

Gestion des compromis de classe et des conflits ouvriers dans les mines d'or d'Afrique du Sud au cours des années 1980.

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Résumé

*Se basant sur des preuves documentaires et des entrevues avec des gestionnaires de différents échelons dans plusieurs compagnies minières en Afrique du sud, cet article relève un défi posé par Michael Burawoy, qui mentionne dans son texte *Politics of Production* que les politiques de production génèrent nécessairement aussi bien des conflits entre les différents échelons de gestion que des luttes ouvrières. L'auteur examine les politiques de production aux niveaux décisionnels dans l'Afrique du Sud de fin d'apartheid, se penchant plus précisément sur les désaccords entre gestionnaires au sujet des compromis et des conflits liés aux classes sociales durant la montée du syndicat ouvrier National Union of Mineworkers dans les mines d'or Gencor et Anglo-American. L'article démontre également d'importantes différences entre les sociétés minières au niveau de la Chambre d'exploitation minière. Au niveau de la mine, les gestionnaires d'Anglo-American étaient extrêmement conscients de l'existence de deux types de gestion (despotique et hégémonique, pour emprunter les mots de M. Burawoy) au sein de l'entreprise durant cette même période. Ils ont « joué le jeu » directorial selon des règles différentes et ont produit des résultats différents non seulement en ce qui concerne la production, mais aussi pour les relations industrielles.*

Managing class compromise and labour conflict on the South African gold mines during the 1980s.

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Abstract

On the basis of documentary evidence and interviews with managers at different levels in several different South African gold mining companies, this paper takes up a challenge posed by Michael Burawoy, who mentions in his Politics of Production that production politics necessarily includes conflicts within different levels of management, as well as worker struggles. The paper examines the politics of production at management level in late apartheid South Africa, focusing specifically on disagreements among managers about class compromise and conflict during the rise of the National Union of Mineworkers on Anglo-American and Gencor gold mines. The paper also demonstrates important differences between mining houses at the level of the Chamber of Mines. At the level of the mine, Anglo-American managers were acutely aware that two styles of management (despotic and hegemonic, to use Burawoy's language) existed even within the company during the same period. They played the managerial "game" according to different rules and produced different outcomes not only for production but also for industrial relations.

Introduction

In a discussion of the labour process in capitalist society, Michael Burawoy (1985:46) argues that "management's consciousness can be seen apart from that of capitalists" so that "managers themselves do not form a monolithic group." He suggests that "changes in labour processes will therefore emerge as the result not only of competition among firms, or not only of struggle between capital and labour, but also of struggle among the different agents of capital" themselves. He adds that "one might speculate that different levels of management will be preoccupied with different aspects of the labor process." To the best of my knowledge, he does not develop this argument more fully in any of

his particular case studies, however.

In his early, long since classic, ethnography of an American machine shop, moreover, Burawoy (1979), set forth as the basic principle of explicitly sociological Marxism that, in addition to examining “relations *of* production”, we need also to pay close attention to “relations *in* production” -- hence his insistence on analysing the politics of production. This paper focusses on managerial relations in production that Burawoy, as far as I know, addresses only in passing. I agree with Burawoy that one cannot simply assume that capital is an actor. Nor do “agents of capital” necessarily share common strategic positions or even perceive themselves as having common interests. As Robert Jackall’s fascinating book *Moral Mazes* (1988) reveals for US corporations, managers at various levels engage in “making out” in various ways that may or may not enhance the accumulation of capital. Jackall brilliantly describes the politics of an “immoral morality” internal to American firms that is certainly also a “game” that has profound effects on production.

Erik Olin Wright’s scintillating essay on class compromise (2000), however, is an exercise in analytical Marxism, which seeks to add a sociological dimension to our understanding of class relations. Wright’s fundamental variables are “capitalist material interests” and what he calls “workers’ associational power”. He argues that militant working class power eventually leads to a situation of negative class compromise in which capitalists and workers square off against one another as in trench warfare. Sometimes, however, especially when there is a social democratic state, class conflict may eventuate in positive effects on productivity and rates of profit, which then lead to a J-curve, an upward surge in benefits to workers and capitalists alike, that he calls positive class compromise.

Wright’s causal argument is, he admits, severely reductionist. Indeed, his methodology requires it. As a result, his argument is open to precisely the sort of critique mounted so effectively by Michael Burawoy in *The Politics of Production* against Braverman’s understanding of the labour process. Wright’s paper is in fact a brilliant exercise in the analysis of relations *of*, rather than *in*, production. That said, his distinction between negative and positive class compromise does break new ground for fruitful study of the politics of production. This paper presents a modest attempt to embark on such a study. For a more chronological version of my

argument with Wright, see Moodie, 2010. I suggest here that we appropriate Wright's notion of two types of "class compromise" but assume a more contingent understanding of causality.

This paper provides examples of the politics of South African mining managements, their relations *in* production, as they handled the rise of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) at gold mining companies before the middle 1980s. The paper examines specific cases on two different levels. On one level, it analyses inter-corporate variation within the gold mining industry as a whole; on the other, it addresses differences among mine managers within Anglo-American Corporation (henceforth Anglo) itself. For internal company politics at the mine manager level, I draw primarily on a series of interviews I conducted with 25 managers in the Gold Division of Anglo. (I provide the date of my interview at the first mention of each of my subjects.) My focus on Anglo-American management is as much an accident as a choice, since my primary objective in doing the interviews was to understand the politics of the NUM at Anglo mines. For the political drama of management at Gencor between 1984 and 1986, I draw on documents kindly shared with me by Naas Steenkamp, who, during this period, headed up industrial relations at Gencor.

Politics of the Chamber of Mines

Since the early teens of the twentieth century, the South African Chamber of Mines, which includes representatives of each of the mining houses, has dominated gold (and coal) mining in the country. While the fortunes of the different houses, each established to channel finances and provide managerial and engineering support for individual mines, rose and fell during the century along with the fortunes of the mines they controlled, the Chamber itself set wages for white and black workers and, through TEBA (the Employment Bureau of Africa), its recruitment arm, controlled the black labour supply to the mines.

