



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE EFFECT OF STRIKE ACTION IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN MINING INDUSTRY WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE SPITZKOPCOAL MINING INDUSTRY: MPUMALANGA PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses mainly on strike action in the South African mining industry. Remarkably, without conflict, strikes cannot exist, which indicates the interrelatedness between 'strike action' and 'conflict'. Labour disputes and resulting disruptions have been the main contributory factor to the mining industry's record low production figures over the past five years. It is notable that before the 1994 elections, the majority of strikes were politically inspired and hence little focus was placed on the employees' needs. However, post-1994 management have subsequently realised the necessity and importance of being responsive to the needs of their staff. Arguably, employees who are satisfied with their employment positions, as well as working conditions, are far less likely to go on strike compared to employees who are unsatisfied. Besides, employers have also realised the importance of labour with specific reference to labour relations from a pragmatic point of view, hence, labour relations cannot be viewed in isolation. A variety of external factors affects labour relations and must be considered when reviewing the labour relations climate. This article suggests specific general guiding principle to be followed by management when handling strike situations. It has been established in this article that there must be greater awareness in order to understand the impact of strike action on productivity.

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of low wages is an age-old perennial problem in the South African coal mining industry. The division between employer and employees is wide and it would seem that the employer is of the conviction that it has unqualified power to rule subordinates with respect to the provision of good working conditions and benefits, such as better salaries. In most cases employer overrules the employees. South Africa, as a country, has historically experienced widespread strikes and other forms of industrial action, especially over the following periods: 1903, 1920s, 1930s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, and this is inclusive of the pre- and post-1994 elections.

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The relationship between employer and employees in different sectors of the economy has been a source of investigation over many years. A significant number of research studies have been conducted on the relationship between employer and employees, with this study having focused on the nature of conflict between the two parties. Arguably, conflict is one of the most destructive forms of interaction in the industry and is a daily reality for everyone, be it at home or at work. This therefore, motivates role players in the workplace to seek strategies that can be used to ease any such conflict within the workplace. Conflict can be relatively minor, easy to handle or even overlooked, whilst in other instances it can be of great magnitude and pose massive problems for the businesses or industries thereby affected. As such, conflict requires a strategy for it to be successfully resolved and to ensure it does not cause or create constant tension or lasting enmity among the various members in the businesses concerned.

The main focus of this study, therefore is on strike action. As previously stated, strikes cannot exist without conflict; thus, although the focus is on strike action, the term 'conflict' cannot be divorced from strike action, because conflict leads to strike action. Strike action is also divided into two types, namely: protected and unprotected. The protected strike action occurs when notice to the employer and the relevant stakeholders is given in advance before engaging in the industrial action. Legal or protected strike usually enjoys trade union support. On the other hand, it is a general characteristic of the illegal or unprotected strike that it does not necessarily enjoy trade union support. Unprotected strike is when employees are involved in strike action, without giving an early notice to the employer prior to the strike. In fact, in many instances the trade union disclaims responsibility for the employees' actions in this regard. In terms of common law, a strike constitutes a breach of contract, entitling the employer to terminate the employees' employment summarily. It may also constitute a delict, for which the employer may recover damages against the responsible parties. The right to strike is now generally seen as a necessary adjunct to collective bargaining, as it corrects the inequality inherent in the employment relationship and is constitutionally entrenched. However, it is also generally accepted that, like all rights, the right to strike may be reasonably limited in the interests of safety and other values and goals. The Labour Relations Act of 1995, gives statutory protection to the constitutional right to strike and limits its exercise.

To this effect, South African trade unions have a history dating back to the 1980s. Information obtained from the Department of Labour, indicates that approximately 2000 registered unions claimed a membership of 3.5 million workers in 2003, of which 465 came from informal employment (Barker 2007:92). In the period from 1980 to 2000, the membership of unions increased sharply with an annual increase of ten percent (Barker 2007:93). According to Barker, this could be attributed to various reasons, which include among other things, the political instability and turmoil in South Africa during that time, as well as heightened awareness of worker rights. Furthermore, the new South African Labour Relations Act (LRA), made it easy for the registration of unions, including the increased recruitment drive for union membership which led to a rapid increase in 1996 and 1997. Unions that were established early were mainly for whites. The South African Confederation of Labour then established favoured employment policies based on racial segregation. The Industrial Workers Union of South Africa, which was the first union to organise black workers, was established in September 1917. This union was formed by a revolutionary syndicalist international league (Wikipedia 2013).

During the apartheid era prior to 1994, trade unions played a major role in the economic and political resistance, forcing employers to realize the need to talk to employees through their union representatives (Wikipedia 2013). Before the coming into being of the democratic government in 1994, trade unions emerged as powerful drivers of political rights at a time when black South Africans were denied the exercise of their rights. Unions'organised boycotts and strikes to make their voices heard (Venter *et al.* 2011). Trade unions played an important role in the political change from apartheid to the present democratic South Africa (Wood and Mahabir 2001). Section 27 of the LRA, gives workers the right to engage in socio-economic protest actions under certain circumstances.

