least where the supply and control of African labour was concerned.[19] When the Transvaal was granted self-government in 1907 under an Afrikaner-led administration, mining concerns remained hugely influential. The new government under Boer Generals Botha and Smuts courted both mining magnates and white workers, presenting itself as representing the interests of both English-speaking and Afrikaner whites.[20] Such conciliatory sentiments, in the context of shifting European realpolitik and waning British imperial power, underlay the merger of the Transvaal with the Cape, Natal and Orange River colonies to form the Union of South Africa in 1910. During constitutional negotiations, Smuts categorically rejected proposals for extending the Cape Colony's qualified non-racial franchise throughout the new Union, since this would unsettle the racial order, with lower classes of whites losing the vote to a handful of educated and prosperous blacks. The establishment of the new dominion on the basis of exclusive white citizenship thus saw the racial stratification of the mining economy mirrored in political arrangements, as power was consolidated at the expense of non-Europeans, similar to arrangements

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[17] Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa*, pp. 61–3, 70–2; Marks, 'Class, culture, and consciousness', p. 132, 143; H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: biography of a people* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2011), p. 324.

[18] Jeeves, *Migrant Labour in South Africa's Mining Economy*, pp. 5–6.

[19] Marks, 'Class, culture, and consciousness', p. 107; Van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh*, pp. 27–42.

[20] S. Marks, 'War and union, 1899–1910' in Ross et al., *The Cambridge History of South Africa*, pp. 180–1, 188–9.

in other assertive 'white man's countries' such as Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.[21]

Structural insecurity and white working-class subjectivities

Yet in the early twentieth century, a 'white man's state' did not automatically translate into security for white workers. Studying white working-class demands and identities in early industrialising South Africa, Frederick Johnstone identified white workers' condition of extreme 'structural insecurity'. The exploitation and economic vulnerability suffered by African migrant workers, Johnstone argued, were partly ameliorated by the fact that they remained embedded in peasant economies and relationships. In the event of unemployment, they could return to the impoverished yet persevering rural communities of their places of origin, rather than face desolation in the cities.[22] In contrast, white workers were completely dependent on waged work. With no rural fallback, unemployment would relegate whites 'to the margins of a capitalist society where charity was in short supply and social contempt abundant'.[23] While Johnstone's assessment underestimated the degree of exploitation suffered by Africans, he correctly identified the manner in which the presence of a large and exploitable black labour force aggravated white proletarian insecurity. With mining interests 'dominat[ing] the state, the compound system, labour migrancy and pass laws ensured that black labour was both cheaper and more easily controlled than its white counterpart and that capital had every incentive to substitute it for white'.[24]

This perpetual threat of displacement would animate conflicts between white workers, capital, and the state in the first two decades of the century, as white workers pressed for a colour bar which would protect their jobs from black encroachment. In the Transvaal, underground blasting was reserved for white workers as early as 1893. In 1902, workers organised to form the Transvaal Miners' Association (TMA) – later renamed the Mineworkers' Union – to represent white miners' demands for race-based protection to employers and the state. The union reflected the socialist labour politics of the British craft union tradition, and the first trade union leaders were overwhelmingly of British or Australian

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[21] Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, pp. 210–37.
[22] Johnstone, *Class, Race and Gold*, pp. 57–9, 64–82, 145–50.
[23] Krikler, *The Rand Revolt*, p. 32.
[24] Marks, 'Class, culture, and consciousness', p. 133.

origin.[25] In addition to organisational experience, these workers brought an ideology of 'white labourism' to the Rand, which meshed with local racist views. Jonathan Hyslop has argued that white labourism's synthesis of hostility to capitalist exploitation, racist visions, and white workers' 'aspiration to incorporation into the dominant racial structure' was an important source of working-class racism across the early twentieth-century British Empire and animated much of the radical labour militancy characterising this era.[26]

The Rand's white workers instigated strikes in 1907, 1913, and 1914. Various factors brought on these industrial conflicts, including efforts by the Chamber of Mines to enforce tougher work regimes, mine managers' refusal to recognise unions, and the terrifying death rate among underground workers caused by silicosis. Yet the threat of encroachment by cheaper African (or, briefly, Asian) labour shot through each upheaval.[27] White workers articulated their demands in terms of racial identity, insisting that their interests as members of the ruling race be safeguarded. The 1907 strikers framed the upholding of their demands as a necessity for preserving 'white civilisation' in the Republic.[28] The 1913 dispute saw white workers protest not only against the perceived despotism of mine management but also against state suppression, as the strike saw basic civil liberties curbed in an effort to quash the workers' movement.[29] Reflecting the bitter sense of rightlessness prevalent among organised labour, the South African Labour Party admonished the country to treat white workers 'not with the intolerance by a "baas to a boy" but as a man and a citizen whose right to life, liberty and competence, is as important as his "master's"'.[30] During all three strikes, the government intervened in favour of employers, deploying the police and armed forces against the strikers.

At the same time, the state did adopt race-based labour policies. In 1911, the Mines and Works Act was promulgated to regulate the working

[25] J. Hyslop, 'The British and Australian leaders of the South African labour movement, 1902–1914: a group biography' in K. Darian-Smith, P. Grimshaw, and S. Macintyre (eds), *Britishness Abroad: transnational movements and imperial cultures* (Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2007), pp. 90–108.

[26] Hyslop, 'The imperial working class', p. 418.

[27] Hyslop, 'The imperial working class', p. 404; Krikler, *The Rand Revolt*, pp. 35–8; E. Katz, *The White Death: silicosis on the Witwatersrand gold mines, 1886–1910* (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Press, 1994); E. Katz, *A Trade Union Aristocracy: a history of white workers in the Transvaal and the general strike of 1913* (Johannesburg: African Studies Institute, 1976).

[28] Krikler, *The Rand Revolt*, p. 36.

[29] Hyslop, 'The imperial working class', pp. 398–9, 404–5.

[30] *Worker*, 10 July 1913, quoted in E. Katz, 'White workers' grievances and the industrial colour bar, 1902–1913', *South African Journal of Economics* 42, no. 2 (1974), p. 144.
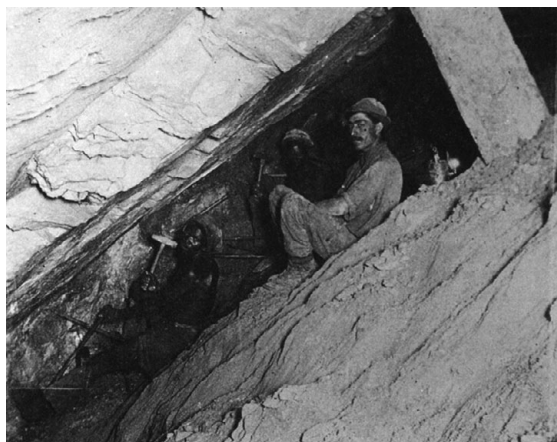
Figure 1.3 Hand hammer stoping in Crown Deep mine in the 1900s.
Source: Barloworld Rand Mines Archive at Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

of mines across the new Union, and effectively extended the Transvaal's race-based restrictions across the country. After the First World War, the number of job categories officially reserved for whites were further extended.[31] The adoption of these policies amid conflict between white labour and capital demonstrate that the colour bar cannot be attributed to white workers alone. State mining engineers, convinced that only whites could maintain safety underground; the white-ruled state, wary of the political consequences of alienating white workers; and the Chamber of Mines, eager to impede cross-racial working-class action – these all played their part in entrenching a racial division of labour.[32]

As long as foreign miners retained their monopoly on skills, the threat of displacement was held at bay. But as early as 1901, the ever declining grade of ore saw mine owners introduce a number of technological innovations in order to expand production. These served to erode the skills of professional miners. In a pattern that would contribute to the industrial conflict of this period, the fragmentation of skilled trades into component parts that were subsequently redistributed to lesser-skilled,

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[31] Visser, *Van MWU tot Solidariteit*, pp. 5–6; C. F. Feinstein, *An Economic History of South Africa: conquest, discrimination and development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 74–7.
[32] Krikler, *The Rand Revolt*, pp. 32–4; E. N. Katz, 'Revisiting the origins of the industrial colour bar in the Witwatersrand gold mining industry, 1891–1899', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 25, no. 1 (1999), pp. 73–97.

often black workers saw whites rapidly become predominantly super-visors in the production process – although their skills remained import-ant in directing operations and training the ever changing black migrant labour force over which they presided. In addition to the eroding effects of technological advances, white workers were keenly aware that skills could be learned – not only by the black workers alongside whom they worked, but also by untrained whites entering the industry. Economic depression and war around the turn of the century saw an influx of impoverished, mainly Afrikaans-speaking whites into the urban econ-omy.[33] The racial attitudes of this newly urbanised proletariat reflected the racialised master–servant relations of their agrarian colonial roots. Many found employment in mining, especially after the defeat of the 1907 strike saw mine owners rush to replace militant immigrant miners. As the erosion of skilled work rendered the distinctions between skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled work ever more ambiguous, it was possible for new white miners to obtain blasting certificates – qualifications of competency authorising them to handle dynamite – after only nine months' training. This allowed them to work as blasters alongside pro-fessional miners from abroad. Meanwhile, unskilled whites were also appointed to perform supervisory work, overseeing unskilled aspects of the production process performed by Africans. By 1913, these develop-ments had effectively rendered the craft unionism of the TMA obsolete. As the ranks of immigrant and local miners increasingly merged, the TMA transitioned from an artisan union to an industrial union.[34]

White working-class anger and anxieties regarding displacement came to a head in the wake of the First World War. The ensuing events of 1922 warrant detailed discussion – not only as a backdrop to the histor-ical formation of the white working class, but also in relation to my interpretation of the politics of labour in the 1970s, addressed in Chapters 2 and 3. To South African historians, the 1920s and 1970s may seem like entirely different eras meriting very different treatment. However, chronologically, they are not far apart – the upheaval of 1922 was within living memory in the 1970s. Today, it is commonplace

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[33] On Afrikaner impoverishment on the land and subsequent proletarianisation, see Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, pp. 320–5.