In the early 1980s, the mining houses that made up the Chamber included three gold mining powerhouses, Anglo, Gencor and Goldfields, and three minor houses, JCI (Johannesburg Consolidated Investments -- essentially a subsidiary of Anglo) and Anglovaal, with two gold mines apiece, and Rand Mines, whose portfolio included Harmony mine in the Free State and a number of virtually mined-out companies on the Witwatersrand. In terms of

management style, to appropriate Burawoy's language, Goldfields, Gencor and Anglovaal adopted a "despotic" style of management rule, whereas Anglo-American's style was "hegemonic". Rand Mines and JCI were mixed in their approach.

What this meant in practice during the 'eighties was that Anglo was incorporating reforms into its labour practices, essentially along the lines of the Wiehahn Commission established in 1977 at the behest of Prime Minister John Vorster (Giliomee, 2012:152-157). Such reforms required that the company recognize black trade unions in an effort to achieve class compromise. The company was also beginning to move away from ethnically based, "tribal" accommodation in their mine hostels towards tribally integrated rooms with "unit supervisors" supposedly replacing tribal *indunas*.

Dennis Etheridge, head of the Anglo-American Gold Division since the middle 1970s, set about decentralizing the Anglo mines into three or four relatively autonomous regions (initially under a "Consultant" – later called 'General Manager'). The regions were made up of Vaal Reefs (with three divisions – West, East and South) in the Klerksdorp area, Western Deep Levels in the Carletonville area, and Freegold in the Free State centred on Welkom and divided into North (Western Holdings, Free State Geduld and Freddie's) and South (including President Brand, President Steyn and Saaiplaas).

Depending on the style of the General Manager (certainly under Bob Williams at Vaal Reefs but considerably less so, later, under Ken Dicks in the Free State), managers at these various mines were given considerable autonomy to experiment with new mining methods and adopt different industrial relations styles. When the NUM appeared on the scene in 1982, however, the Anglo-American Gold Division did insist that all its mines grant access to the union, much to the chagrin of many of its managers.

Goldfields (whose most profitable mines were on the far West Rand, ranging from Westonaria to Carletonville) and Gencor (with four profitable mines on the far East Rand, two in the Free State and three more marginal mines on the far West Rand/Stilfontein area – as well as the thriving Impala Platinium mine, not part of the Chamber of Mines wage and recruitment system) and Anglovaal (with a rich mine in Klerksdorp and a poor one in the Free State) on the other hand, adopted a tough top down style of management. Robin Plumbridge, the chairman of Goldfields, for instance, ruled their mines with an iron hand. He was legendary for his despotic

management style. This applied even to managers on Goldfields mines. As Nap Mayer told me (2/8/2006): “I had people coming from Kloof mine to look at how to run a mine at South Vaal. This poor guy had to phone Plumbridge in the morning and tell him how many holes he had drilled for the night.”

At Gencor before 1986, the head of mining, Johan Fritz, was as “disciplinary” as Plumbridge in his management style, especially with regard to industrial relations. As in days of yore, Goldfields’ and Gencor’s hostels were managed along ethnic lines and industrial relations continued to be regulated by extensive mine security with a large degree of autonomy (and subsequent brutality). The NUM, when it came, was granted an office away from the Goldfields and Gencor compounds and recruitment on the compounds was explicitly forbidden. Indeed, during the 1980s, the NUM was never allowed to gain a firm foothold on Goldfields’ mines.

Anglovaal quietly and decisively followed the Goldfields mould. When the NUM took hold at Anglovaal’s Hartebeestfontein mine, moving over from bases at Vaal Reefs, management systematically dismissed union leaders. On an early visit to the mine, Puseletso Salae (16/9/94), the NUM regional secretary, discovered that the interior of his car had been “treated” with tear gas by mine security forces. It was impossible to drive the car and it was months before it was fully usable.

Rand Mines hedged its bets during the 1980s and tried to stay clear of the union, but JCI was in a somewhat complicated situation. Since it was essentially a subsidiary of Anglo, it was obliged to adopt a policy of open access on its two gold mines, Randfontein Estates and Western Areas. Its management style was conservative, however, retaining “tribal” compound housing, for instance, and trying to maintain a “firm” line in regard to the union. The NUM branch at JCI’s Randfontein Estates without doubt presented the most violent manifestation of union activity on any gold mine. This was certainly not entirely JCI’s fault. Nonetheless, it seems to me that JCI was caught between its liberal intentions and its conservative management style. In some ways, it had the worst of both worlds. Aspiring to traditional control, it lacked the brutal follow-through of Goldfields and Gencor before 1986.

Gencor holds the line

Gencor provides the most interesting case for understanding management politics at the mining house level. The company had

been formed in 1975 in a militant take-over of Union Corporation by the Afrikaner controlled General Mining group (*Federale Mynbou*) managed by Wim de Villiers. The take-over was funded with strong capital support from the two premier Afrikaner capitalist strongholds, Sanlam (under Andreas Wassenaar) and Rembrandt (under Anton Rupert). Sanlam retained ultimate control of the new company (Jones:149-163).

Wim de Villiers would not survive long as General Manager of the new company because of a fatal tiff with Wassenaar. Many of Gencor's top managers were openly hostile to Sanlam's arrant assertion of control and the forced resignation of De Villiers (Jones: 164-175). De Villiers' years as chairman of General Mining, however, did bring his protégé Naas Steenkamp to the centre of industrial relations at the company and eventually the Wiehahn Commission, Gencor and the Chamber. Steenkamp, the most progressive member of the Wiehahn Commission, was an ardent proponent of a decentred and negotiated approach to labor issues. During his early years working with Wim de Villiers, de Villiers had sent him on a tour to Europe to study various systems of industrial relations. De Villiers' final scheme of "decentralised management" (a form of class compromise) certainly owed something to Steenkamp's input.

Steenkamp's path in Gencor after the departure of de Villiers in 1982 was not plain sailing, however. After de Villiers' forced resignation, Gencor drifted in the shallows for more than three years under the chairmanship of Ted Pavitt (previously of Union Corporation), who was kept on a very short rein by Sanlam's tight control over any suggestion of independent management initiatives. The company thus struggled to develop coherent managerial structures, although in the mining department the manager, Johan Fritz, established a reputation for tough top-down control. Such policies put him in direct opposition to Steenkamp who reported to Fritz, although he actually headed up the entire industrial relations component in the company.