Currently, unions can still challenge the government on certain issues (Venter *et al.* 2011). The LRA gives rights to employees and their representative unions to redress through arbitration, mediation and conciliation. In almost all sectors of the economy employees have union representatives who engage with employers on issues affecting their union members. For the purpose of clarity and precision, this study focuses mainly on the Spitzkop coal mining industry. The Spitzkop coal mine is based in Mpumalanga Province and is surrounded by three small towns: Breyten, Hendrina and Ermelo. The area also has other mines, including Hendrina coal mine and Ermelo mine. The researchers mainly focussed on the Spitzkop coal mine, because of the history of a long strike action that took place there in 1994. As of now, Spitzkop management faces a challenging task of improving remuneration and other benefits for the employees. The goal of Spitzkop coal mining industry management can be defined as, creating value for target consumers and making sufficient profits for the industry. Miners, on the other hand, experience extensive acute problems, such as insufficient or lack of income and a large number of financial responsibilities in their families. The existence of trade unions in the mining sector, serves an informative role, as the employees get to know their rights such as working conditions, wage increases and other benefits. Notably, miners have of late become accustomed to voicing their immediate problems to the employer, such as the cause of poverty to their families, because of low income through inadequate wages. So, it is that workers participate in strike action, though it is important to note that this is not just a question of low income, but also because of other environmental factors, such as working conditions. It is for this reason that the researchers keep on asking themselves, as to whether an increase in salaries alone would solve the employees' problems?

According to chapter 4 of the Labour Relations Act (LRA), 66 of 1995, a strike is well-defined as follows:

"Strike means the partial or complete concerted refusal to work or the retardation or obstruction of work, by people who are or have been employed by the same employer or by different employers, for the purpose of remedying grievance or resolving dispute in respect of any matter of mutual interest between employer and employee and every reference to work in this definition including overtime work, whether it is voluntary or compulsory."

Thus, it bears repeating that this study examines the impact of strikes on the Spitzkop coal mining industry, through which employee discontent may be expressed through various forms of organised collective action such as:

- **Go slow:** Employees work without enthusiasm and at a lower output than normal;
- **Overtime ban:** There is a collective refusal to work outside normal hours of work, thereby affecting potential for production;
- **Work to rule:** Employees insist on a strict interpretation of duties or recognition agreements, and require specific detailed instructions on how to complete work. This slows work down and impacts negatively on production;
- **Withdrawal of co-operation:** Employees withdraw support for any co-operative measures, such as quality circles or productivity gain sharing plans;

- **Overtime traditional strike:** A group of employees act collectively by implementing a complete stoppage of work in an attempt to pressurise the employer into considering their demands. Sit-ins or sleeping in the company premises may be part of such action.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This study evaluates existing theories, dealing precisely with the micro-dynamics of strikes. This is followed by an evaluation of additional factors which are not covered by these existing theories, which could cause and/or condition the nature of this form of industrial conflict. These factors, together with those relevant variables identified by existing theories of strike action, will serve as the basis for the construction of an integrated theoretical understanding to be re-evaluated and developed in the subsequent substantive study. Burkitt (1975:87) suggests that in order to understand the micro-dynamics of strike, a number of models have been created to explain the internal circumstances under which strike action occurs, with most models focusing on the trial of strength dispute. Of great influence has been Hicks' (1932:141) model, which suggests that employers are faced with a choice – either to resort to protracted struggle, with an attendant loss of income, or grant wage concessions. It is possible to construct a schedule through which to enable one to plot how much an employer will be prepared to pay in wage increases to prevent a stoppage, with a point being reached where the cost of stoppage is equal to the cost of wages (ibid.:142). This situation is represented below.