[34] P. Bonner, 'South African society and culture, 1910–1948' in Ross et al., *The Cambridge History of South Africa*, pp. 264–7; Van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh*, pp. 27–9; Visser, *Van MWU tot Solidariteit*, pp. 2–3, 6; Krikler, *The Rand Revolt*, p. 22, 24–6; Katz, *The White Death*, p. 40, 47–73; D. Yudelman, *The Emergence of Modern South Africa: state, capital and the incorporation of organized labour on the South African goldfields, 1902–1939* (London: Greenwood, 1983), p. 128.

for scholars to argue – as I do – that events of the 1970s such as the oil shock, the election of Reagan and Thatcher, and the ascendance of neoliberal economic ideology are crucial for understanding developments in the 2010s. These are as distant from us today as the events of 1922 were in the 1970s, but this does not make them any less pertinent.[35] Indeed, as Chapter 6 will show, 1922 continues to figure prominently for the MWU in its contemporary guise as the Solidarity Movement.

With many foreign miners enlisting in the armed forces, Afrikaners formed the majority of white miners in underground jobs by 1918. In December 1921, in the context of soaring post-war inflation, the Chamber of Mines announced its intention to replace some 2,000 white miners in semi-skilled work with cheaper black labour. The broader white mining labour force feared that it was simply a matter of time before they faced the same fate. Already battling rising living costs and now facing unemployment, they reacted with outrage. In January 1922, a major strike broke out in the gold and coal mines, soon backed by a general strike throughout the Transvaal. The strike turned into an armed rebellion, as 22,000 workers – the majority of them Afrikaners – challenged the power of mine owners and the legitimacy of the South African state that supported them. This revolutionary challenge took two main forms: on the one hand, many workers saw the strike as a revolt against British imperialism and, organising in commandos reminiscent of Boer tactics during the South African War, sought the formation of an independent republic. On the other hand, communist revolutionaries saw the strike as an opportunity to overthrow the capitalist order. These various expressions reflected the enmeshment of race and class militancy in the white labour movement, most dramatically demonstrated by the most infamous symbol of the 1922 rising: the strikers' banner reading 'Workers of the world unite and fight for a white South Africa'.

The strike reached its revolutionary climax in early March in a 'small-scale civil war', which saw Prime Minister Smuts supplement state forces with aerial bombardment, artillery, machineguns, and tanks.[36] Battles took place throughout central Johannesburg's white working-class suburbs of Vrededorp, Braamfontein, and Fordsburg, as well as in the east of the city in Germiston, Boksburg, and Benoni. For a short period at the height of the insurrection, the strikers turned to attacking blacks, murdering over 40 Africans. By mid-March 1922, government forces prevailed and the eight-week strike was crushed. In what has been called

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[35] I am grateful to Duncan Money for alerting me to this.
[36] Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, pp. 332–4.

Figure 1.4 Members of the Newlands strikers' commando ride past supporters holding a banner with the Rand Revolt's famous slogan.
Source: *Star, Through the Red Revolt on the Rand* (Johannesburg, 1922)/African News Agency (ANA)

the 'biggest and bloodiest upheaval in South African labour history',[37] more than 200 people were killed, some 600 wounded, thousands arrested, and four hanged for treason.[38]

The militancy and murderousness of the strikers expressed anxieties inherent in the formation of white working-class identity in the context of politicised racial imaginaries and intense class struggle. White workers, Jeremy Krikler has argued, had come to define themselves in relation to 'that which they were not: rightless, wageless, racially-despised, unfree blacks'. The Chamber's efforts to tamper with the colour bar were viewed as an assault on white workers' racial identity and privilege, which, if successful, would 'ground [them] down into poverty' and see them become 'white kaffir[s]'.[39] According to Krikler, the 'intense class

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[37] W. Visser, 'From MWU to Solidarity – a trade union reinventing itself', *South African Journal of Labour Relations* 3, no. 2 (2006), p. 20.

[38] Bonner, 'South African society and culture', pp. 267–70; Feinstein, *An Economic History of South Africa*, p. 64, 77–81; Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, pp. 332–5; Krikler, *The Rand Revolt*, p. 110, 130–2; Visser, *Van MWU tot Solidariteit*, p. 27, 33, 35.

[39] All quotes from Krikler, *The Rand Revolt*, p. 32, 149. 'Kaffir' is a highly offensive racial slur for blacks, commonly used by whites in colonial- and apartheid-era South Africa.
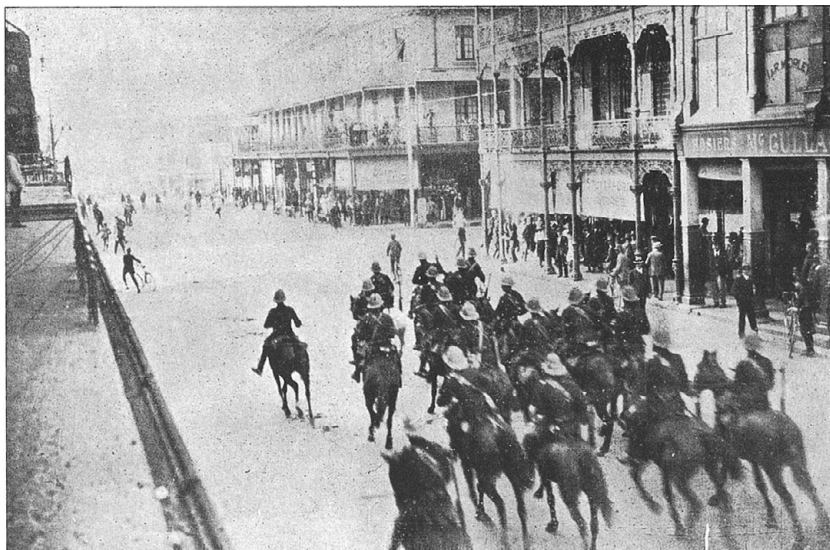
Figure 1.5 Mounted police sweep through central Johannesburg on 9 March 1922.
Source: Star, Through the Red Revolt on the Rand (Johannesburg, 1922)/African News Agency (ANA)

consciousness' and 'militant anti-capitalism' of white workers meant that the 'White South Africa' for which they were fighting was 'a particular organisation of state, society and economy' in which white workers would not be at the mercy of the industrial despotism of employers, but would be recognised as citizens of equal importance to other classes in the white community. For this reason, white working-class animosity and insurrectionary violence during the strike were overwhelmingly directed against white employers and the white state – those seen as infringing their rights, and towards whom workers directed their claims for full citizenship.[40] At the same time, the conflict of 1922 occurred as the trade union organisation of African workers was gaining momentum and African political leadership was becoming increasingly vocal.[41] Just two years earlier, 70,000 African mineworkers had staged a strike that, like earlier white working-class action, was crushed by state forces. The

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[40] Krikler, *The Rand Revolt*, p. xi, 52–3, 112, 113, 119, 122, 292–3.
[41] J. Seekings, '"Not a single white person should be allowed to go under": *swartgevaar* and the origins of South Africa's welfare state, 1924–1929', *Journal of African History* 48, no. 3 (2007), p. 379.

racial pogrom of March 1922 formed part of broader incidents of vio-
lence during which white workers targeted African trade union organisa-
tion on the Witwatersrand.[42] Indeed, during neither the 1920 African
mineworkers' strike nor the 1922 Rand Revolt did white or black workers
display labour solidarity across the colour line – they understood them-
selves to be fighting separate battles.

White workers' incorporation into the racial state

The aftermath of the strike saw a significant shift in state policy towards
white labour. Eager to avoid future industrial and political action of this
scale and intensity, Smuts' South African Party (SAP) government
enacted legislation that secured a privileged bargaining position for
white workers. The Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924 established, for
the first time, a system for industrial relations across the economy
through which employers' organisations and trade unions could negoti-
ate the peaceful resolution of industrial conflicts. By expressly excluding
Africans from the legal definition of 'employee', and hence from joining
legally registered and recognised unions, the Act barred Africans from
these structures, thereby giving unionised workers – whites, but also
other minority race groups – the power to negotiate via industrial coun-
cils for the racial allocation of the most favoured jobs and working
conditions.[43]

But this was too little too late to redeem the Smuts government. In the
1924 general election, white workers used their political power to elect a
National Party–Labour Party government perceived as sympathetic to
their interests. The Nationalists represented the largely unskilled and
recently urbanised Afrikaner population, as well as small property owners
and small-scale Afrikaner farmers. Labour, in turn, represented much of
the urban English-speaking proletariat, including white artisans and
working-class immigrants. All were vulnerable to efforts to undermine
the colour bar and looked to the state for protection.[44] Together, the two
parties formed an electoral pact and campaigned on the platform of
'civilised labour'. This held that more systematic policies of racial dis-
crimination were needed to ensure that 'civilised' persons, as distin-
guished from 'barbarous and underdeveloped' Africans, received
employment and wages allowing them to maintain the appropriate

[42] K. Breckenridge, 'Fighting for a white South Africa: white working-class racism and the
1922 Rand Revolt', *South African Historical Journal* 57, no. 1 (2007), p. 230, 238–40.
[43] Horrell, *South Africa's Workers*, pp. 2–3.
[44] Feinstein, *An Economic History of South Africa*, pp. 81–2.

