

## THE ECONOMY

WHEN the weekly train bringing Mozambican workers to South Africa's goldfields failed to reach Johannesburg station last Wednesday afternoon, mine managers worried that Pretoria's bar on Mozambican labour, announced that afternoon, had come into effect already.

To their relief, the train had simply been delayed, and there would be no labour shortages in the weeks ahead.

Industry analysts calculating the costs of the South African government action saw that the loss of Mozambican labour would damage though not cripple the industry.

But the announcement came as a body blow to the Mozambican economy and left more than 100 000 Lesotho nationals feeling extremely nervous that similar action could be taken against them.

When the train arrived on Thursday there was no special ceremony to mark the end of an era — the last trainload of Mozambican miners, whose links with the goldmines are as old as the industry itself.

After all, it was Mozambican labour in the 1890s and the early twentieth century which laid the foundations of the South African mining industry, built Johannesburg and later bankrolled the decrepit Portuguese empire.

Unable to attract South African blacks to poorly paid jobs in what historian Alan Jeeves has described as the "dangerous, brutal and onerous working environment" of the mines, the Chamber of Mines recruited most of its labour from Mozambique in the first three decades of the gold mines.

Mozambique's peasant economy had been devastated by three centuries of Portuguese colonialism, which included the large-scale export of slaves and forced labour on the *prazos*, the large colonial estates.

Mozambicans were driven to seek wage remuneration to pay taxes and to afford the trade in fortified wine and spirits upon which whole communities, with the connivance of the Chamber's labour recruitment agents, had become dependant.

Through agreement between the Portuguese colonial authorities and the Chamber and South African authorities (in which the Portuguese received kickbacks, such as a certain guaranteed amount of traffic through Lorenzo Marques harbour), a system of tied labour emerged between Mozambique's three southern provinces and the goldmines.

On the eve of the Anglo Boer War, more than 60 000 Mozambicans were employed on the goldmines, about 60 percent of the total workforce. Its peak as a percentage was in 1904 when two-thirds of the black workers on the gold mines were from Mozambique.

Mozambican employment on the mines remained constantly high until Frelimo came to power in 1975, when there were 118 000 Mozambicans on the mines — a third of the total workforce and the largest single ethnic complement.

Fearful of the importation of socialist ideas on to the mines and wanting to weaken its new Marxist

# The last train from Maputo

## Mozambican labour and the mines

Mozambican labour has long been the mainstay of the mining industry. When Frelimo came to power in 1975, one in three miners was from Mozambique. Even today, several mining houses, notably JCI, Rand Mines and Anglovaal, have large complements of Mozambican miners. PHILLIP VAN NIEKERK and JEAN LEGER report on how last week's bar on Mozambican labour will hurt the mining industry.

neighbour economically, the South African government drastically cut down the recruitment of Mozambicans to the mines.

By 1977 the total number of Mozambicans on the gold mines had been reduced to its low point of 35 000.

As a further economic measure, in 1978 South Africa scrapped an agreement signed with Portugal in 1928 in which part of the miners' wages were paid to the Portuguese administration in gold at a fixed price.

By reselling this gold at free market prices, Portugal was assured of massive revenues which effectively propped up the crumbling 500-year-old empire in its last years.

By the 1980s, recruitment of Mozambican labour had picked up once more. This was given further impetus by the Nkomati Accord of 1984, climbing close to 60 000 by the time of last week's announcement.

To the mine-owners, Mozambican workers have several attractions — their experience in the industry means they often fill supervisory and skilled positions and their desperation for work means they are prepared to work on many of the hottest and most dangerous mines.

The mining industry has a glut in labour supply unprecedented in its history, but the thesis that all black mineworkers are unskilled has long been discredited and certain individual mines are likely to be hard-hit.

Though they only constitute 12 percent of the black labour force, the withdrawal of their labour is likely to have an effect on production disproportionate to their numbers.

And certain mining houses are likely to be harder hit than others. Those with the largest complement of Mozambican workers are Johannesburg Consolidated Investments (JCI, 25 percent), Rand Mines (22 percent) and Anglovaal (20 percent).