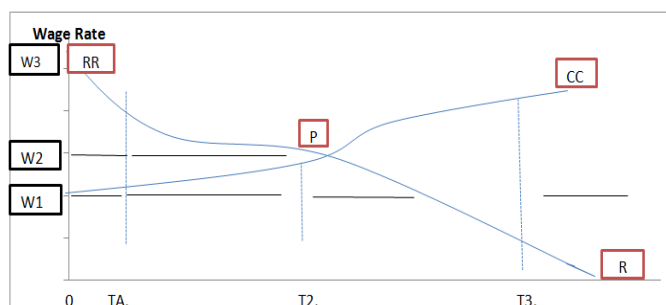


Figure 1. Expected Length of Strike

Expected Length of Strike

Where CC is the employers' concession curve and RR the union's resistance curve, OW1 is what the employer would pay in the absence of trade union pressure, OW2 is the highest wage the employer is prepared to pay. While the union may settle for less, this nevertheless has the potential to improve the situation of its members (Burkitt, 1975:87). The concerns of the union are largely measured, as the gap between its resistance curve and OW3 (desired wage rate). Essentially, this model is based on the assumption that the length of a strike is the result of a rational costs benefit analysis on behalf of both parties. The strike will last as long as one party believes the cost of the strike is less than the benefits of achieving the desired wage level. A serious constraint of this type of theory is that, the situation tends to change during a strike. For instance, change in the attitudes of employers and labour may result in a lengthening or shortening of the strike to the extent that one set of rational criteria may not necessarily prevail. Violence or the intervention of the authorities may harden attitudes, whilst negotiation or mediation may result in a

greater willingness to compromise. Hicks' model is perhaps most valid as a 'snapshot' and as a vivid depiction of a situation at a given point of time, but is nonetheless subjected to dynamic adjustment. For example, issues such as wage demands and actions by individuals during the course of the strike may interact to shape its nature and the ultimate outcome in the context of a particular time and geographical location ('space') (Giddens, 1984:25). Remarkable, the possible effects of such aspects will be explored in successive sections. Other important considerations include the company's potential to survive the loss of income stemming from a wage increase, which in turn is partially affected by its ability to pass on any increases to the consumer (Reder, 1980:76). This in turn, is affected by the relationship between the company's costs (and prices) and those of its rival companies (ibid.:76). Trade unions enter the picture by calling for government intervention and/or by attempting to organise through the whole industry, in order to ensure that all companies face the same wage pressures (ibid.:77). On the other hand, management will try to reduce wages in situations of high unemployment and when the trade unions are at their weakest, it may not be irrational for a union to force a company to close (ibid.:80). Conversely, other factors such as the potential for government to intervene are also of significance in such disputes. Barbach (quoted in Reynolds, 1987:144) maintains that all industrial unrests are about price and power. Reynolds (1987:145) postulates that even the threat of strike action attests weakening in terms of investment lost. This seems to be something of a generalisation and is difficult to prove in most circumstances, as much-vaunted cutbacks due to perceived trade union threats are often attributed to a "basket of factors". Furthermore, limitations of Hicks' model include the fact that it makes certain assumptions regarding the psychology of the "working man" (Kennan, 1986:1101) and the prevalence of rationality.

The Complexity of Strike Action in South Africa

Most of the quantitative models of strike causality versions (that is, models primarily based on quantitative data and on certain liberal economic assumptions with regard to consistent rationality and the self-regulating nature of markets, which may be extended to non-economic variables (Milogram & Roberts, 1990:58)) deal either with that which causes strikes or with the internal dynamics and duration of strikes. As noted earlier, it can be argued that the two may not be necessarily distinct however the cause of a strike may be inherently bound up with its course. In particular, subjective interpretations of the workers' 'previous experiences of collective action before the strike started, and experiences during the strike, frame both the combativeness and ultimate duration of the dispute. George Simmel was one of the first social theorists to articulate a dialectical understanding of the relationship between broader social trends and localised and individual struggles for autonomy (Frisby, 1989:38). Simmel points out that there is an ongoing dialectical relationship between broader socio-economic forces and subjective understandings as well as interpretations.

This notion can readily be useful for developing a broader understanding of strikes. Although, it can be argued that the relationship need not necessarily be dialectical and that subjective and objective forces combined might trigger strike action. A certain level of inflation may, for example, place pressure on employees to resort to strike action. The ultimate

decision to strike and the duration thereof may be determined by the more subjective factors, such as the previous experiences of the parties to the dispute. Indeed, the distinction between subjective and objective factors may not always be clear-cut, especially when factors, such as the economic effects of informal networks of support are considered. Frisby (1989:38) notes that rapid socio-political change may mean that this distinction between broader trends and local conditions is no longer clear-cut, but has instead become blurred. For instance, local conflicts can assume national significance. A good example of this would be the 1973 Durban strikes. As a response to a very particular localised set of circumstances (including developments within the KwaZulu-Natal homeland and the role of the University of Natal SRC's Wages Commission in organising workers), the strike provided much of the impetus for the emergence and rapid expansion of the independent trade unions on a national level. Jameson (1991:416) asserts that relationships at the workplace do not automatically form part of a total system. On the contrary, they can incorporate a variety of localised tendencies and counter-forces. What takes place at an individual or local level may indeed occupy an ever-changing position with regard to the wider social totality (Jameson, 1991:416). In other words, the relationship between local social happenings, including industrial conflict, should not be seen as automatically linked with broader social trends. Industrial conflict may occur despite an unfavourable broader socio-political environment, and, in addition, may not only be determined by factors such as wages, but also affect them.