'civilised' lifestyle.[45] The very ambiguity of these labels allowed the Pact parties to appeal to Cape-based coloured voters.[46] Yet National Party leader General J. B. M. Hertzog's declaration during the election campaign that the position of white workers represented 'the most important issue for the survival and welfare of the country' reflected the coalition's true colours.[47]

Once in power, the Pact enacted legislation to privilege and protect whites in the workplace. While it was eager to partner with mining to grow the economy and stimulate job creation, it would no longer allow the Chamber of Mines to unilaterally decide to reduce the white labour force. Hence, it implemented the 1926 Mines and Works Amendment Act to safeguard white mineworkers from displacement. Moreover, it set out to uplift impoverished, unskilled, and newly urbanised whites by bringing them into employment and paying them 'civilised' wages. Often, jobs were created by replacing unskilled and semi-skilled African workers in state sectors.[48] Grace Davie observed that this represented the reversal of 'the tenet of the so-called civilising mission in Africa. Instead of anticipating gradual improvements in African society through education and religious conversion, the state declared its intention to elevate white living standards while announcing that Africans and Indians would indefinitely remain at a lower stratum.'[49] The most significant drive to transform poor whites into 'civilised labour' occurred in the railways, where between 1924 and 1933 unskilled whites rose from 9.5 per cent to 39.3 per cent of the labour force, while unskilled black labour was reduced from 75 per cent to 49 per cent. By the early 1950s, the railways would become the largest employer of white labour, with some 100,000 unskilled and semi-skilled whites on its books. The Pact sought to create further employment opportunities for whites by expanding the industrial sector. It founded the parastatal steel company Iscor – which started production at its first site in Pretoria West in 1933 with an exclusively white complement – and introduced import tariffs to protect local industries. Meanwhile, in the private sector, companies were offered benefits and incentives, such as preference for state contracts, for favouring white over black labour.[50]

[45] Government circular quoted in Feinstein, *An Economic History of South Africa*, p. 86.
[46] Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p. 334; Seekings, 'Not a single white person', p. 381.
[47] Quoted in Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p. 335.
[48] Horrell, *South Africa's Workers*, pp. 2–3; Feinstein, *An Economic History of South Africa*, pp. 86–7.
[49] G. Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: a social history of human science, 1855–2005* (New York NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 56–7.
[50] Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, pp. 340–2; Seekings, 'Not a single white person', p. 383.

Figure 1.6 Jackhammer stoping in East Rand Proprietary Mines, 1938.
Source: Barloworld Rand Mines Archive at Historical Papers Research Archive,
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

Scholars disagree over who truly benefited from the reconfiguration of
relations between the state, capital, and labour under the Pact
government. Merle Lipton views the legislative measures implemented
from 1924 as a victory for white workers in the wake of their 1922 defeat,
drawing a more or less straight line from workers' support for the Pact
and its 'civilised labour' policy, through growing enthusiasm for
Afrikaner nationalism in subsequent decades, to the NP's election on
its apartheid platform in 1948.[51] But not all white workers benefited from
these policies. By prioritising the employment of unskilled and semi-
skilled whites, skilled workers paid part of the price of financing full white
employment: under the Pact, their wages fell in real terms.[52] Eddie
Webster has demonstrated the uneven impact of the Pact's policies in
the steel and metal industry. He shows how 'civilised labour' policies
posed a threat to the position of skilled workers, as it encouraged the
dilution of craftsmen's trades and the redistribution of labour to cheaper,
lesser-skilled workers. Webster also argues that the Department of
Labour, set up after 1924 to promote these policies, was in fact a

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[51] Lipton, *Capitalism and Apartheid*.
[52] Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p. 336, 341; Seekings, 'Not a single white person', p. 383.

'propagandist for scientific management' that sought to wrestle control of the labour process from skilled workers by transferring the mental labour of planning and organisation to management.[53] The 1924 Industrial Conciliation Act – introduced by Smuts but implemented under Hertzog – similarly represented a double-edged sword. It bolstered the position of white labour vis-à-vis other racial groups, but placed controls on organised labour. Strike action was limited, so that workers effectively sacrificed their most powerful weapon.[54] Moreover, the Act's conciliatory mechanisms facilitated the institutionalisation of working-class struggles and the bureaucratisation of trade unions, co-opting white labour into state-controlled structures of power. This, according to Phil Bonner and Eddie Webster, saw white unions 'degenerate' into 'little more than benefit societies'.[55] Viewing the state as an instrument of capital, Davies argues that these measures represented efforts to divide the working class along racial lines and thereby diffuse any challenge to the existing conditions of capital accumulation. The state's accommodation of white workers during this period, says Davies, brought about 'the almost complete political capitulation' of the white labour movement.[56] Yudelman quotes the dramatic decline in white strike action after 1922 as evidence of this co-optation.[57] Coloured workers sat uneasily within the new labour dispensation. They did not enjoy the privilege bestowed on whites, but they were not excluded from the industrial relations machinery in the same manner as Africans, and therefore they enjoyed a measure of protection. In many instances, white, coloured, and Indian workers organised in the same trade unions.[58] The very ambiguity of 'civilised labour' suggested their inclusion in the benefits of the policy, but in practice it functioned to favour whites.[59] While employers were certainly frustrated by the new legislation forcing them to employ and negotiate with expensive white labour, African workers ultimately paid the price for white workers' security – their wages were suppressed even further in an effort to reduce labour costs, and they were restricted to performing unskilled labour.[60]

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[53] Webster, *Cast in a Racial Mould*, p. 35, 38.
[54] Krikler, *The Rand Revolt*, pp. 291–2; Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p. 335.
[55] P. Bonner and E. Webster, 'Background', *South African Labour Bulletin* 5, no. 2 (1979), p. 3.
[56] Davies, *Capital, State and White Labour*, pp. 194–5, 198.
[57] Yudelman, *The Emergence of Modern South Africa*, p. 25, also 35, 190–213.
[58] Horrell, *South Africa's Workers*, p. 6.
[59] Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p. 343; Seekings, 'Not a single white person', p. 381, 394.
[60] Feinstein, *An Economic History of South Africa*, pp. 111–12; Breckenridge, 'Fighting for a white South Africa', p. 230, 243.

The election and policies of the Pact government inaugurated two important shifts in South Africa's political economy during this period. First, it demonstrated the political power of white workers and marked the overt politicisation of the colour bar.[61] By favouring poor whites for employment, paying them an inflated 'civilised wage', and institutionalising white labour's industrial power, the legislation of this period sought to separate and distinguish white workers from their African counterparts, to mark them out more clearly as citizens and as 'civilised' by conferring on them race-based privilege and status. This applied to white men as well as women. In the context of the Great Depression, particularly young, unmarried white women were increasingly drawn into the industrial workforce, with the garment industry in particular developing into a largely female sector.[62] It is no coincidence that white women were enfranchised in 1930. A year later, as the Depression swelled the ranks of the white poor, property and literacy voting qualifications for all white men over the age of 21 were also removed.[63] From this time onwards, white workers 'began to see their salvation not in independent organization as a class or in aggressively expressing their interests, but in developing a symbiotic relationship with the state'.[64] Second, under the Pact government, the state started to play an active role in the functioning of the economy – a trend which continued under subsequent governments. In a recent historical analysis, Bill Freund identified the Pact's policies as forming part of a trajectory of state-driven developmentalism in South Africa.[65]

White poverty and workers as the vanguard of whiteness

Reverberating through the industrial conflicts and labour politics of this period were broader social anxieties regarding the maintenance of South Africa's racial order. These became concentrated on the issue of white poverty. This was not a new phenomenon – a substantial population of

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[61] Feinstein, *An Economic History of South Africa*, pp. 80–9, 120–6.

[62] See, for instance, Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*; J. Mawbey, 'Afrikaner women of the Garment Union during the Thirties and Forties' in Webster, *Essays in Southern African Labour History*, pp. 192–208; L. Vincent, 'Bread and honour: white working-class women and Afrikaner nationalism in the 1930s', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 26, no. 1 (2000), pp. 61–78.

[63] L. Vincent, 'A cake of soap: the *Volksmoeder* ideology and Afrikaner women's campaign for the vote', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 32, no. 1 (1999), pp. 1–17. On the rights of white women before their enfranchisement, see H. Giliomee, '"Allowed such a state of freedom": women and gender relations in the Afrikaner community before enfranchisement in 1930', *New Contree* 59 (May 2004), pp. 29–60.

[64] Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p. 336.   [65] Freund, *Twentieth-century South Africa*.

impoverished proletarianised whites had long been present in colonial South Africa. But historians have convincingly argued that it was only from the late nineteenth century, in the context of depressed economic conditions and white middle-class anxieties about the future of the colony, that white poverty gained prominence and political traction as a major social problem.[66] South Africa's industrial heartland became the focal point of these anxieties, as impoverished rural Afrikaners spilled into the urban economy. The white population of Johannesburg swelled from 40,000 in 1899 to 250,000 in 1914, accompanied by the proliferation of unsanitary and crowded slums in suburbs such as Fordsburg and Vrededorp – the very neighbourhoods where mineworkers would clash with state forces in 1922.[67] Growing perceptions of the threat which these conditions posed to health, and of the preponderance of criminality, miscegenation, and racial mixing in poor communities, mixed with prevailing social Darwinist understandings to cast poor whites as a danger to continued white supremacy. One Social Welfare Department worried that 'the weak members of a superior race too readily adopt the lower mental and moral standard of a contiguous and inferior race',[68] while a prominent economist labelled poor whites 'a menace to the self-preservation and prestige of the white people'.[69] Such views mirrored concerns about racial degradation and the future of white rule in other European colonies.[70]

State efforts to address the 'poor white problem' and secure the racial order through racial segregation and labour protection are crucial to this chapter's discussion of the formation of the white working class. From 1910, the SAP government enacted urban reforms, clearing racially mixed slums and arranging segregated rehousing. The Pact introduced much more forceful interventions for safeguarding the racial hierarchy. The urban workplace was regarded as a key battlefront: poor unskilled

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[66] C. Bundy, 'Vagabond Hollanders and runaway Englishmen: white poverty in the Cape before poor whiteism' in W. Beinart, P. Delius and S. Trapido (eds), *Putting a Plough to the Ground: accumulation and dispossession in rural South Africa, 1850–1930* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986), pp. 101–28; V. Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town: group identity and social practice, 1875–1902* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 127–9.