Under Wim de Villiers, Steenkamp had set out to replace the traditional disciplinary style of management-worker relations with a more consultative and participative approach. He drew up a "comprehensive" and "all-embracing" industrial relations manual, which was used in "Industrial Relations Orientation" courses for managers down the chain of command (citations are from de Villiers, n.d.). This brought him into direct conflict with Fritz and other more

conservative mining executives, although it also earned him silent support from others. As Gencor's representative at the Chamber of Mines, however, he (ably but unhappily) defended positions on labour relations with which he disagreed.

An old-style mine manager, Fritz firmly believed (*Financial Mail*, 11/9/85) that "blacks have a different cultural approach. They want to know exactly where you stand otherwise they lose confidence in you." As a result, and for reasons of underground safety, he said, one needed to "maintain a structured approach toward mining methods and discipline." He thus concluded: "It is important to remain consistent with black employees and not to vacillate". His model was a military system of command and blacks were quite clearly "the other ranks".

Not that Fritz was particularly open to suggestions from his white subordinates either. Already in January 1984, his top-down intervention, in the face of alternative recommendations from virtually every other managerial participant, had prevented resolution of an NUM-initiated strike at the Impala Refinery in Springs. A similar story could be told about the wage strike at Marievale gold mine in 1985, where the Industrial Court, in a precedent-setting ruling, ultimately decreed that unfair dismissals had taken place and obliged the mine to rehire the entire labour-force of dismissed workers.

Most important was the dismissal, on 7-8 January, 1986, of over 25,000 workers from Impala Platinum mines which also fell under Fritz's Gencor management. Impala had refused access to the NUM, citing a recently proclaimed Bophuthatswana Industrial Conciliation Act which forbade South African unions from organizing in Bophuthatswana. A worker's committee, late in December 1985, presented management with a list of grievances covering wages and working conditions (accompanied by a brief work stoppage) and demanded recruiting facilities for the NUM. When there was no management response, the entire Impala workforce went on strike early in January, 1986. Fritz's response was to have the Impala manager, Don Ireland, call in the Bophuthatswana police to break the strike. NUM officials who came to the mine were refused a meeting with management.

The largest dismissals from one mine hitherto in South African history followed. Bophuthatswana labour law, "calculated not to regulate conflict but to suppress it," made impossible any

legal claims of unfair dismissal against Impala.² The Bantustan government was profoundly satisfied with the outcome, but for Impala the whole business was a disaster. Wildebeestfontein North mine, which had not dismissed its entire work force was back to full production in two weeks. The other three Impala mines took six to nine months to return to normal. In a speech delivered to Gencor bursary holders in September, 1986, Derek Keys mentioned that the dismissals had cost the company R120 million although close to seventy per cent of the workers had been rehired. There would never again be another mass dismissal on any Gencor mine. Anglo had learned a similar lesson in 1985 (see Moodie, 2015).

The 1984 dismissals at Impala Refinery in Springs

Fritz's management style fits precisely into Burawoy's conception of despotic power. It was a total disaster for the company's image and seriously affected the bottom line. Since I have considerable detail from a Steenkamp document (1986a) of events for the 1984 Impala Refinery strike, let me use this as a case study to demonstrate the operation of "despotic" management at Gencor under Fritz. I should note that since the report was written by Steenkamp (in reluctant response to Fritz's direct instructions) it is not necessarily unbiased. Nonetheless, there is no reason to doubt the facts as stated.

The story goes as follows. On January 12, 1984, the entire workforce at Impala Refinery came out on strike over the dismissal of seven black workers in a racial incident. Cyril Ramaphosa (4/6/2001) once told me it was the first serious strike for the union to deal with. "After that," he added, "strikes rained down on us." Although the union represented over sixty percent of the black workforce, Impala had been tardy about granting recognition so the strike was technically illegal.

The strike was certainly justified. According to an interview with the Human Resources manager at the Impala Refinery at the time (Bannon, 2012:50), "with the establishment of the new Springs refineries, many workers were transferred from the old Union Corp gold mines, bringing with them their right-wing racist attitudes." He adds: "This continued because even though 'the old guard' retired their sons, nephews and younger brothers took their place.... All too often white-on-black verbal abuse was to ignite the situation.... The 'if we don't like your face, then you are gone' attitude at the Impala

refineries at the time magnified racial tension and polarisation and was the best recruiter for the NUM.”

Management acted precipitously. “By the next evening,” Steenkamp reported, “acting on instructions from Head Office [Fritz], the Refinery was dismissing workers who failed to turn up for work.” The union was shaken. Steenkamp continues:

The NUM General Secretary phoned the acting general manager of the Refinery, Mr O’Keefe, on Saturday morning, 14 January 1984, signalling that the workers would be prepared to return to work; in a meeting later that morning he told Mr O’Keefe that the workers would return to work immediately provided a mutually convenient time could be found to hear representations on behalf of the seven workers whose discharge had triggered the strike. This was a totally meaningless “condition” since management had itself suggested it the previous day.

Prior to the meeting, however, O’Keefe had contacted Fritz who instructed him that he was allowed only to “listen” to Ramaphosa. At their meeting, O’Keefe agreed to get back to Ramaphosa about his offer, but apparently was not allowed to do so.

Stalemate continued and workers continued steadily to be dismissed. On Monday, January 16, Ramaphosa phoned Steenkamp, he said “in an act of desperation.” Steenkamp suggested that he agree to make a public announcement saying that the illegal strike was a mistake and offering to talk the workers back to work. Steenkamp phoned Bob Bovell, the chief executive of Impala, who agreed to talk to Ramaphosa “in the light of this total capitulation.” Steenkamp phoned Ramaphosa and told him to make a time with Bovell. “Shortly afterwards,” Steenkamp concludes, “Mr Bovell phoned to tell me that he had thought it prudent to inform the executive director [Fritz] of his plans to talk to Ramaphosa and had been forbidden to do so. Mr Ramaphosa rang me a while later to ask me what kind of game I was trying to play.” All the workers were finally dismissed.

The entire senior staff at the refinery believed that “re-engagement would be in Impala’s best interests. They cited the maintenance of productivity via an established workforce, client relations, and long-term survival.” Such arguments were rejected

because Fritz argued that re-engagement would set a precedent for the entire mining industry. Notions of “disciplinary principle” prevailed.