Case Study: Spitzkop Coal Mine

The purpose of this study is to discuss the historical background of the industry and the hierarchical structure of the Spitzkop coal mining industry. Furthermore, it is important to know the geographical situation of the study area. Much emphasis lies on the employer's relationship with the Shop stewards and employees, as well as the impact of strikes in the coal mining industry. When addressing strike action, there are various participants who play an influential role during the process. Looking at the most important role-players, one should mention the employer, the Shop stewards of a trade union and the employees involved in the strike action. The Spitzkop coal mining industry is one of the best industries in the Mpumalanga Province. The industry produces coal which it supplies locally, as well as exporting to other countries. The 1994 strike action was based on low salaries. Employees had been neglected for a long time by management and therefore decided to engage in a massive strike action. The type of strike that occurred was a solidarity strike called by the Congress of South African Unions (COSATU) nationally. Notably, the National Union of Mineworkers' (NUM) members were in the majority, as compared to those of the National Employees Trade Union (NETU) and Mineworkers' Union (MWU). The large number of NUM members made the strike possible and this resulted in the economy of the industry being acutely affected. The attitude of management was to regard time as money, and hence considered the absence of one employee at work as a great loss of production and economy. The 1994 strike action took only a week, yet the industry experienced financial implications due to the decline in production. The strike action only affected the industry and townships around Mpumalanga Province, as well as exportation of coal to other countries.

Spitzkop Coal Mining Industry Organisational Structure

Duiker Mining (Pty) Ltd serves as the mother body of the structure outlined below: Boschmans Colliery, Spitzkop Colliery, Strathrae Colliery, Tselentis Colliery, Strathrae Colliery, Tselentis Colliery, Waterpan Colliery and Consolidated Colliery. Much of the article's focus will be on Spitzkop Colliery at Breyten, where there was a long strike action that took place. Spitzkop had 989 employees and 69 management staff at the time, leading to a total figure of 1 058. For this study, the researchers selected the stratified sampling technique which uses readily available subjects. This technique is economical in terms of spending money and there is minimal loss of data from the subjects in the study. In order to ascertain the impact of strike action, a sample size of hundred (100) respondents was drawn from the Spitzkop coal mining industry, which is situated in Mpumalanga Province (Breyten) and surrounded by Hendrina, Ermelo and Carolina.

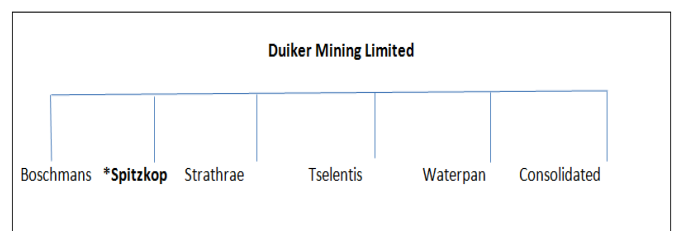


Figure 2. Duiker Mining Limited

Geographical region of the Study

In 1995, the province was formerly called Eastern Transvaal and changed to Mpumalanga province. The word "east" precisely means "the place where the sunrise". Mpumalanga is located in the eastern South Africa, near the border of Swaziland and Mozambique. The central spoken languages in the province are Swazi, Zulu, Ndebele and Tsonga. Mpumalanga also shares common borders with the NorthWest Province to the north, Gauteng to the west, the Free State to the south west and KwaZulu-Natal to the south east.

The province has a land surface of 78 370km², which represents 6.4% of South Africa's total land area. The population of just over 3 million people represents 7.3% of the country's population. Mpumalanga's capital city, Nelspruit, is one of the fastest growing towns in South Africa. The economy of the region as a whole is supported principally by manufacturing, mining, agriculture, forestry, power generation and tourism.

Other principal towns in the province include:

- Witbank – mining, steel manufacturing, industry, agriculture
- Middelburg – stainless steel production, agriculture
- Secunda – power generation, coal processing
- Lydenburg – agriculture, fish farming, mining, tourism
- Barberton – mining town, correctional services, farming centre, home of the Barberton Daisy
- Malelane – tourism, sugar production, agriculture