[67] Bundy, *Poverty in South Africa*, p. 47; Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p. 316, 325.

[68] Quoted in Davie, *Poverty Knowledge*, p. 46.

[69] Quoted in Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p. 346.

[70] A. Stoler, 'Sexual affronts and racial frontiers: European identities and the cultural politics of exclusion in colonial Southeast Asia', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, no. 3 (1992), pp. 514–51; J. McCulloch, *Black Peril, White Virtue: sexual crime in Southern Rhodesia, 1902–1935* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2000); W. Jackson, 'Dangers to the colony: loose women and the "poor white" problem in Kenya', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 14, no. 2 (2013).

whites forced to compete with cheaper African workers ran the risk of sinking below the level of blacks.[71] Hence, in addition to its 'civilised labour' policy, the Pact launched an ambitious programme of public works, employing poor whites in the construction of irrigation schemes, roads, dams, and railway lines. It also expanded government services in housing, education, and health, and instituted non-contributory old-age pensions. Whites – and, to a lesser extent, coloureds – were the beneficiaries of this state support; Indians and Africans were excluded.[72]

Despite these measures, the Great Depression exacerbated the material and symbolic dimensions of white poverty. Large numbers of rural poor – often Afrikaner *bywoners* (tenant farmers) who had not benefited from the Pact's urban-focused policies – washed up in the cities as the economic downturn was compounded by a prolonged drought.[73] Following a familiar pattern, these unskilled whites accumulated in multiracial neighbourhoods, struggling to find work amid a large body of cheap black labour. In 1929, a commission of inquiry, funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, embarked on the first research-based investigation into white poverty in South Africa.[74] In its highly influential 1932 report, the Commission put the number of poor whites at 300,000 (17 per cent of the white population), of which 250,000 were estimated to be Afrikaners. Members of the Commission reported evidence of a 'spirit of dependency' fast approaching 'national pathology' among the country's white poor. They recommended the improvement of education among poor whites and the provision of employment opportunities to address the problem.[75]

Grace Davie has demonstrated how the researchers involved in the Carnegie Commission were influenced by Western progressivist views, scientific racism, and everyday popular understandings of poverty and social health. These understandings of the possibility of white degeneracy now came to function alongside environmental and structural understandings of poverty.[76] The white poor were no longer simply dangerous

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[71] L. Koorts, '"The Black Peril would not exist if it were not for a White Peril that is a hundred times greater": D. F. Malan's fluidity on poor whiteism and race in the pre-apartheid era, 1912–1939', *South African Historical Journal* 65, no. 4 (2013), pp. 560–1, 563.

[72] Seekings, 'Not a single white person', p. 381, 390–4.

[73] Seekings, 'Not a single white person', p. 393.

[74] Davie, *Poverty Knowledge*; T. Willoughby-Herard, *Waste of White Skin: the Carnegie Corporation and the racial logic of white vulnerability* (Oakland CA: University of California Press, 2015).

[75] Quotes from Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p. 348, 349; see also Bonner, 'South African society and culture', pp. 259–60.

[76] Davie, *Poverty Knowledge*, pp. 61–9.

but deserving and in need of protection: they formed a fragile barrier between racial suicide and racial purity that had to be bolstered. Afrikaner nationalists, who were mobilising aggressively in the 1930s, hijacked the Carnegie report, steering its impact and public uptake.[77] They used it to lobby for forceful state-led redistribution under an Afrikaner government to uplift poor whites. In the process, 'environmental explanations partially displaced notions of innate racial difference'.[78]

The political triumph of Afrikaner nationalism is discussed later in this chapter. Here, I wish to highlight two crucial points emerging from this period. First, poor whites and white workers did not form clearly distinct communities. Interventions raising poor whites into work, racially segregated rehousing efforts, and shared state dependence meant that a fluidity existed between poor whites and white workers in terms of both social relations and lived experience that did not always make them easily distinguishable. As we have seen, the white strikers of 1922 were very aware of this – they earnestly feared slipping (back) into the ranks of the white poor and becoming 'white kaffirs'.[79] 'Workers called white and classes called poor' were never, as Jon Hyslop remarks, simple sociological categories.[80] Second, this fluidity meant that, as most impoverished whites moved into work and the poor white problem was 'solved', the white working class came to represent the bulwark upholding the racial order, the vanguard of whiteness. As racially mixed slums were cleared and society increasingly segregated, the workplace, where white and black continued to labour shoulder to shoulder, became the key battlefront for maintaining the racial order. Chapter 2 shows how the idea that white workers formed the vanguard of white society against the *swart gevaar* (black peril) remained current on the eve of the political and economic crisis of the 1970s. At the same time, residues of popular understandings of white degeneracy, racial shame, and inferiority associated with poor whiteism never faded completely and continued to cling to the working class. This, too, would be revealed in contestations emerging around late-apartheid reforms.

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[77] J. Tayler, '"Our poor": the politicisation of the poor white problem, 1932–1942', *Kleio* 24, no. 1 (1992), pp. 40–65; Davie, *Poverty Knowledge*, p. 91.

[78] Davie, *Poverty Knowledge*, p. 95. Koorts, 'The Black Peril would not exist' offers a similar argument.

[79] Krikler, *The Rand Revolt*, p. 149.

[80] J. Hyslop, 'Workers called white and classes called poor: the "white working class" and "poor whites" in Southern Africa 1910–1994' in Money and Van Zyl-Hermann, *Rethinking White Societies*, pp. 23–41.

The rise of Afrikaner nationalism and the triumph of apartheid

A party split in 1934 had left the NP significantly weakened when the majority of its members merged with Smuts' SAP to form the United Party (UP) and take power. In their new capacity as the official opposition, the Nationalists sought to mobilise support by rallying around white poverty as encapsulating Afrikaner economic and cultural subordination. To be sure, by the 1930s, the economy was dominated by people of British or Jewish descent, and English was the dominant language of commerce and the state. Afrikaners' educational levels were low and they were overwhelmingly concentrated in low-paid working-class jobs. This, Nationalists felt, saw Afrikaners exploited and excluded, their language and traditions treated with disdain, relegating them to cap-in-hand second-class citizenship. In response, Afrikaner intellectuals and politicians offered a Christian Nationalist reworking of Afrikaner history which framed Afrikaners as a cohesive and divinely ordained people, destined to unite against the dual threats of British foreign hegemony and the uncivilised natives, and to assume their 'rightful place' in their land of birth.[81] In his landmark study *Volkskapitalisme*, Dan O'Meara explained the rise of Afrikaner nationalism during the 1930s and 1940s by pointing to the material, rather than political or ideological, basis of this movement. Specific petty bourgeois class forces, he argued, sought to secure a base for capital accumulation by mobilising all Afrikaans-speakers – including workers – around an ideological redefinition of Afrikaner nationalism which would act as the vehicle for establishing an Afrikaner class alliance in order to capture economic, and later political, power.[82]

The 1938 centenary of the Great Trek presented a felicitous opportunity for propagating the Nationalist message. Nationwide celebrations, culminating in the laying of the cornerstone of Pretoria's colossal Voortrekker monument, attracted mass popular enthusiasm as Afrikaners came together to celebrate what was increasingly imagined as the volk's heroic history in its battle for survival and freedom. A speech by NP leader D. F. Malan presented the workplace as a battlefront between the races when he likened the Voortrekker pioneers of old

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[81] T. D. Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: power, apartheid, and the Afrikaner civil religion* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1975).

[82] O'Meara, *Volkskapitalisme*, p. 103, 108. See also H. Adam and H. Giliomee, *Ethnic Power Mobilized: can South Africa change?* (New Haven CT and London: Yale University Press, 1979).

holding their own against black hordes in the interior to present-day Afrikaners facing black job competition in the urban economy. The difference, Malan claimed, was that:

the task to keep South Africa a white man's land, which has become ten times heavier than before, [now] rests on the shoulders of those who are the least able to bear it. Our Blood River lies in the city and our Voortrekkers are our poor who, in the most difficult of circumstances, have to take up the cudgels for our nation against the swelling dark tidal wave.[83]

Such ideas encapsulated and transmitted understandings of the white lower classes – whether in work or seeking employment – as the front line of whiteness, not marching confidently but a desperate, socially precarious group in need of support.[84] *'n Volk red homself* (A people rescues itself) became the popular call to Afrikaners to use their financial resources in service of their people, supporting new Afrikaner businesses which would in turn employ (especially poor) Afrikaners, and promoting national pride in their language and culture. This form of mobilisation – what scholars have called the Afrikaner cultural and economic movement – acted as a vehicle for the popularisation of Afrikaner nationalism from the 1930s onwards. To a great extent, the movement was engineered and driven by the Afrikaner Broederbond (Brotherhood), a secretive Christian Nationalist organisation founded in 1918 by a handful of Afrikaans-speaking teachers, clergymen, and politicians – those petty bourgeois forces identified by O'Meara – to promote the 'welfare of the Afrikaner nation'.[85] Over the next decades, the Broederbond covertly developed and directed a gamut of interlocking political, cultural, educational, religious, and other organisations and initiatives – often with overlapping leadership – with a shared vision of capturing control of the state as a vehicle for Afrikaner advancement. This saw cultural mobilisation become entangled with economic and political ambitions. Through its subsidiary, the Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge (Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Associations or FAK), for instance, the Broederbond engineered the large-scale coordinated promotion of the Afrikaans language and culture as white, nationalist, and politically coherent. Simultaneously, it was involved in setting up an Afrikaans savings bank, finance house, and chamber of commerce with the purpose