Steenkamp concludes his account by noting that “at no stage was a calculation made of the likely total cost of the chosen strategy; and at no stage was this weighed up against the comparative cost of alternative strategies.” Whatever the cost, Fritz held the line. One can hardly maintain that his policy served “the material interests” of the refinery. To the contrary, in the words of the human resources manager at the time (Bannon, 2012:50), “we...lost three to five years in replacing the skills of those poor guys, many of whom were excellent workers.”

If this was indeed the first big strike faced by the NUM, then Fritz, in taking the steps he did, did set an important precedent. It was a precedent followed by Anglovaal and, especially, Goldfields’ Robin Plumbridge. Again and again in accounts of labour unrest at Goldfields mines in the 1980s, managers were forbidden to talk to local union representatives or the NUM itself. Instead, Goldfields security forces were called in “to restore order” in the name of “discipline”. Despotic management, in Burawoy’s terms, prevailed. The “associational power” of the union, such as it was, was simply broken.

Gencor turns around

In the case of Gencor, however. Sanlam proved unwilling to pay the price for Fritz’s devotion to disciplinary despotism. In April, 1986, three months after the Impala dismissals and just as Fritz was about to fire Steenkamp, Derek Keys, an outsider to mining, was appointed by Sanlam (in its guise as *Federale Mynbou*) as chief executive of Gencor. Sanlam’s choice of Keys seems to have been initiated as a direct result of a January investigation by the American management consulting firm, Arthur D Little, into problems with Gencor’s “current management style”. The report was very critical especially of the mining division with its “militaristic hierarchy” in terms of which “personnel relations tend to be dealt with in a mechanistic and bureaucratic way” (*Sunday Times*, 2/11/86)

Fred du Plessis and Marinus Daling, senior executives at Sanlam, had initially approached Keys about the top job at Gencor in February 1986, immediately upon receipt of the Arthur Little report. Keys had cogitated for six weeks before accepting their

offer in April. By July 1986, after close consultation with all levels of Gencor management and with firm support from Sanlam, he had radically restructured the company into an extremely effective organisation.

Fritz, who apparently thought he should have had Key's job, resigned in disgust, but not without first recommending that Steenkamp be fired (Steenkamp, 1986b), essentially for drafting, at the request of Ted Pavitt, a memo that took a critical line independent of but astonishingly close to the Arthur Little report. Fritz demanded that Steenkamp provide justification for his critique. The outcome was the document containing the analysis of the 1984 Refinery strike summarized above as well as a more general statement of Steenkamp's decentered and participative industrial relations policies (Steenkamp, 1986a).

It is important to note, perhaps, that Steenkamp's critique of despotic managerial discipline had a moral as well as an economic justification. "Our policy of decentralised management states," he wrote to Fritz, echoing Wim de Villiers, "that our people are our most important asset" and that "leadership must be acutely aware of the needs and human dignity of subordinates." He thus challenged, in his words, "the fundamental assumption that labour, like machinery or electrical power, is a commodity." Steenkamp, it seems to me, was feeling his way to positive class compromise despite the NUM's "associational" weaknesses on Gencor mines in the face of line management and mine security intransigence.

Now, with firm support from Keys and the remaining mining executives, Naas Steenkamp set out to reform Gencor's industrial relations policies in line with Keys' insistence that "people are not commodities". According to Albert de Beer (6/14/2001), who moved from Vaal Reefs East in Anglo to Gencor when Keys took over, Keys brought with him into Gencor "respect for people." In the Chamber of Mines, Gencor turned sharply 180 degrees from the hard-nosed Goldfields camp into what was perceived to be the "soft" Anglo camp. Steenkamp became a moderate voice to be reckoned with in the company – and indeed in the Chamber itself. The NUM took off on Gencor mines which were hard hit by the 1987 strike because the union was so well organized there.

What then of the politics of management within Anglo-American that had supposedly taken a "participative" line from the very beginning of the 1980s. We have already noted that Anglo mine

managers were not tightly controlled compared to, say, Goldfields (or pre-1986 Gencor) managers. Decentralised management was already a reality on Anglo mines. Indeed, while the Anglo Gold Division certainly took a progressive line at head office, Anglo mine managers were seriously divided on the issue of unionization. This division continued through the massive 1987 strike (see Moodie 2009).

Anglo American Head Office

The rise of the NUM was the outcome of an unprecedented opening up of opportunities, especially on Anglo-American mines, and of genuine grievances about unfair dismissals, wages and promotions. While granting access to the compounds might have been a necessary condition for unionization it is hardly sufficient to explain the rise of the NUM in particular, however. In the early 1980s there was a plethora of nascent unions seeking to take advantage of the industry's new openness and the NUM was not the first in the field.

The brilliant organizing strategies of Cyril Ramaphosa seemed to outstrip all competition with effortless ease. For all Ramaphosa's energy and intelligence, however, it is not sufficient to attribute the NUM's success to his efforts alone. He built his organization on the base of already existing social networks of political activists, informal associative power at work on the mines, especially amongst Basotho and Xhosa-speaking workers. Associative power was hardly restricted to the union but preceded it. It was thus a combination of long-standing grievances about wages and promotions, new political concessions by the Chamber of Mines, Ramaphosa's strategic and negotiating genius and his ability to tap into already existing political networks, that explain the insurgent emergence of the NUM.

The policies of South Africa's largest mining employer certainly aided the formation of the NUM. Anglo-American managers were obliged by their head office to give the union access to the mine hostels for recruiting and organizing, even giving the union use of an office in the hostel at each of its shafts. Several local Anglo managers at Vaal Reefs in fact told me in all seriousness that it was well known that Cyril Ramaphosa was an Anglo protégé. He had been selected early to start a union on the mines, they said, and his legal education was funded by an Anglo-American scholarship.

While this is stretching things too far, Anglo did indeed have a history throughout the 1970s of publicly proclaiming and privately working towards black unions on the mines. In the late 1960s several senior Anglo executives (including 1970s Gold Division head, Dennis Etheridge) had returned from Zambia²³ where labour practices had had to be very rapidly overhauled. They were determined not to be caught napping again. Harry Oppenheimer was fully on board with a move to reform industrial relations on company mines.