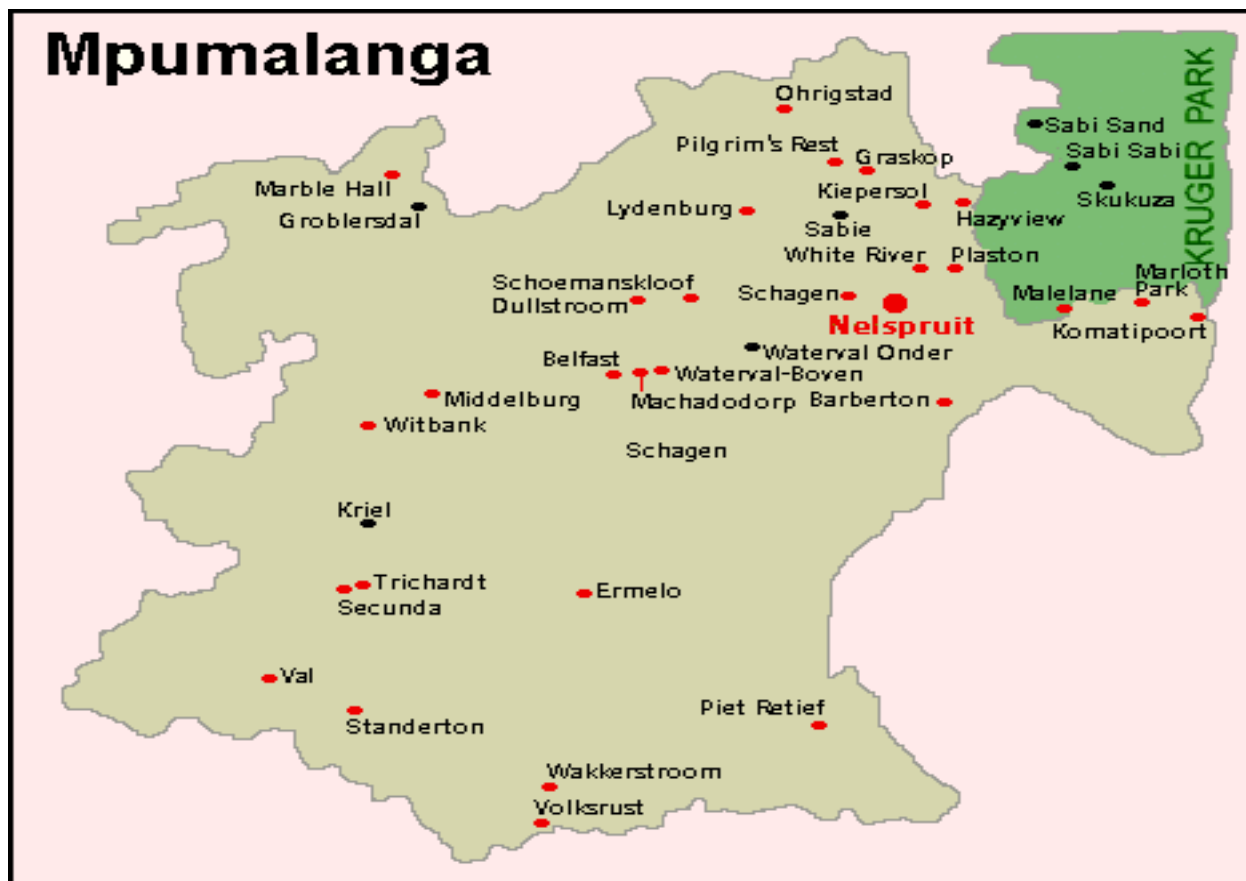


Figure 3. Mpumalanga map illustrating principal towns in the province

The eastern town of Komatipoort is only 100km from the port of Maputo in Mozambique. Ambitious plans are well advanced to transform the Maputo–Nelspruit corridor into an industrial giant, using the Maputo harbour as a major terminus for both exports and imports to and from the province, as well as inland to Gauteng and the rest of South Africa. The climate and topography of Mpumalanga varies from Highveld grasslands at 1600m above sea level, through the Middleveld and escarpment to the subtropical Lowveld plains towards the Kruger National Park and the private game reserves on the eastern border.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researchers used questionnaires to solicit information from the respondents in the Spitzkop coal mining industry. Stratified sampling procedure was also applied in this study to minimise the loss of data from the respondents and thus economise in terms of money spent (Bailey 1994). In the analysis of the data, frequency table and chi-square (χ^2) statistics tests were used to demonstrate employer and employee's responses and attitudes to the strike.

Data was also analysed using frequencies and percentages. The research design has been used by the researchers in the collection of data, as well as in engaging in the analysis and interpretation of the observations. The stratified sample research method was used to collect information from the respondents, that is, using close-ended

and open-ended questions. The study described the strategies that must be used in handling a strike action, with specific reference to the type of go slow strike that exists in the Spitzkop coal mining industry. It was also intended in this study to identify the employees' interest in participating in strike action and thus develop a disciplinary action forth industry. The researchers sampled and stratified the questionnaires using a small set of cases and divided them into groups.

The researchers used a more manageable and cost effective sample rather than working with the entire pool, thus, for purposes of convenience, it was decided to divide them into groups. Sampling is a portion of the total population, and the researchers always viewed the sample as only an approximation of the whole. Thus, a sample size was drawn from the different work positions of the employers and the employees of the Spitzkop coal mining industry. The rationale for looking at different occupational categories was informed by the realization that employers have the power to control the employees, hence their input was considered important. Furthermore, the employers enjoy privileges and benefits at the expense of the employees' production. As a consequence, employees were deprived of enjoying their benefits and thus earned low salaries. This state of affairs then resulted in the strike phenomenon being enhanced.