[83] Quoted in Koorts, 'The Black Peril would not exist', p. 573.
[84] These were not unique to South Africa but a feature of race-based societies in the context of the Great Depression. E. V. Meeks, 'Protecting the "white citizen worker": race, labor, and citizenship in south-central Arizona, 1929–1945', *Journal of the Southwest* 48, no. 1 (2006), pp. 91–113.
[85] Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p. 400.

of mobilising Afrikaner capital, in turn to finance the expansion of Afrikaner businesses and employment and see Afrikaners gain a foothold in trade and industry vis-à-vis established English business.[86]

For many white workers, developments during the Second World War caused great concern. Wartime industrial growth, particularly in semi-skilled positions, stimulated large-scale African urbanisation as workers flocked from the rural areas to job opportunities in the cities. Eager to attract black workers, anglophone manufacturing and commerce called for the loosening of segregationist labour and influx control. As Africans were absorbed into industry, the colour bar was regularly breached. The 1940s saw average African industrial wages rise more rapidly than those of white workers (although the former still lagged far behind), the emergence of an increasingly assertive black labour movement, and more vocal demands for black political rights. The UP government struggled to respond to black urbanisation, its influx control system 'overwhelmed' to the 'point of rupture'. In the run-up to the 1948 general election, it could only put forward modestly reformist and ambiguous proposals for affecting labour stabilisation and addressing African demands, and it was widely viewed as accepting mass African urbanisation as irreversible.[87]

The NP, by contrast, seemed to offer the white electorate a clear solution for safeguarding its interests: apartheid. As both an immediate political intervention and a long-term policy, apartheid promised more rigorous controls on Africans' movements and position in the labour market, and expressed commitment to the restoration of a racial order threatened by white poverty and black social mobility.[88] In contrast to the UP, which was closely identified with the interests of capital, the NP cast itself as the party of the 'working man' and the economically disadvantaged Afrikaner people, running on 'an explicitly anti-capitalist and (Afrikaner) populist platform'.[89] It promised state intervention in and regulation of the economy and labour market, including the nationalisation of mines, banks, and land companies. At the same time, in the post-war context of growing Cold War tensions and increasing African and multiracial labour organisation, it accused the UP of failing to defend whites against the threat of (non-racial) communism. Not content with appealing to workers in this way, the Broederbond launched covert attempts to gain control of unions with substantial Afrikaner

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[86] Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p. 401, 432–7.
[87] O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, pp. 24–7, 31–2, 42, 48.
[88] D. Posel, 'The apartheid project, 1948–1970' in Ross et al., *The Cambridge History of South Africa*, p. 326.
[89] O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, p. 36.

membership through the infiltration of leadership structures and the exploitation of racist sentiments among white workers.[90] This met with varying degrees of success.[91] Despite measures implemented by the Pact government to co-opt white workers, organised labour still harboured a range of political and ideological sympathies in the 1940s. The flourishing of the manufacturing sector in this period saw the emergence of a new generation of industrial unions that were non-racial and socialist in orientation. Indeed, historians have interpreted the 1940s as a historical moment when real opportunities for multiracialism existed in the organised labour movement as the new industrial unions sought to mobilise alongside African workers.[92]

Nevertheless, the Nationalists' 'ideology of racism and mythology of black, Anglo and communist threats' directed white, particularly Afrikaner, workers towards 'adopting an ideology that neatly justified their exploitation and replaced class consciousness with race anxieties'.[93] By the late 1940s, notes O'Meara, 'most white workers had been persuaded that potential competition from cheaper African labour posed a greater threat to their interests than did the bosses'.[94] These developments contributed to the delegitimisation of working-class identification in the post-war years, making class identification harder to sustain.[95] Furthermore, it is perhaps unsurprising that the Nationalists' explicit ideological inclusion of poor and working-class whites in the body politic of the volk appealed to these constituencies, given the manner in which the Smuts administration was perceived to be in league with the very Anglo and capitalist interests which were seen to threaten white working-class citizenship.

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[90] Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p. 427; Visser, *Van MWU tot Solidariteit*, pp. 55–101; Horrell, *South Africa's Workers*, pp. 10–11; D. O'Meara, 'Analysing Afrikaner nationalism: the "Christian-National" assault on white trade unionism in South Africa, 1934–1948', *African Affairs* 77, no. 306 (1978), pp. 45–72. See also below on the MWU.

[91] On the nationalist struggle to win the allegiance of white women in the Garment Workers' Union, see L. Witz, 'A case of schizophrenia: the rise and fall of the independent Labour Party' in Bozzoli, *Class, Community and Conflict*, pp. 261–91; Berger, *Threads of Solidarity*.

[92] R. Fine with E. Davis, *Beyond Apartheid: labour and liberation in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1990); P. Alexander, *Workers, War and the Origins of Apartheid: labour and politics in South Africa 1939–1948* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), p. 2; S. Dubow and A. Jeeves (eds), *South Africa's 1940s: worlds of possibilities* (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005).

[93] C. van der Westhuizen, *White Power and the Rise and Fall of the National Party* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2007), pp. 31–2.

[94] O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, p. 78.

[95] B. Kenny, 'Servicing modernity: white women shop workers on the Rand and changing gendered respectabilities, 1940s–1970's, *African Studies* 67, no. 3 (2008), p. 374, 377.

In 1948, the NP's apartheid platform won it significant support in the urban mining and industrial constituencies of the Witwatersrand, as well as among steelworkers and lower middle-class constituencies in Pretoria. Beyond the cities, farming communities – especially the maize farmers of the Transvaal – had become alienated from the UP government by its wartime suppression of agricultural prices. Deeply worried about the threat African urbanisation posed to the stability of the rural labour force, farmers also threw their weight behind the NP. Thus, when it came to power in 1948, the NP stood at the head of a broad social alliance of petty bourgeois Afrikaner political and cultural entrepreneurs, workers, and farmers.[96]

The apartheid state and the organised labour movement

In the decades following 1948, the NP intensified and expanded existing provisions for ensuring white domination on the basis of racial separation. The large-scale state intervention this required was not unusual in the post-war context. War-weary populations, governments, and businesses desired stability, growth, and broad-based social welfare, and centralised state planning presented a vehicle for achieving full employment and the reduction of economic inequality alongside industrialisation, modernisation, and rising production and foreign trade.[97] This international enthusiasm for large, regulatory states was given 'its own particular twist' by the NP. Posel explains that the NP 'harnessed the broadly Keynesian notions of statecraft … to its own particular – and distinctive – project of "modernising" racial domination. Imagining a bigger, more interventionist and regulatory state as the agent of large-scale social transformation made it possible to envision a society in which constructs of race would become the all-embracing, ubiquitous basis of the social order.'[98]

These ambitions were clearly reflected in labour legislation designed to extend discriminatory provisions. The 1953 Native Labour Act cemented the exclusion of Africans from existing industrial conciliatory mechanisms by setting up a separate system centred on factory-level 'works committees' to represent African workers. These were largely powerless, leaving Africans no effective or legal avenues through which

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[96] O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, p. 30, 35–6.
[97] E. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: the short twentieth century, 1914–1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994), pp. 270–3.
[98] D. Posel, 'Whiteness and power in the South African civil service: paradoxes of the apartheid state', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 25, no. 1 (1999), p. 103.

to express their grievances.[99] The 1953 Act, claimed then Minister of Labour Ben Schoeman, would see African trade unions 'die a natural death'.[100]

Coloured and Indian workers continued to be included in the formal labour relations machinery alongside whites, but here, too, efforts were made to regulate the labour market for the benefit of white, enfranchised workers. The 1956 Industrial Conciliation Act broadened the discriminatory measures laid down in 1924. Its notorious Section 77 made statutory provision for the racial allocation of jobs across the economy through direct government intervention. The Act officially delineated this form of job reservation as 'a protective measure of the Whites, Coloureds and other Non-White groups against racial competition'.[101] Yet, when introducing the Act in Parliament, the Minister of Labour explained that Section 77 would serve to 'safeguard the standards of living of the White workers of South Africa and ensure … that they will not be exploited by the lower standards of any other race'.[102] While white poverty is broadly considered to have been 'solved' by this point, such statements reflected the persisting conviction that white workers required protection if they were to continue upholding the vanguard of whiteness.

The 1956 Act also sought to bolster white working-class dominance in industrial relations. While the 1924 Act had allowed white, coloured, and Indian workers to organise in multiracial unions, the new legislation forbade the registration of new multiracial trade unions and ordered existing multiracial unions to split into separate branches or unions according to race. It further determined that only whites could serve on union executives, thus securing the leadership of the organised labour movement for whites and weakening the bargaining position of other workers. Doxey suggests that these provisions sought to obstruct the development of a united and potentially left-leaning multiracial labour movement – and, in the process, served to reduce the collective bargaining power of organised labour as a whole.[103] The NP had already dealt organised labour a heavy blow with its 1950 Suppression of Communism Act. This intentionally broad and ambiguous law subsumed all manner

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[99] A. Lichtenstein, 'Making apartheid work: African trade unions and the 1953 Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act in South Africa', *Journal of African History* 46, no. 2 (2005), pp. 293–314; N. L. Clark and W. H. Worger, *South Africa: the rise and fall of apartheid* (Harlow: Pearson, 2011), pp. 75–6.

[100] Bonner and Webster, 'Background', p. 4.

[101] Department of Labour, 1960, quoted in Department of Labour and of Mines, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Labour Legislation Part 1 (Key Issues)* (Pretoria: Government Printer, RP49/1979), p. 40.

[102] Hansard, 23 January 1956, col. 276, quoted in Doxey, *The Industrial Colour Bar*, p. 140.