Anglo American, which has a policy of phasing out Mozambican labour, will be the least affected.

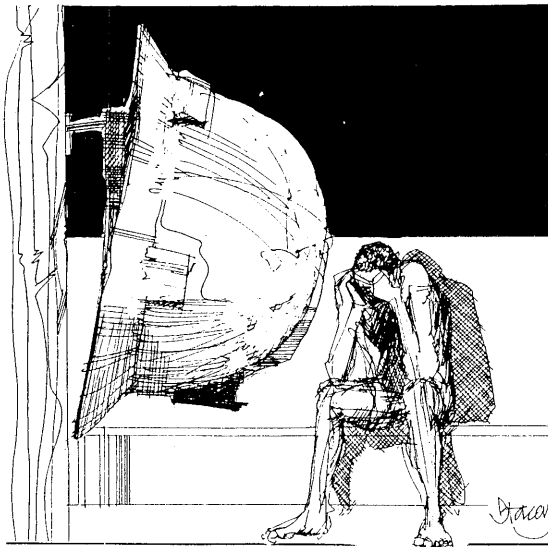
However, on its two most dangerous mines — Western Deep Levels and Elandsrand — Anglo still has a high proportion of Mozambicans.

A field study on Mozambican labour by Maputo's Eduardo Mondlane University said of Western Deep Levels: "Because it is a very deep mine it is extremely hot for underground working conditions and it is a highly unpopular mine."

An even more pertinent example of the attractions of Mozambican labour is East Rand Proprietary Mines (ERPM), the hottest, most dangerous and deepest mine in the Rand Mines group, which has a Mozambican complement of 43 percent — the highest in the industry.

According to the Maputo University study, during the seventies ERPM mine "went out of its way to make openings for Mozambicans and issued new Re-Employment Certificates, sometimes through the post, to ex-employees whose certificates had already expired".

In addition, Mozambican workers — whose insecurity about their jobs have made them extremely subservient to mine management — have strongly resisted unionisation and are known by management to be



strike-breakers.

It is an extraordinary irony that the workers whom the government envisages will replace them are likely to be South Africans, who have a greater reputation for militancy and a strong distaste for unpleasant working conditions.

And it places the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) in an invidious position because in August last year they decided at a national conference to call for an industry-wide strike should foreign workers be repatriated.

At the time the NUM was particularly concerned with threats to repatriate Lesotho nationals who comprise a large and vocal portion of the union's membership and strength.

However, the stopping of recruitment of Mozambicans is likely to strengthen the position of Basotho workers in the immediate future.

Two weeks ago the Chamber stopped recruitment of Malawian novices because of the fear of importing Aids onto the mines. This has meant that two large, traditional areas of labour supply have been

terminated in a short space of time.

The primary effects of the move will be felt in Mozambique's three southern provinces — Maputo, Inhambane and Gaza — where the population already faces famine as a result of drought and the ravages of the Renamo insurgents.

In a 1977 paper advocating the disengagement of Mozambican mineworkers from South African mines, Ruth First and Rob Davies for the Institute of African Studies in Maputo argued that this would not be possible without massive rural development in these areas.

Mine wages have tended to outstrip agricultural produce in the three provinces by a factor of 10.

"The system of labour export has been entrenched as a result of a long historical process of underdevelopment in southern Africa, and one which has left the supply states structurally dependent on the South African labour market," they wrote.

In the last 10 years this process has, if anything, worsened.

According to official sources in Maputo, quoted by the news agency Aim, the remittances of Mozambican mineworkers represented about a third of Mozambique's foreign exchange earnings last year.

For the miners and their families, the effects will be horrendous. A shantytown of men living only for the hope of a mine job has sprung up outside Teba mining recruitment offices at Ressano Garcia, close to the South African border.

Now that their hopes have been shattered, what will the fate of these men be?

And for the thousands of miners who have spent a lifetime of labour on South African mines, there remains one last train trip back to starvation before the Maputo-Johannesburg labour trains stop running forever.