Questionnaire Administration and Procedure

Martins (1999:215) outlines the population with the necessary information to be interviewed and further outline the best

means of data collection. For this study, employers and employees were expected to fill in a self-administered questionnaire, which was generally handed to the respondents and filled in by that particular respondent with no help from the interviewer. The items on the questionnaire were based on the personal data of the participant, with the following categories being covered: gender, age, race, decision-making participation, causes of strike in the workplace, elimination of strike action, monthly income for employees and trade unions in conflict resolutions. The researchers dispersed one hundred (100) questionnaires to the respondents (employers and employees) to ensure that the sampling method suited the study. Upon analysis of the data obtained, the researchers assumed that there were no challenges experienced by the respondents in terms of the questions posed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 below reflects that 68% of the respondents were males who constituted the majority of the respondents, while 32% of the respondents were females and are a minority in the industry. Both males and females were represented in the study, although males were in the majority. It can also be confirmed from the table below that females are not well represented in the Spitzkop coal mining industry, with the number of male employees outnumbering the female employees. This can be attributed to the past discrimination against female employees over the years. However, a critical observation of the statistical distribution of gender and race shows that more white females are employed than black females. This, on the other hand, can be attributed to the apartheid policy of the past. Some of the black females are only employed to do menial jobs like sweeping and preparing tea for the senior members of the management. This is contrary to the position of the white females, most of whom are in the management class. The inference we can draw from this analysis is that the management of the Spitzkop coal mining industry has not fully implemented the new Labour Relations Act of 1995, where racial discrimination is vehemently rejected. It also appears that, as from 1994 affirmative action has not been fully implemented as is expected. In view of the situation, as represented below it can be argued that the negotiation process between employer and employees could solve the above problem. It would seem therefore that further research is needed to investigate the problem as articulated below.

Table 1. Gender distribution

Gender	Number of respondents	%
Male	68	68
Female	32	32
Total	100	100

Table 2 reveals that 36 respondents out of the 100 who participated fully in strike action activities were in the 31–40 age category at the time when this study concluded. Twenty-three were aged between 41 and 50, while 21 were in the 26–30 age category. Sixteen percent (16%) of the respondents were in the 18–25 age category and four of the respondents were in the age category of 51 and above. The inference drawn from the table below is that individuals in the thirties and forties are more likely to participate in strike action. As individuals move towards the fifties and above, their interest to participate in strike action declines.

Perhaps the reason we can attribute to this is that they are moving towards their retirement and are only counting their days to leave the industry. With regard to those in their late twenties and early thirties, their interest to participate in strike action is also high, while the interest of those in the 18–25 year category to participate in strikes is not high.

Table 2. Age distribution of the respondents and their interest to participate in strike action

Age	Number of respondents	%
18-25	16	16
26-30	21	21
31-40	36	36
41-50	23	23
51 and over	4	4
Total	100	100

Table 3 reflects that the majority of the respondents, that is, 90 (90%) were blacks, 5 (5%) were whites, 4 (4%) were coloured and 1 (1%) was Indian. The findings below reveal that most of the respondents were blacks, followed by whites and coloureds. This reflects that black employees dominate the Spitzkop coal mining industry. Since blacks constitute the largest number they also play a very big role in any strike action in the industry. Black employees were initially employed only as unskilled labourers and were paid a wage between 8–10 times less than that of their white skilled colleagues (Roux, 1978). This racially-based wage differential became the norm for industry and commerce in general. Subsequent to this, one of the major aims of white labour unions became that of maintaining and reinforcing this wage gap to increase the job security of their members. This differentiation was not restricted to wages only, but also extended to other working conditions. This was evident in the first documented strike in South Africa which occurred in the Kimberly diamond fields in 1884, when white employees refused to strip and be searched for illegal diamonds, a practice that was customary for black employees when leaving the mine. This was South Africa's first taste of violence in industrial action, as four men were killed and 40 injured by armed mine officials and scab labour in the process (Grey-Coetzee, 1976).

In 1904, because mine owners were unable to obtain sufficient low-paid black workers, they imported indentured Chinese to make up for the missing numbers. Relevant legislation prohibited the Chinese from certain scheduled white occupations, but the fear that black and Chinese indentured labour would be permitted to perform skilled work led to a strike in 1907 by white miners. The Transvaal government at the time did not step in to intervene on behalf of the miners, but troops were deployed to protect mine property, indicating the state's alignment with the mine owners. Sociologically speaking, blacks have been placed under the apartheid policy where many of them have been marginalised, ill-treated and dehumanised. For this reason, many of them are not afraid to strike and fight for their rights. Secondly, the other factors of why blacks play a major role in strikes are because many of them are well educated and, because of this, they know their rights as provided for in the new Labour Relations Act. Thirdly, many of them are employed permanently and have spent many years in the industry. The fact that they are permanent staff explains why they are actively involved in strike actions as and when such strikes occur.