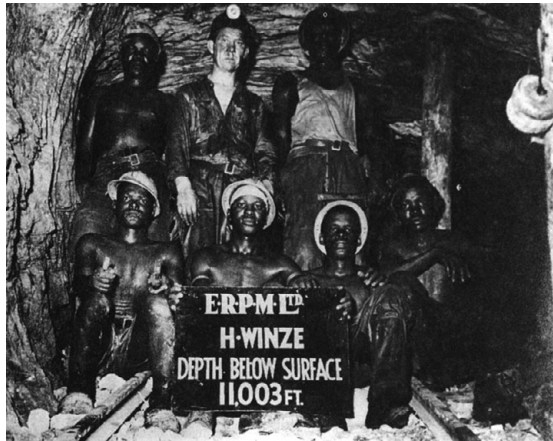[103] Doxey, *The Industrial Colour Bar*, pp. 148–9.

Figure 1.7 The crew that attained the world deep-level mining record
in 1958 at East Rand Proprietary Mines.
Source: Barloworld Rand Mines Archive at Historical Papers Research Archive,
University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

of political dissent. Several hundred trade unionists were removed from
their positions under the Act, stifling leftist sympathies within organised
labour. According to Fine, this defeat of socialist ideas and independent
trade unionism among white workers made them a 'prop for the apart-
heid state'.[104]

It is important to understand the profound impact of this legislation on
organised labour, as it would significantly shape the nature of workers'
responses to reform efforts from the 1970s. To be sure, factionalism had
long characterised the South African labour movement – but this new
legislation saw racial and ideological divisions become more pro-
nounced. Despite the NP's success in purging socialist tendencies, dif-
ferent views about cross-racial solidarity remained within the labour
movement. In October 1954, 61 unions – mostly open industrial and
craft unions – formed the Trade Union Council of South Africa
(TUCSA) as a coordinating body intended to bolster labour unity in
anticipation of the divisive new Industrial Conciliation Act. Membership
was restricted to registered unions, but TUCSA liaised closely with
unregistered African unions outside the formal system. For some, this
did not go far enough towards the goal of labour unity. In March 1955,
unions opposing TUCSA's unwillingness to accept African affiliates

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[104] Fine, *Beyond Apartheid*, p. 94.

formed the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), which afforded white, multiracial, and African unions equal rights. For others, TUCSA's fraternising with African workers and its new industrial unions' acceptance of 'non-white' members went too far. Thus, a number of predominantly Afrikaner craft unions in construction and state employment joined with racially exclusive industrial unions to form the Co-ordinating Council of South African Trade Unions. Together with white railway unions, they subsequently formed the South African Confederation of Labour (SACLA). Following the pro-mulgation of the 1956 Act, TUCSA advised its multiracial affiliates to split into separate branches, not separate unions, in order to retain some unity. By contrast, SACTU encouraged coloured and Indian workers to break away from mixed unions and form their own organisa-tions, lest they continue to be governed by white workers. At the same time, there was a strong movement of white workers into exclusive unions, and by the mid-1960s, white membership of mixed unions had virtually halved.[105]

The organised labour landscape remained tumultuous. SACTU's association with the liberation movement soon incurred the wrath of the government. By 1967 it had been immobilised, its organisational capacity depleted by the detention or banning of its leaders. TUCSA, meanwhile, wavered in its stance on the exclusion of African unions. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, it variously moved to allow or disallow African membership. These oscillating efforts saw virtually all craft unions leave TUCSA. By the 1970s, TUCSA represented around 223,000 workers, of whom the majority were coloured, some were Indian, and about 58,000 were white. As per the determinations of the 1956 Act, TUCSA was white-led, even though the complexion of its leaders was representative of only 27 per cent of its members. SACLA also faced difficulties – racial homogeneity clearly did not guarantee unity. In the course of the 1960s, there were growing doubts among the artisanal affiliates about state policies, and in 1966 the Railroads and Harbours Staff Associations stated that the utilisation of labour resources needed to be reassessed in order to maintain economic growth. This brought it in direct conflict with the Co-ordinating Council's commit-ment to the status quo.[106] Various craft unions – including the Railroads associations – subsequently disaffiliated. By the mid-1970s, SACLA

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[105] Horrell, *South Africa's Workers*, pp. 19–25, 30, 39; Greenberg, *Race and State*, p. 296, 300–1.
[106] Horrell, *South Africa's Workers*, pp. 26–7, 29–41; Greenberg, *Race and State*, pp. 301–2.

represented some 200,000 white workers, or 31 per cent of the organised labour force.[107]

The NP's labour legislation, which sought to promote the position of white workers and to distinguish them as a clear category of privileged citizens from other sections of labour, therefore did not go uncontested within organised labour. The main disagreement between – and, indeed, as Chapter 3 will show, within – these labour federations revolved around the inclusion of African workers in the labour movement. White workers were represented across the spectrum of these divided opinions, including forming a minority of SACTU members.[108]

Moreover, it is important to note how apartheid labour legislation sought to secure protected privilege for white workers. This was primarily done by keeping other races down – excluding coloured and Indian workers from leadership positions, barring Africans from participating in the mechanisms of industrial governance, and blocking 'non-white' access to certain jobs and skills – rather than by legitimately strengthening white workers' skills and bargaining positions. Iscor, for instance, adhered to state requirements for the employment of 'civilised labour' while excluding black workers – yet the measures taken in this regard were designed to preserve and reproduce the white labour force, rather than promote its upward mobility. Indeed, Iscor devised a range of measures – offering credit facilities to encourage homeownership, providing sport, recreational, and medical facilities to workers, recruiting successive generations from the same families – to ensure that it retained its workers.[109] Similarly, the NP's legislation fostered a certain kind of white labour movement – acquiescent, nationalist, and not anti-capital. The Suppression of Communism Act facilitated the removal of the best black and white trade union leaders, while the 1956 Industrial Conciliation Act deepened fragmentation throughout organised labour. Thus, Alexander argues, white workers, like blacks, were the victims of apartheid – their organisations crushed and their exploitation secured under the NP, leaving them reliant on the state.[110]

The race-based dualism of the labour regime – conferring rights and protection on the white minority and excluding the African majority – also extended to the NP's other legislative endeavours to enshrine a social hierarchy in which racial identity formed the basis of inclusion

[107] SAIRR, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1976* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), 1977), p. 313; SAIRR, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1977* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), 1978), p. 288; Horrell, *South Africa's Workers*, pp. 141–2.

[108] Horrell, *South Africa's Workers*, p. 26.   [109] Sharp, 'Market, race and nation', p. 92.

[110] Alexander, *Workers, War and the Origins of Apartheid*, pp. 125–6; see also Fine, *Beyond Apartheid*, pp. 92–4, 100.
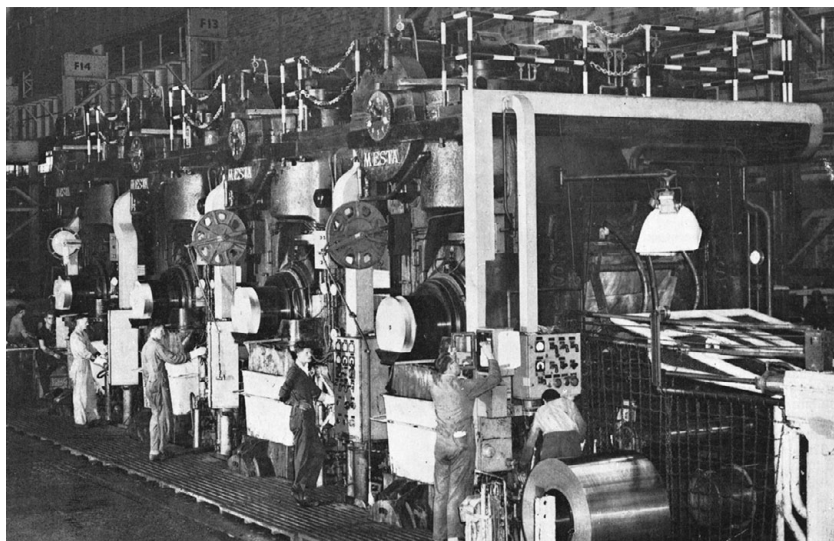
Figure 1.8 Workers operating the four-stand tandem cold reduction mill at Iscor's Vanderbijlpark works, 1965.
Source: *Iscor News*, January 1965

and exclusion in every aspect of political, economic, and social life. The 1950 Population Registration Act divided the South African population by race. Africans were additionally subdivided into 'distinct' ethnic groups. In the course of the 1950s, the creation of separate homelands for each of these 'nations' became NP policy. Enacting the Promotion of Bantu Self-government Act in 1959, Prime Minister H. F. Verwoerd explained in Parliament that the new law would see whites retain sovereignty in South Africa, while the 'black nations' would be led to 'full development' and 'full authority' in their 'own areas'.[111] In the context of worldwide decolonisation, this provided a convenient instrument for depriving Africans of their citizenship, thus cementing the convergence of race and rights in South Africa. This policy of separate development, explains Dubow, saw apartheid evolve 'from the pronouncement of white domination – *baasskap* – to an elaborate and obfuscatory ideology of "multi-national" development'.[112] The Transkei, identified as a Xhosa homeland, was the first territory to be granted self-government in 1963.

[111] Quoted in H. Giliomee, *The Last Afrikaner Leaders: a supreme test of power* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2012), p. 76.
[112] S. Dubow, *Apartheid 1948–1994* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 105.