In December 1972, Alex Boraine was appointed to look into Anglo employment practices. A Methodist minister, he was joined in 1974 by Bobby Godsell, a recent sociology and philosophy graduate from the University of Natal. Both had been active in the opposition Progressive Party as well as the Methodist youth movement. They traveled together on a study trip to Europe and then Boraine quite soon left Anglo for a parliamentary seat. Godsell stayed on to participate in writing Anglo's proposals to the Wiehahn Commission in October 1977. Workers, that document asserted, should have the right to associate, strike, bargain collectively, participate in decision-making directly affecting their lives, and to work. Such rights should be legally protected by the state especially in the area of unfair dismissals. Indeed, as early as 1974, in a portion of a speech drafted by Godsell and Boraine at a hotel in Europe (Godsell, 6/6/2001), Harry Oppenheimer had recognized the existence of black trade unions and expressed a cautious willingness to negotiate with such unions. By 1978, his annual report described black trade unions as "a healthy and desirable development."

Harry Oppenheimer's personal management style was an important influence at Anglo head office. As Godsell explained to me, speaking of himself and his colleague, Hank Slack:

[Oppenheimer] is a person who for whatever reasons didn't like neat organisation. He hated the word strategy, didn't like strategic planning, didn't like mission statements. He was a person who simply liked to have people around him whose ideas were interesting and we had the capacity to take ideas to the Anglo executive pretty much whenever we could put up an idea. So we had access to the Anglo executive.... Look, we were

located at 44 Main Street [at the centre of Anglo power]. We were still under the shadow of Boraine. We had backing from W.D.Wilson and itinerantly from Harry Oppenheimer and we had quite good support from Gavin Relly. We were seen as 44 Main Street people. Young men in short pants who interfered. Financial operating divisions hated us.

Of course, not every suggestion from Bobby and Hank was taken up by the Anglo executive. They had to back up their arguments with evidence. But their access to executive deliberations was essential.

At a more direct level at Anglo head office, Callie van der Colf and Nigel Unwin headed up the Gold Division personnel and industrial relations offices. As we have seen, in contrast to Goldfields and Gencor before 1986, Anglo allowed union organizers relatively free access to the hostels. When I interviewed Unwin (3/7/95) he mentioned the taken-for-granted common sense that predominated at the Anglo Gold Division head office:

It wasn't a conscious thing. In fairness I've never seen a union as an illegitimate force. I suppose it was more theoretical than anything else, but it wasn't something which concerned me. I've never identified the union as the enemy. And I don't think, with respect to a lot of people, that the consequences of opening the hostels up was understood by a lot of Anglo senior managers.... I mean this is the single most significant [factor]... If that hadn't happened, the NUM would never have got off the ground, in my opinion, never. I don't think people realized that until it was probably (in their minds) too late. It was just part of the philosophy that hostels were pretty shitty places to live and if you could at all do whatever you could to have them partially normal within an already strange set-up, that was their right. We all shared that attitude.... With hindsight it was a critical element. Christ, we were young! It was totally disproportionate to the total impact but that's just the way it was."

As early as March 1982, the Anglo Gold Executive had sent out a circular letter to all mine managers (drafted by Nigel Unwin)

setting out guidelines for dealing with black unions that might seek access to mine premises. The union's bona fides should have been established by Head Office, he said, all visiting union officials must be made known to management and should check in with the hostel manager at the beginning and end of each visit. To keep officials out of dining halls or ablution blocks a room in the hostel should be set aside for union officials to talk to hostel dwellers and all union literature should be cleared with the mine manager prior to distribution.

There were two principles which should guide union access, "good order should in no way be disrupted by union activities" and "the union's presence should be so organized as to allow interested hostel residents to make contact, and others to avoid it." Unwin envisaged that once the union had become sufficiently representative (50 per cent plus) union representatives would participate in grievance procedures as employees' friend/advocate. By then, already existing elected consultative committees might be converted to union-supported shop steward committees (VRE/White Unions - Gen, 22/3/82).

By June 1982, in its annual report on the eve of the founding of NUM, Anglo-American complained about low black membership in trade unions and looked forward to the time when the majority of its members belonged to unions. "The corporation remains firmly of the view that collective bargaining operates in the best interests of both parties when all the unions concerned, irrespective of race, are represented at the same negotiating table and the issues to be dealt with are agreed," the statement read (*Citizen*, 29/6/82). Such reforms were also perceived to be important to enable workers to continue to obtain skills that would enhance production. It is difficult to imagine a clearer statement of an ideal of positive class compromise.

Anglo's vision of orderly progress quickly ran aground on the resistance of certain authoritarian local mine managements and the NUM's provocative style of recruitment. The NUM in no way shared management views of what constituted "good order" in the hostels. Nor were Anglo local mine managements necessarily in agreement about how to handle the union.

Anglo American Mine Managers

As mentioned earlier, Anglo mine managers were give

considerable discretion to run their mines as seemed best to them. We have already seen that, at least at this stage, this was not true of the other mining houses with the possible exception of JCI. Ken Dicks (17/10/1998), at the time General Manager of Vaal Reefs East, for instance, who was sympathetic to Goldfields' hardnosed approach to the union and openly critical of his own head office, was quite adamant when I asked him if he would have preferred to have worked at Goldfields. "Hell no", he responded, "I wouldn't want Robin Plumbridge running my mine for me."

Anglo's relatively free-handed style of management thus led to radical differences between management styles within the same company. This is not to say that Anglo Gold Division was entirely hands-off. Take, for example, a small fracas about union recognition at Vaal Reefs East. On April 14, 1983, Ramaphosa sent to Callie van der Colf at Anglo Head Office stacks of membership forms for Western Deep Levels and Vaal Reefs West and East, requesting recognition (VRE/NUM Corr). Nigel Unwin promptly sent a letter to Vaal Reefs asking that the East and West mines undertake a verification exercise to establish whether the union's claims were accurate.

On the West mine, management merely checked the NUM forms against their personnel records to ensure that alleged NUM members were indeed on their payrolls. Vaal Reefs East, however, circulated a form to shaft personnel asking them to interview all alleged NUM members. NUM activists contacted Ramaphosa claiming "that they were being interrogated about their union membership." Indeed, they told him that "they were being asked whether they were intimidated into joining the union and whether the signatures on their membership forms were authentic or not." Management, of course, denied union charges that they were themselves intimidating workers.