Table 3. Race Group distribution

Race Group	Number of Respondents	%
Black	90	90
Coloured	4	4
White	5	5
Indian	1	1
Total	100	100

Hypothesis One

H₀: Employees are not allowed to participate in any decision-making.

H₁: Employees are allowed to participate in any decision-making.

Table 4. Employees are allowed to participate in any decision-making

Respondents	Yes	No	Total
Male	60 (53.2)	10 (16.8)	70
Female	16 (22.8)	14 (7.2)	30
Total	76	24	100

$$X^2 = \frac{n(O11 \times O22 - O12 \times O21)}{R1 \times R2 \times C1 \times C2}$$

$$X^2 = \frac{100(60(14) - 10(61))}{(70)(30)(76)(24)}$$

$$= 100(840 - 160)^2$$

$$= \frac{46\,240\,000}{3\,830\,400}$$

$$X^2_{obs} = 12.0718$$

$$X^2_{crit} = 10.83$$

$$Df = 1$$

Since $X^2_{obs} \geq X^2_{Critical\ value}$, then H₀ is rejected. Therefore, employees are allowed to participate in decision-making.

The contingency coefficient "C" = 0.001.

It is worth reiterating at this stage of the discussion that the reason for not allowing employees to participate in any decision-making was primarily because of management hostility. However, in the new democratic era, management have seen it appropriate and fair to allow employees to participate in decision-making since this is now a democratic country. Before 1994, employees' participation was minimal as compared to the post-1994 dispensation to date. The employees participate in decision-making because they are part and parcel of the industry; and, by so doing, it becomes possible for the employees to render services efficiently and effectively.

Hypothesis Two

H₀: Salaries are not the cause of strike action in the workplace.
 H₂: Salaries are the cause of strike action in the workplace.

Table 5. Causes of strike action in the workplace

Respondents	Yes	No	Total
Male	69 (61.62)	9 (16.38)	78
Female	10 (17.38)	12 (4.62)	22
Total	79	21	100

$$X^2 = \frac{N(X\ O22 - O12 \times O21)}{R1 \times R2 \times C1 \times C2}$$

$$X^2 = \frac{100(66(12) - 9(10)^2)}{(78)(22)(76)(21)}$$

$$= \frac{5\,446\,400}{2\,846\,844}$$

$$X^2_{obs} = 19.1315$$

$$X^2_{crit} = 10.83$$

$$Df = 1$$

Level of significance α ; 0.001

Since $X^2_{obs} \geq X^2_{Critical\ value}$, then H₂ is accepted. Therefore, salaries are the cause of strike action in the workplace.

In many industries, the cause of strike action is occasioned, among other things, by low salaries and other related issues. Notably, salary dispute is not a new problem and occurs in national, international, provincial and local industries.

The contingency coefficient "C" = 0.001.

In this article, reference was made to Frisby who cited Simmel (1987:38) as having been one of the first social theorists to articulate a dialectical understanding of the relationship between broader social trends and localised and individual struggles for autonomy. In other words, Simmel insinuates that there is an ongoing dialectical relationship between broader socio-economic forces and subjective understandings and interpretations. This conception can readily be applied in developing a broader understanding of strikes, although it can be argued that the relationship need not necessarily be dialectical and that subjective and objective forces combined might trigger a strike action.

Arguably, a certain level of inflation may, for example, place pressure on workers to resort to strike action, but the ultimate decision to strike and the duration thereof may be determined by the more subjective factors, such as the previous experiences of the parties to the dispute. Sociologically speaking, causes of strike action in the workplace are a socio-economic problem that cannot be terminated and or eliminated. The best we can do is to minimise them through industrial negotiations that involves culture, religion, the economy and other institutions. Strike action reflected a negative impacting the case study of Spitzkop coal mine because the production declined rapidly, as a result and also failed to be resolved as quick as possible.

Hypothesis Three

H₀: Strike action cannot be terminated and or eliminated.
 H₃: Strike action can be terminated and or eliminated.

Since $X^2_{obs} \geq X^2_{Critical\ value}$, then H₀ is rejected. Therefore, strike action can be terminated or eliminated.