The scheme made no provision for Africans residing in South Africa's 'white' cities, or for the country's coloured and Indian communities.[113]

Capitalism and white society under apartheid

Western policy priorities at this time reflected the alliance between states, capital, and labour born of the post-war context. In this triangular arrangement, governments effectively oversaw institutionalised negotiations between capital and labour to reach deals acceptable to all sides – typically, high wages and good benefits in exchange for high profits and labour predictability; as well as a steadily expanding welfare state and state participation in the economy in return for political stability, the suspension of communist sympathies, and a predictable macro-economic environment. By the 1970s, notes Eric Hobsbawm, all advanced capitalist states had become welfare states in the sense that the majority of state employment and expenditure was concentrated in social security. This social consensus and the arrangements it produced were fundamentally dependent on the sustained economic growth characterising the post-war Golden Age.[114] In South Africa, the NP's efforts to shore up a distinctive racial and nationalist order were 'inseparable from efforts to sustain and regulate practices of capital accumulation and economic growth, along with the class interests and conflicts associated with those'.[115]

Thus, the statism evident in post-1948 labour legislation extended to all spheres of South Africa society, reflecting the broad-based social alliance represented by the ruling party. The implementation of stricter influx control attempted not only to stifle African urbanisation but created the rural reserves of cheap black labour that white farming required. Generous subsidies and inflated prices for agricultural products further benefited the sector, with white farmers' real incomes growing by 7.3 per cent per year between 1960 and 1975. This growing prosperity concealed white agriculture's deepening state dependence, with an estimated 20 per cent of farmers' incomes deriving from various forms of state support by 1972.[116]

For white workers, the discriminatory sanctions of apartheid labour legislation protected 'their narrow niche of privilege' by insulating them from black labour competition and guaranteeing employment in reserved jobs, often with inflated wages. The first five years of NP rule witnessed a

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[113] Giliomee, *The Last Afrikaner Leaders*, p. 76, 81.
[114] Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, pp. 282–4.   [115] Posel, 'The apartheid project', p. 322.
[116] O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, p. 77, 143.

10 per cent rise in real white wages in construction and manufacturing, while African wages shrunk by 5 per cent. Yet, as O'Meara notes:

> while the NP government thus clearly improved both the living standards and job security of white workers, it conspicuously failed to implement the 'new economic order' it had promised them. Malan's government speedily abandoned its commitment to take a controlling interest in the mines and other strategic industries, to introduce effective state control over banks and other monopolies, and to impose a statutory system of profit sharing.[117]

What the NP did offer working-class whites, in addition to statutorily protected employment in industry, was privileged educational opportunities as well as expanded employment options as avenues for upward social mobility.[118] The creation of a range of new state and semi-state institutions saw Afrikaner employment in public administration expand by 98.5 per cent between 1946 and 1960, and the state become the country's largest employer. The civil service in particular shed its segregation-era English character to become an assertively Afrikaner domain.[119] Under the NP, the size and number of state bureaucracies grew rapidly – from 26 government departments in 1948 to 41 by 1970.[120]

For workers, however, state employment fostered dependence. Often public service employees were those who had failed in more competitive and lucrative private sector labour markets – to the extent that internal government observations noted that the civil service employed 'factory rejects'. And if the government bestowed jobs, it could just as easily revoke them – a realisation that often produced labour acquiescence. The civil servants' Public Service Association was a toothless organisation throughout the apartheid period, unwilling to bite the hand that fed it. As Posel argues, this dependency was magnified by the politics of job reservation: 'The prospect of having to compete for their jobs against a huge black labour pool must have been a rude reminder to white civil servants [and other protected workers] that their meal tickets remained with the National Party.'[121]

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[117] O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, p. 78.
[118] Indeed, Seekings argues that the post-1948 NP was less ideologically statist than its Pact antecedent – it preferred supporting the white population through privileged opportunities in the labour market and education, rather than direct welfare provisions. J. Seekings, 'The National Party and the ideology of welfare in South Africa under apartheid' *Journal of Southern Africa Studies* 46, no, 6 (2020), pp. 1145–1162.
[119] O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, p. 62, 76.
[120] Posel, 'Whiteness and power in the South African civil service', pp. 101–4.
[121] Posel, 'Whiteness and power in the South African civil service', p. 108, 115.

Crucially, the expansion of state capacity also offered important opportunities to those petty bourgeoise Afrikaner elements which, in O'Meara's analysis, first initiated the reformulation of Afrikaner nationalism with the goal of capturing economic and political power. Many found favourable career prospects in the public service, where bureaucrats enjoyed 'security of tenure, cradle-to-the-grave social welfare, and handsome study opportunities'.[122] Most NP Members of Parliament hailed from Afrikaner petty bourgeois ranks and were members of the Broederbond. For Afrikaner businessmen, meanwhile, the expansion of state capitalism offered employment opportunities in the top management and advisory positions of state and semi-state enterprises such as the South African Railways and Harbours, Iscor, the national electricity provider Eskom, and the oil-from-coal energy and chemical company Sasol. State benevolence towards Afrikaner business also saw government accounts and contracts transferred to Afrikaner financial institutions and enterprises. From just 6 per cent in 1948, Afrikaner control of private industry rose to 21 per cent by 1975.[123]

The NP's statism was supported by strong post-war economic growth. South Africa's GDP showed an annual average increase of 5 per cent between 1948 and 1957, 3 per cent between 1957 and 1961, and a flourishing 6 to 8 per cent between 1962 and 1974, earning the latter period the label 'the golden age of apartheid'.[124] Supported by such consistent growth, NP policies facilitated dramatic upward social mobility among white South Africans. According to Davies, 'between 1946 and 1960 the number of whites described in censuses as labourers … decreased by 61 percent while the numbers in the new petty bourgeoisie increased by some 74 percent'.[125] Within the Afrikaner population, the absolute and proportional number of males in the lowest-income categories shrunk, while their presence in the higher-income sectors of the economy swelled rapidly, leading to the establishment of an urban Afrikaner middle class of white-collar workers and managers.[126] Broad occupational data, meanwhile, shows the percentage of Afrikaners in blue-collar employment remaining remarkably stable in the first decades of NP rule (Table 1.1). By contrast, the same period saw a significant decline in the percentage of Afrikaners in agriculture, offset by the spike in those in white-collar employment.

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[122] Quoted in O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, p. 77.
[123] O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, pp. 79–80.   [124] O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, p. 82, 116.
[125] Davies, *Capital, State and White Labour*, p. 351.
[126] O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, pp. 136–7, 140.

Table 1.1 *Distribution of the Afrikaner labour force, 1946–70.*[127]

	1946(%)	1960(%)	1970(%)
Agriculture	30.3	16.0	10.1
Blue-collar employment	40.7	40.5	38.3
White-collar employment	29.0	43.5	51.6

These local trends mirrored international developments. The dramatic decline of the peasantry alongside the rise in higher education opportunities during the Golden Age saw similar shifts in the population segments involved in agriculture and white-collar employment in industrialised countries. But the size of the industrial working class remained relatively constant at about one-third of the population in these countries, while it grew in Eastern Europe and the 'Third World', where industrialisation was expanding. Hence Hobsbawm stresses that 'the idea that the old industrial working class died out during this time of economic boom is statistically mistaken on a global scale' – this would not be the case until the 1980s.[128]

In the 1930, advocates of the Afrikaner economic movement had rallied around the slogan *'n Volk red homself*. When they reconvened in the 1950s, it was in a 'mood of self-congratulation'.[129] The poor white problem was considered solved, and Afrikaner businesses were establishing a firm foothold in the economy. With the rescue action accomplished, this section of NP supporters could now focus on making money. By the 1960s, writes Beinart, it was 'the best of times, materially, for white South Africans'; they had 'never had it so good'.[130] In this way, too, South Africa echoed global realities. Globally, the prosperity of the post-war era was not just visible in retrospect but consciously experienced by the populations of increasingly prosperous 'developed' countries. British Conservatives fought the 1959 general election on the slogan 'You've never had it so good', winning Harold Macmillan the premiership for a second time. Industrial expansion throughout the capitalist, socialist, and 'Third' world made this a Golden Age of impressive economic growth – and increasing labour shortage. Full employment and the burgeoning consumer society placed at least some affluence within most working-class people's reach, with

[127] Sadie, *The Fall and Rise of the Afrikaner*, p. 54.
[128] Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, p. 302.   [129] Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p. 439.
[130] W. Beinart, *Twentieth-century South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 180–1.

workers in the industrialised West enjoying a universal and generous welfare state, paid annual leave – even the luxury of owning a car.[131]

Yet while apartheid was, in O'Meara's words, 'good for every white's business', the actual material advantage of the NP's pro-white policies was spread very unevenly. The new class of urban Afrikaner financial, industrial, and commercial capitalists emerged as the major beneficiaries; they 'blossomed from an embattled infancy to potent adulthood under the benevolent care of the NP government'.[132] Apartheid-era legislation drove down the cost of African labour and shielded local industries, creating favourable conditions for capital accumulation for Afrikaner business. The period 1946 to 1960 witnessed growing stratification within the white Afrikaans-speaking population, as Afrikaners became overwhelmingly concentrated in three distinct occupational categories: 'professional, managerial and executive (i.e. the upper middle class); clerical, sales and administrative (the middle to lower levels of the middle class); and skilled and supervisory workers'. O'Meara argues that:

Rigid occupational criteria, educational barriers and different lifestyles together rendered very difficult any mobility *between* these strata. The apartheid policies of the NP government performed the crucial function of partially ameliorating the earnings gap between these strata normally found in free market economies, thus at least partially sustaining the old myth of a classless *volk*. It likewise consolidated the relatively privileged and protected position of Afrikaner skilled and supervisory workers. Nevertheless, the stratification was real, and … the income gap between these categories would grow wider in the 1960s.[133]

Considering the position of economically active Afrikaans-speaking white males in 1960, O'Meara identifies those in 'administrative, managerial and executive' positions, representing only 4.2 per cent of this working population, as the highest-income category, earning an average monthly income of R3,308. Artisans and production workers, by contrast, are recorded as the largest occupational category of Afrikaans-speaking white males at approximately 27 per cent of the population. Yet with a median monthly income of R1,473, they were one of the lowest earning in relative terms, ahead only of 'manual labourers' with a median monthly income of R931 and the 'unemployed'.[134] Embourgeoisement was uneven and often shallow. By 1964, some 60 per cent of the unionised whites in the employ of the Chamber of

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[131] Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, pp. 257–9, 261, 264, 267, 276, 307.
[132] O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, p. 81, 139.
[133] O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, p. 137 (emphasis in original).
[134] O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, p. 137.