On May 18, 1983, Ramaphosa and local union officials met with Viv du Plessis, the East personnel manager to sort the matter out. By that time, du Plessis had been in touch with both Unwin and van der Colf who told him they would be happy if he were to adopt the West mine procedure which was common on other Anglo mines. Du Plessis then agreed to "back-down" and Unwin informed Ramaphosa of this. That was before du Plessis met with Dicks, however. According to du Plessis: "In discussing it with Mr. Dicks, he expressed his satisfaction with our verification exercise but agreed

that we could ‘back-down’ to a fall-back-position, whereby we would continue with the verification exercise but with the N.U.M. members present and involved.” This was not, of course, what had been agreed with Unwin and van der Colf. Understandably the meeting between du Plessis and the NUM officials was a confrontational one.

My impression from the correspondence is that du Plessis came to the meeting expecting to negotiate his fall-back position which would have involved the continued use of the “verification form” but in the presence of NUM members. Ramaphosa, however, had been assured by Unwin that the East mine would follow normal Anglo practice. Du Plessis started the meeting by asking why the NUM had not consulted them about verification. Ramaphosa’s response was that the agreement was with the Chamber of Mines and not with Vaal Reefs East and that there would be trouble if the mine had failed to complete the verification process when the recognition agreement with the Chamber was signed on May 27.

Du Plessis insisted that the Vaal Reefs management would continue with their verification process regardless of what the union said and did. At that point Ramaphosa terminated the meeting, saying that he would instruct his members not to provide East management with any information. Du Plessis never got to his fall-back position and accused Ramaphosa of adopting “an intractable stance.”

Ramaphosa returned to his office in Johannesburg and promptly wrote to Dennis Etheridge, with copies to Anglo’s managing director in the Transvaal, to Van der Colf and to Ken Dicks, giving his version of the events and concluding that “we believe it will be in the interests of industrial peace if this matter is resolved once and for all.” A copy of the letter arrived on du Plessis’ desk and he wrote a very defensive memo to Dicks. On May 27, Vaal Reefs East was included amongst the mines recognized by the Chamber.⁴ The NUM had prevailed because of Ramaphosa’s head office contacts and overall Anglo policy. One can only imagine Ken Dicks’ anger and Viv du Plessis’ humiliation.

After he retired, Ken Dicks decided that the division amongst “hard” and “soft” mine managers was planned by top management. “If you look at Anglo-American and you look at the mines that were running at the time and the personalities that prevailed at the mines, I always felt there was a fifth column. Bobby and the head office guys were selling us down the river,” he said. He continued:

I felt and I still feel very strongly on reflection that we

were used as pawns...., who were sent in there and they said: "Box!" They didn't want a sweetheart union. They couldn't say to us, "Don't box." They had to have a contest. They had to have two protagonists to make the thing look legitimate.... These are my views upon reflection. So we went in there and we boxed. Right. There were two schools of thought, if I can classify them. The one school of thought was the van Gessels..., the Dick Fishers.⁵ They were the doves. On the other side was the Ken Dicks..., Nap Mayer, who said: "Man, we must draw clear lines to decide who is there." These were, I would say the hawks and these were the doves. Van Gessel was a snow-white dove. He just believed you must be nice to the unions and that's it, work with them and peace at any price and to hell with the production and ta da da. So there were the two schools of thought within the gold division at the time and we disagreed quite vehemently with each other on policy. I mean giving them access into the hostels just was anathema to me. I just couldn't live with it.... So that was kind of how it went, those two camps. And I don't know who was right. I'm too close to be able to know which was the right policy. But we were used as poor white pawns in the game. I really believe that.

Interestingly enough, when I spoke to Karel van Gessel (14/6/2001), who was manager at Western Holdings when the union arose, he shared Dicks' perceptions of the managerial divide (but not of the head office plot):

I said to Ken Dicks and Nap Mayer.... If you want to have a lasting kind of thing, then you need to get a negotiated settlement.... A lot of people, those managers, thought that by soft saying about consultation or involvement or whatever to unions and employees they would be abdicating management. And I said: "That is not abdicating management. That is participative management. It is not to say that you must become inefficient. In fact if it is used correctly you should become more efficient."

Van Gessel is very eloquent. He was also speaking for managers like Dicks' neighbour Dick Fisher on Vaal Reefs West, who managed to build lasting and meaningful relationships with NUM leaders on his mine and was despised by Dicks for being soft and for wasting production time talking to the union. Maurice James (11/6/1998), Dicks' most valued assistant, told me: "West Division, so far as I'm concerned, capitulated – gave them the mine. They gave everything away. They were totally opposite. In those years, as far as my memory goes, East Division was the only division that really produced."

NUM members to whom I spoke respected van Gessel and Fisher for taking strong stands when necessary – they were managers after all – but for striving always to be fair. Perhaps the best early example of this more participative style of management, with its strengths and its hazards (and of the problems occasioned by those who took a hard line), emerges from van Gessel's account of an abortive strike at Western Holdings.

In 1984, after a strike had been balloted and declared on mines which recognized the union, the Chamber came back with a marginally improved offer on the Sunday before the strike. Representatives from all the recognised mines were present at the negotiations and they agreed that the strike should be called off. By this time, however, workers had been drinking in anticipation of a strike and at Vaal Reefs and Western Holdings they took violent umbrage at any suggestion they go to work.

At Western Holdings' No. 2 shaft, as van Gessel told me, the union was fairly recently established and the biggest problems arose there. The police were called out by mine security. Van Gessel was phoned in the middle of the night: "They are breaking down the hostel. Can we go in and sort them out?" And I said, 'Are you sure?'. They came back and said, 'False alarm.' The second time, I said, 'I'm coming out myself.' So, at four in the morning I went out there to have a look for myself, and there was no burning or anything. The police were there." The police wanted to "go in and sort them out."⁶ Van Gessel gave the police commander an option:

I said, you either take over, which I would prefer since, as I always said to head office, I am not head of security. I'm not trained to be a general in the army. Mining is my business. If there is civil unrest the police must take over and I stand back. But if you don't want that, then I

do the job. And this chap must listen to me. So he said to me, well then he is going away. I said, well then, you go away. You either say to me you are taking over and then I go back and phone head office and say look the police have taken over, or you can do what you like. He said he'd stay. So I had some talk about it and a couple of people close by said, "You are taking a chance on this one." I said, "Well, that's why I am the manager."