Table 6. Strike action can be terminated and or eliminated

Respondents	Yes	No	Total
Male	66 (58.52)	11 (18.48)	77
Female	10 (17.48)	13 (5.52)	23
Total	76	24	100

$$X^2 = \frac{N(O11 \times O22 - O12 \times O21)}{R1 \times R2 \times C1 \times C2}$$

$$X^2 = \frac{100(66(13) - 11(10))}{(77)(23)(76)(24)}$$

$$= 100(858 - 110)^2$$

$$= \frac{5995000}{3230304}$$

$$X^2_{obs} = 17.32$$

$$X^2_{crit} = 10.83$$

$$Df = 1$$

Level of significance α ; 0.001

The majority of the respondents agreed that strike action could be terminated or eliminated entirely. In view of the above analysis, management desires to respond to workers' demands to terminate or eliminate the strike action that occurred in the Spitzkop coal mining industry. It became evident in our literature review that the general strike of 1964 in Nigeria paralysed the economy. History shows that not until the strike action was carried out did the management meet with the various demands of the employees. One of the researchers in this study, during a field trip to the Spitzkop coal mining industry, also observed a similar occurrence. The researcher gathered from the respondents that most of the employees' demands were not met until the strike action occurred. One of the basic questions we would like to ask is why the management in most organisations are reluctant to meet employees' demands before the commencement of strike action. Perhaps the reason why management only responds to employees' demands during strike action is because of the huge loss in profit to the organisation during such action. Therefore, considering that profits could be adversely affected by strike action, it is puzzling why management does not avoid such industrial unrest or action through peaceful negotiation before it starts or rekindles. Our suggestion is that management should learn to negotiate with employees and show concern for their well-being so that strike action can be minimised or totally eliminated if possible.

Hypothesis Four

- H₀: There is insufficient monthly income for employees.
- H₄: There is sufficient monthly income for employees.

Table 7. Insufficient monthly income for employees

Respondents	Yes	No	Total
Male	67 (66.22)	10 (10.78)	77
Female	19 (19.87)	4 (3.22)	23
Total	86	14	100

Hypothesis Five

- H₀: Trade unions do not play a pivotal role in conflict resolution.
- H₅: Trade unions play a pivotal role in conflict resolution.

$$X^2 = \frac{N(O11 \times O22 - O12 \times O21)}{R1 \times R2 \times C1 \times C2}$$

$$X^2 = \frac{100(67 \times 4 - 10 \times 19)}{77 \times 23 \times 86 \times 14}$$

$$= \frac{608400}{232284}$$

$$X^2_{obs} = 0.2853$$

$$X^2_{crit} = 10.83$$

$$Df = 1$$

Table 8. Trade Unions play a pivotal role in conflict resolutions

Respondents	Yes	No	Total
Male	70 (61.62)	9 (17.38)	79
Female	8 (16.38)	13 (4.62)	21
Total	78	22	100

$$X^2 = \frac{N(O11 \times O22 - O12 \times O21)}{R1 \times R2 \times C1 \times C2}$$

$$X^2 = \frac{100(70 \times 13 - 8 \times 9)}{79 \times 21 \times 78 \times 22}$$

$$= \frac{100(910 - 72)^2}{2846844}$$

$$X^2_{obs} = 24.667$$

$$X^2_{crit} = 10.83$$

$$Df = 1$$

Level of significance α ; 0.001

Since $X^2_{obs} \geq X^2_{Critical\ value}$, then H₀ is rejected. This, therefore, confirms that trade unions play a pivotal role in conflict resolution.

There are four unions in the Spitzkop coal mining industry, all of which have a common goal of fighting for employees' rights in the industry. From the inferences drawn in Table 8 above, seventy-eight percent of the respondents agreed that trade unions play a pivotal role in conflict resolution. The contingency coefficient "C" = 0.05.

Value and Recommendations of the Study

The researchers are very optimistic that both employer and employees could benefit from this study. Employees will understand that there should be a humane relationship between themselves and their employers and that the relationship between employees and employers is based on a negotiated contract (written or applied) between an individual and the organisation. Conflict between employer and employees, in terms of low salaries and working conditions in general, cannot be solved permanently but can be managed. Social needs cannot be satisfied only with fixed economic capital because of social change and technological advancement in the country. Employees should learn to know their rights, as well as the policies of the company they work for. Employees should also know that the company conducts workshops to enlighten them as part of the company shareholders. Employer, on the other hand, should change the traditional management style and adopt a more democratic style that can neutralise any conflict and lack of understanding in the Spitzkop coal mining industry. If everybody is satisfied, then Spitzkop will be successful. As a matter of fact, the only instrument that has been available for employees to use to fight for any increase in their wages or pay is the medium of trade union negotiation forums, which till now have progressively helped the employees. Furthermore, negotiation forums should help to improve the industrial relation system in South Africa.

As part of the recommendations, the following model could be adopted to minimise the adverse effects of strike action:

- Employer should pay attention to the employees' demands,
- Employees should be involved in decision-making,
- The relationship between employer and employees should be improved, and
- The company should improve the working conditions of employees.

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