Mines were so-called day's pay men. By far the largest number of them were production workers represented by the all-white Mineworkers' Union.[135]

The Mineworkers' Union

The establishment of the MWU in 1902 came amid the intense conflict between workers and employers characterising the early twentieth-century industrialised and industrialising world. For most of the century, the MWU's membership covered non-artisanal underground employees – those whites at the lowest end of the mining skills and supervisory hierarchy, working in the production process directly alongside African workers. MWU members played a central role in the 1922 Rand Revolt. White miners who were organised in the MWU – totalling some 15,000 by 1922 and by then including immigrants as well as unskilled Afrikaans-speaking whites who had entered the mines during the war – shared both the republican and the revolutionary sentiments that animated the revolt. The MWU is said to have warned that the Chamber's reorganisation of labour would see 'the Kafir [sic] … take up the place of the white man and then we are doomed to national annihilation'.[136] The strikers' banner reading 'Workers of the world unite and fight for a white South Africa' was carried by the Newlands commando, led by I. J. Viljoen, an MWU member.[137] According to the union's biographer Wessel Visser, the 1922 strike became 'embedded in the historical psyche and collective consciousness of MWU members'.[138] As subsequent chapters will show, the salience of this strike turned insurrection would reverberate through the union throughout the twentieth century and remains an evocative reference point in the present.

MWU members were major beneficiaries of the civilised labour policies instituted by the Pact government – in particular the 1926 Mines and Works Amendment Act, which entrenched white job reservation in mining by reserving certificates of competency in certain skills, such as blasting, for white and coloured workers.[139] By the 1930s, as the Carnegie Commission was undertaking its investigation into white poverty, newly proletarianised and often unskilled Afrikaners constituted the overwhelming majority of MWU members. The union's leadership,

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[135] Wilson, *Labour in the South African Gold Mines*, p. 170.
[136] Simons and Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa*, p. 285.
[137] Visser, *Van MWU tot Solidariteit*, p. 33, 35.
[138] Visser, *Van MWU tot Solidariteit*, p. 27 (my translation).
[139] Visser, 'From MWU to Solidarity', p. 20.

by contrast, remained largely English-speaking.[140] Afrikaner nationalists saw this situation as reflecting the overall disempowerment of Afrikaners under Smuts' pro-British UP and set their sights on gaining control of the MWU. They set about branding established labour leaders as communist agents and exploiting antisemitic and racist sentiments among white workers. In the context of falling workers' wages and corruption among union leaders, the nationalists successfully turned MWU members against their Labour Party-oriented executive. By 1948, Afrikaner mining constituencies – previously Labour strongholds – displayed strong support for the Nationalists and were instrumental in voting the NP into government. A few months later, the MWU elected a new NP-oriented executive. The union subsequently developed an assertively Afrikaans and Christian identity. Visibly more nationalist in character, its mouthpiece condemned communism and working-class consciousness as threatening the unity of the volk.[141]

The first decades of apartheid witnessed the race-based social alliance in action: South African businesses and the NP government benefited from the industrial discipline and political loyalty of white workers, while workers in turn enjoyed the protection and benevolence of the state and employers.[142] In addition to material benefits, white workers' new-found social security as full members of the white body politic and key partners in Afrikaner political power must have gone some way towards ameliorating the real and subjective class and race insecurities long associated with white proletarianisation and poverty. The MWU in particular wielded great influence within government – its representatives enjoyed direct access to ministerial offices and even the Prime Minister, with some serving on the executive of the Transvaal NP.[143] And on the labour front, MWU representatives drove hard bargains in the interests of their members. Particularly from the 1960s, as shortages of white labour and technological advances in mining techniques saw the Chamber of Mines press for the reorganisation of the racial division of labour, MWU general secretary Arrie Paulus jealously guarded his members' privilege and power. Paulus, known for his brashness and brinkmanship, negotiated improved wages and benefits in exchange for uncertified African workers

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[140] Visser, 'From MWU to Solidarity', pp. 20–1; Davies, *Capital, State and White Labour*, p. 286.
[141] Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p. 427; Visser, *Van MWU tot Solidariteit*, pp. 55–101, 123–4; Horrell, *South Africa's Workers*, pp. 10–11; O'Meara, 'Analysing Afrikaner nationalism'.
[142] Visser, *Van MWU tot Solidariteit*, p. 121.
[143] Visser, 'From MWU to Solidarity', p. 21; see also O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*; Davies, *Capital, State and White Labour*.

Figure 1.9 Arrie Paulus (right) and Cor de Jager (centre-left) emerge smiling from a meeting with then Minister of Mines Carel de Wet (centre-right) in 1970.
Source: *The Star*, 24 October 1970/African News Agency (ANA)

being given greater responsibility in the blasting process.[144] Government and mining capital alike regarded Paulus with wary reverence, with mining giant Anglo American recognising the firebrand unionist as 'the most powerful labour leader in the country'.[145]

Labour aristocracy or privileged precariat?

Understandings of white workers as historically unproblematically privileged and secure within the context of the racial state still prevail. In his opening to *The Rand Revolt*, Krikler admits that he started the study considering white workers 'something of a labour aristocracy – deserving infinitely less sympathy than the black workforce below them'. He records his bewilderment when his sources revealed these aristocrats of labour 'announc[ing] themselves rightless, [in a world] in which one sensed acute pain and fear, a jolting internal dislocation'. Krikler was

[144] Moodie, *Going for Gold*, p. 72; Crankshaw, *Race, Class and the Changing Division of Labour*, pp. 58–61.
[145] W. Visser, 'Arrie Paulus en Peet Ungerer – Twee gedugte leiers van die SA Mynwerkersunie', 30 September 2015, https://blog.solidariteit.co.za/arrie-paulus-en-peet-ungerer-twee-gedugte-leiers-van-die-sa-mynwerkersunie/ (accessed 17 January 2017). See also D. van Zyl-Hermann, 'Race, rumour and the politics of class in late and post-apartheid South Africa: the case of Arrie Paulus', *Social History* 43, no. 4 (2018), pp. 509–30.

writing, of course, about 1922 – and we must recognise that, after the economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s, the position of apartheid-era white workers was certainly different to that of their ancestors on the Rand one or more generations earlier. In the early decades of the twentieth century, 'the privileged position of this "labour aristocracy" of white workers … was real relative to the black working class, but non-existent when set against the status of the wealthy whites who despised them'.[146] The powerful social and economic engineering of the state, the suppression of black resistance, and steady economic growth under apartheid seemed to cement white prosperity and the myth of the classless volk – even if the well-heeled sections of the volk drove the latest model ivory-coloured Mercedes while others rolled through life in Ford Zephyrs and Cortinas.[147]

Yet, as Krikler realised with regard to 1922, and as this chapter has shown for subsequent decades, things were distinctly more complex than this veneer of white workers' wealth suggested. While on the surface it might have been all bonuses and *braaivleis*, this ostensible privilege and security were a smokescreen held up by the state. It was the very nature of this artificial protection that rendered many white workers vulnerable and dependent on the racial state.

The workers of the MWU represent a case in point. By the 1970s, these white miners' role in the underground production process had progressively diminished. Blasting – formally reserved for whites – had become semi-skilled work, effectively rendering the holding of a blasting certificate superfluous. While there continued to be real skill involved in this job, concessions negotiated by the union saw black workers take on much of the actual work while the white blaster simply supervised – as the opening vignette about Willie demonstrates.[148] This made white miners completely dependent on racially discriminatory legislation to safeguard their superior position and privileges in relation to African workers. Without the protection of the racial state, these workers were simply under-skilled, overpriced, and expendable. Moreover, their mining-specific skills bound them to these precarious positions: MWU members – in contrast to craftsmen and maintenance workers in the mining industry – did not have a trade, making employment outside

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[146] Krikler *The Rand Revolt*, p. ix, x.
[147] On cars and class in apartheid-era Afrikaner society, see A. Grundlingh, '"Are we Afrikaners getting too rich?" Cornucopia and change in Afrikanerdom in the 1960s', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 21, nos 2–3 (2008), pp. 148–50.
[148] See descriptions of the production process in Davies, 'The white working-class in South Africa'; Simson, 'The myth of the white working class in South Africa'.

mining unlikely.[149] This exacerbated the economic vulnerability of these white miners. In Posel's formulation, referring to workers in the apartheid-era civil service, the power and privilege conferred on workers dependent on the racial state were not unproblematically about the benefits of the 'wages of whiteness', but rather like a 'golden handcuff' – 'a mix of costs and benefits, pleasures and pains'.[150]

Thus, rather than seeking to categorise white workers during the apartheid era as either genuine proletarians or the lackeys of bourgeois capital, I propose that a more complex picture emerges from the history of white working-class formation over the course of South Africa's industrial and political history. This results in an understanding of white workers that places less emphasis on their relations to production and more on their relation to and position in the racial state. In this sense, they were certainly privileged, particularly from 1924 – and we may point to the same evidence offered by Marxists such as Davies and Simson on employment, status, and income. At the same time, however, white workers' position was precarious; often, what stood between them and material and subjective cataclysm was state legislation protecting them from black labour competition and exclusion from the white body politic. Would this ever come about? Would the likelihood that bourgeois interests could sacrifice the white working class remain as minimal as Davies supposed? How would white workers respond, and what would the impact be on their forms of organisation, their politics and subjectivities? The following chapters seek to answer these questions.

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[149] Department of Manpower Utilisation, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Labour Legislation Part 6 (Industrial Relations in the Mining Industry)* (Pretoria: Government Printer, RP28/1981), p. 9.

[150] Posel, 'Whiteness and power in the South African civil service', p. 119.