Van Gessel also discussed the matter with some of the union leaders. There were a few individuals doing some looting. He said to the union people: "I am now going away and if you cannot control the crowd I'm going to send this lot behind me in there." They said to him, "Fair enough. Give us a chance." Van Gessel went back to his security forces again.

Ten minutes later he got a phone call saying, "There are still ten or twelve people who are burning benches." He said to his security men, "Go in and sort them out." He concludes the story of No. 2 as follows: "They sorted it out and they had seven people who were bitten by dogs and that was it. That shaft had no troubles until the big strike in 1987. Not a problem at all. Because they thought it was fair enough that those people were sorted out."

This episode did not mean the end of that night for van Gessel, however. He continues:

At No. 6 shaft we had the same kind of thing, you know we had problems in the crush [where people clocked in to go underground] and they wanted to sort them out and I said to them there is not much point having a lot of violence in the crush because half of the people want to work and the other half don't want to work. Because all you are going to get is an uprooted shift at the bottom and people just clashing. I said, just let it be. And if nobody goes to work nobody goes to work and if everybody goes to work everybody goes to work. That settled things for the time being.

Van Gessel went home to sleep.

When he returned four hours later, he discovered "they had climbed into No. 1 shaft. I won't say who made the decision in my absence. They obviously didn't think I was being forceful

enough...., security, most of them, but also some police under the instructions of my assistant and with the approval of my consultant.” The story continues:

And in the end I don't think they actually knew what they were doing because in the end we put something like 140 people in hospital. The trouble was not that. The trouble was that the majority of those people were innocent people. What happened was that the instigators ran into the barracks, they chased out all the innocent people inside the barracks, and the rubber bullets started hitting those people. So in the end it took me six months to sort that out. Not because we had sorted out the combatants but because we had sorted out the wrong people. That was typical. They said management action. Everybody thinks about it. Everybody does what they like. It took me six months to actually sort it out for a shaft which [was] actually a very well organized shaft.

This was not the end, however, since “in their wisdom the security people, with their adrenaline flowing, decided to go across the road and sort No. 3 shaft out at the same time. And there they ran right in the middle of a shift trying to go down the mine with some people trying to stop them and again they put about 80 people in hospital.” It took van Gessel weeks “to sort out all the underlying problems and get the trust back from the people.” He concludes the story of this one night by saying: “You know, it’s all very well to sort people out if there’s anarchy, but if you’ve got a choice it’s far better to actually sort out the right people. Take a little bit of time to just find out who the right people are.”

My reason for taking so much space for this one night is that it provides a riposte for Dicks’ assertion that “van Gessel was a snow-white dove.” In this story, which is backed up by testimony from many of the union stalwarts I have interviewed, the forceful reasonableness of managers like van Gessel and Dick Fisher emerges clearly from the story. They certainly held union leaders accountable. Dick Fisher, union leaders told me, was “tough, but he would always listen”.

Jeff Leaver (3/6/2001), who was a personnel officer under Ken Dicks at Vaal Reefs East during the 1980s, and who sympathized with the union, told me that of the three different mines at Vaal

Reefs “it was quite astonishing how territorial the mine managers were.... The reason there were such great differences was that the silos were quite impenetrable” so that the centre was neutralised. Nonetheless, it is clear from my interviews that Bob Williams, the General Manager, looked most kindly on Dicks and the East Mine.

This is hardly surprising, since Vaal Reefs East under Ken Dicks was one of the most productive mines in the Anglo stable. (With one exception the shafts at Vaal Reefs West under Dick Fisher were old and largely mined out.) During the 1980s, once Nap Mayer had been moved to run Freegold North, and the South Mine ran into trouble (with mass dismissals and the associated costs), the East Mine became the “cash cow of the Anglo stable.” As Leaver noted:

If you look at the numbers in rand terms, it is big bucks. Sometimes priorities become a little blurred when you are losing the kind of money we were losing on strikes. We must have gone through a year of intermittent go-slows. It just didn't stop. For probably a year. I mean the union really gave the management team an incredible run-around.

Nigel Unwin told me that at this stage, Vaal Reefs was producing about 40% of Anglo's gold so a lot was at stake.

At the end of my second interview with Ken Dicks (12/6/2001), he summed things up from his point of view: “We really didn't do our jobs as we should have. We were more arm wrestling each other at the table on union matters than human relations matters. Rather than getting on and doing what we were paid to do which was to produce gold and mine as engineers, sensibly and safely.”

For Dicks, his job was to get the gold out of the ground. Union negotiations were a waste of his most productive time. If union officials were late for meetings, for instance, he simply cancelled. In pure production terms, he also sat on his management subordinates, holding them accountable, leaving them no space to “make out” in Burawoy's sense. “I used to have a check-point review once a quarter with each of my subordinates” he told me:

Those are the result areas we agreed on. Those are the outputs of your job. How have you done? Of course the guys hated those meetings because some of them hadn't done anything. I kept copious minutes which I sent them. I said, “Now, last time you said this and this.” I used to say, “Now you come in and do the

presentation and I'll sit and listen." They used to come and say they don't understand and I wanted to punch the guys.... Some guys did it like it was second nature. Other guys tried to give me the run-around.

Later, he added a wry afternote: "You know the reason I said I wouldn't want to work for Goldfields is that I am a Plumbridge, you see. I don't want to be handled the way I handle my subordinates. No, shit, I don't like that. That's all part of our make-up."

Let me add a final observation from Jeff Leaver that, I think is *a propos* of Dicks' style of management. "In many cases management was befuddled because they didn't understand how the union got its mandates. What its values were.... Management just simply couldn't understand...why those elected leaders across the table couldn't make or give undertakings that they'd follow through on." Of course, as Leaver well knew, "the union couldn't work that way – couldn't afford to work that way." Losing touch with its members is any union's worst nightmare – or it certainly should be.

