

TIMELINE

1887

The Transvaal Chamber of Mines in Johannesburg was formed

1897

White workers struck against wage reductions at the Randfontein mine

1902

Transvaal Miners Organisation (TMO) was formed

1907

Miners go on strike, and the government uses violent tactics to halt the strike - First big clash

1909

Transvaal Industrial disputes Act passed in parliament

1913

The Transvaal Miners' Association is renamed as the South African Mineworkers Union (MWU) and gains recognition by the Chamber of Mines.

1 May 1913 - Widespread strike after a decision by Kleinfontein Goldmine to force underground mechanics to work longer hours on Saturday

1914

8 January - Railway men's Union strike

13 January - Mine workers joined, and a general strike is declared. Johannesburg is placed under Martial Law

15 January - Trade Union leaders and union members are surrounded by armed Government troops. The strike collapses and many of the leaders are forcibly placed aboard a mail-ship in Cape Town and illegally deported to Britain. None ever returned

1915

21 December - 2 800 Black miners strike at Van Rhyn Deep

1918

February - African miners, hard hit by the rising cost of living, boycott concession stores on the East Rand in February 1918. Police break up the boycott by arresting picketing workers

[FRAME 1](#)
Click here

[FRAME 2](#)
Click here

DISORDER ON THE RAND THE 1922 MINeworkers STRIKE

[FRAME 3](#)
Click here

[FRAME 4](#)
Click here

After the Anglo Boer War the strong **Transvaal Miners Organisation** (TMO) was formed in 1902.

In May 1907, a strike was called to resist some working conditions. Four years later, on 21 January 1911, the tramway workers refuse to begin services. This being the first of many labour disputes which culminated in the General Strike of 1922.

In **May 1913** labour discontent came to a head in a general strike at New Kleinfontein mine where management introduced changes to working hours. The strike spread from mine to mine, accompanied by growing violence. On **4 July** Police were attacked by strikers. Workers attempted to close the tramways, the power station and the railways – **Park Railway Station** was attacked and partly **burnt** down as well as the offices of **The Star** were **gutted by fire**, **Police** and Military units opened fire, killing nineteen people. Generals Botha and Smuts intervene and arrange for a truce, which met many of the strikers' demands.

Between 1913 and 1922 *intermittent labour actions* were the order of the day – *see timeline*.

Most severe of all the Witwatersrand labour unrest was the 1922 strike, also known as the Red Revolt, with the main theatre in Johannesburg.

PRELUDE

In November 1921 the **Transvaal Chamber of Mines** (Chamber) announced that from 1 February 1922 they intend to abandon the **colour bar**. This meant that 2 000 semi-skilled white miners could lose their jobs. The white miners reacted strongly as their salaries and standard of living were endangered. Sporadic strikes commenced, but these did not become widespread until the end of the year

The **trigger** was a drop in the world price of gold in December 1921. Companies tried to **cut** their operating costs by decreasing wages and **weakening** the colour bar enabling promotion of cheaper black miners to skilled and supervisory positions.

The **South African Industrial Federation (SAIF)** representing the unions, rejected the Chamber's proposals

THE STRIKE

Following intermittent disputes in 1921, the New Year marked a **strike** on the collieries of the Transvaal. It soon spreads to the gold mines, especially those in the East Rand when electrical power workers and those in **engineering** and foundry occupations followed suit.

The strike involved all the mines on the Witwatersrand and began on 2 January when white coal miners went on strike. On 9 January the White Miners' strike was formally declared when 22 000 miners downed tools. In the meantime, a small group of militant workers formed the Council of Action, which was influenced by communism. On 7 March a General Strike was called by the Council of Action.

Black workers were not part of the strike and were restricted to the compounds and light duties on the mines. The **security** of the mines and black workers was a great **concern** to mine management, who soon **requested** rifles and ammunition from the South African Police.

The young **Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA)** took an active part in the uprising on grounds of class struggle. The racist aspect was typified by the slogan; "**Workers of the world, unite and fight for a white South Africa!**" and by several clashes against blacks.



A picture from "Gold Their Touchstone" with the caption: "1922 Revolt: A Black *voorlooper* ('forerunner') led a procession of miners whose banners proclaim, **"Workers of the World unite for a White South Africa"**.

This slogan was used mainly not to alienate the sympathy of white South Africans for the strike

The humiliated black "forerunner" is **symbolic** of the white strikers' demand not to abandon the colour bar, or job reservation.

Initially the government refused to interfere and felt the Chamber and SAIF should resolve the matter themselves. Government attempted to get the two sides to negotiate, but neither side was willing to compromise. The strikers formed commandos.

In response, government sent in troops from the Active Citizens Force and declared martial law. The ensuing violence resulted in hundreds of injuries and deaths.

TIMELINE

1918

May - A bucket strike is held by Black sanitary workers - 152 arrests. The ANC launches a labour campaign threatening to organize a General Strike - workers released.

11 May - White Power Station workers go on strike

1 July - When 15,000 miners stop work, Police rush to the scene and try to force the miners down the shafts, resulting in violent clashes. The Police arrest eight men who are accused of 'incitement to violence' for the strikes of the period. Two belong to the ANC, three to the ISL and three to the IWA.

September - White mineworkers persuade the Chamber of Mines to agree that no position filled by a white worker should be given to an African or Colored worker.

1919

Some 70, 000 Black miners go on a peaceful strike. Government troops broke up meetings, killing 11

1 February - White building trade workers strike

29 March - White power station workers go on strike

31 March - White municipal workers strike

1 April - The strike is called off

6 April - Settlement is reached

1920

January - Black miners' strike

29 February - Black workers riot near Vrededorp

4 May - White tramway workers strike

21 May - Tramway strike ends

1922

2 January - White coal miners went on strike and on **9 January, White miners' strike** is formally declared, following disputes in 1921

19 January - Tramway service is reduced to minimum

27 February, White Power Station workers down tools

7 March, General Strike called by workers' Council of Action

10 March – Declaration of Martial Law

17 March - Strike called off