Maurice James expressed management's problem in terms of representative rather than participative democracy: "These guys, you couldn't reason with them because they didn't understand what a union was about – what a union was. They didn't understand a word like a mandate.... Everything had to go back to the masses.... So consequently you never got anywhere with them."

The problem with representative democracy for a union, of course, is that it presumes support from members. Managers had sanctions they could apply over their subordinates. The union would simply lose members if it acted unilaterally. NUM leaders in the 1980s were completely committed to participative democracy. Compromises struck with management without worker participation ultimately doomed the union to impotence – or worse still, it could lead to loss of members to rival unions, as happened on some of the coal mines and eventually on platinum in Rustenburg.

Given the differences in management political style within the same company, I asked Nigel Unwin about the process by which mine managers were appointed. He told me:

It was done by consultation and discussion at very senior levels in the group between the mining divisions... There was a process of succession planning and career planning which happens regularly once a year at a manpower conference. High flyers would have been identified and

moved around to get the right exposure. Usually, they would start off with a relatively easier, small, less critical mine to appoint the managers to....It was the [group] consulting engineers who made the decision. They would meet with these guys regularly in their meetings. It's a very closed and very effective communication process between managers and consulting engineers. Consulting engineers are continually visiting the mines and they would not only meet with managers but also with lower level management. Just as a measure of it, in the eight or nine years that I was there, I can think of very few managers who shouldn't have been appointed because of managerial weaknesses. There were a few, but by and large they picked the right guys. It was an effective system.

The system was certainly effective enough to advance the career of Ken Dicks. He was appointed as General Manager of Freegold in 1990 and then, when most of the Anglo Free State mines, against Nap Mayer's and Dicks' urging, were being sold to Bernard Swanepoel's Harmony mines, he became General Manager of Western Deeps. Dick Fisher, in his turn, retired as General Manager of Vaal Reefs South even as Vaal Reefs was eventually broken up, with less productive shafts sold off to African Rainbow Minerals in a black empowerment deal. Karl van Gessel, "too much of a gentleman" in Nap Mayer's opinion, was moved to Anglo Gold head office and put in charge of mine safety. I should perhaps add that there was something of a shift in Anglo Head Office style when Peter Gush replaced Etheridge as head of the Gold Division.

Conclusion

While I hope this account of the diverse modes of management politics on the South African gold mines (illustrative of Burawoy's insistence on "relations *in* production") is valuable in its own right, let me conclude by returning to Erik Olin Wright's account of class compromise and his J-curve. The union struggle at Goldfields and Gencor (before 1986), as well as the practices of the "hard" Anglo managers, might seem to be examples of negative class compromise, whereas the practices of Anglo head office and the Anglo "doves", could be taken to represent an attempt at positive class compromise.

The problem from the point of view of Wright's causal argument, however, is that the Anglo "doves" were seeking positive class compromise before much, if any, union "associational power" had been created. The same could be said for Steenkamp's policies at Gencor after 1986. Unless one widens Wright's conception of management "material interests" to include policies that sought to *create* associational power for workers in the interest of increased productivity (if indeed this was the intent), his J-curve causal argument has to fall away (or at least be radically transformed).

The history of the politics of management, at least for relations *in* production on the South African gold mines as the NUM came into being, thus complicates the causal force of Wright's model, given the union's initially very limited associational power – certainly in the conventional sense. At the same time, his conception of negative and positive class compromise usefully expands and deepens Burawoy's distinction between despotic and hegemonic regimes, including an aspect of class conflict that seems to be curiously missing from Burawoy's rather ideal- typical account of that distinction, at least as I read his *Politics of Production*. It seems to me that Burawoy's conception, especially of a "hegemonic regime", needs to be considerably expanded in light of the history of class conflict and the politics of management on the South African gold mines.

Archival Material

I rely on two sets of archival material. The first is a full set of industrial relations documents from Vaal Reefs East mine. As Vaal Reefs was being disbanded, John Carr remembered where the documents were housed and guided me to them. The mine kindly shipped them to me in the US. I organised them and sent them to be microfilmed by Sterling Library at Yale University where they are available to future researchers. In this paper, they are noted as VRE.

The second set consists of the extraordinarily extensive personal archives of Naas Steenkamp. He made the documents available to me. I have urged him to gift them to a South African university library. Meanwhile, I list below specific documents cited from Steenkamp's collection:

Dawie de Villiers (c.1985), Confidential report to General Mining Union Corp on their "Industrial Relations Manual" (which also mentions "contradictions" for implementation incurred by

Johan Fritz' top-down management style).

T.I. Steenkamp (1986a), "Gencor's Image and IR Practices", Memo 7, 1986/03/10.

T.I. Steenkamp (1986b), "Notes on discussion with Mr. J.C. Fritz, 28 April, 1986".

Endnotes

1. Emeritus Professor of Anthropology and Sociology, Hobart and William Smith Colleges and Honorary Research Associate, Society, Work and Development Institute (SWOP), University of the Witwatersrand
2. I quote here from page 48 of an investigation into violence at Bafokeng North mine, to be found in the report of the "Commission of Enquiry into Events at the Bafokeng North Mine during March 1992." I was given access to this report by Clive Thompson who was one of the commissioners.
3. It is interesting to note in passing that Wim de Villiers, who took over management of General Mining (and eventually Gencor) and who had such a profound influence on Naas Steenkamp, had previously had experience as general manager of Anglo's Rhokana copper mine in Zambia. Mind you, Nap Mayer, who was perhaps the most prominent conservative Anglo manager, had also had a spell in Zambia, so the Zambian experience seems to have worked both ways.
4. My interpretation of these events is based on the following documents in the VRE/NUM Corr files -- Ramaphosa to v.d.Colf, 18/4/83; Unwin to Gen. Mgr., VR, 20/4/83; du Plessis to Dicks, 6/5/83; du Plessis notes of meeting, 18/5/83; Ramaphosa to Etheridge, 18/5/83; du Plessis to Dicks, 20/5/83.
5. In the interest of clarity I exclude the names of managers not mentioned in this paper.
6. When I spoke to Dave Witten (18/10/1998), an ex-British Army officer, who was in charge of mine security at Vaal Reefs, he insisted that it was policy there that the police should be called in only as a last resort. During the 1980s, he said, "the police had no training in crowd control. None at all."

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