



Chapter Five

How the Mines got their Labour Taxation

The mines needed labour. Most of all, they needed many thousands of unskilled workers to dig out the ore from underground.

* In 1890, before deep-level mining started, there were 14 000 labourers working on the gold mines.

* By 1899, only five years after deep-level mining started, nearly 100 000 labourers were employed on the Rand mines.

Deep-level mining needed them by their thousands. The more workers each mine had, the more gold could be produced – and the better the profits.

Who were these labourers?

They were black subsistence farmers and peasants who came to the mines to work for wages. They came from all over South Africa and from other countries in Africa. They came to earn money to pay for taxes, farming tools or guns, or because they could no longer support their families on the little land that was left after the coming of the whites.

SHORTAGE OF LABOUR

At first, before deep-level mining started, there were enough black subsistence farmers willing to go to the Witwatersrand for a short while to earn some money. But as the mines got bigger and deeper, the mine-owners began to call for more labour.

'We must have labour,' said the President of the Chamber of Mines. *'The mining industry without labour is as bricks would be without straw, or as it would be to imagine you could get milk without cows.'*¹

But the problem of the mine-owners was that there was no

ready-made working class, no established herd of 'cows'. The mine-owners would have to make one. They would have to find ways of forcing thousands of subsistence farmers and peasants off the land and into the mines.

There were a number of different ways in which the mine-owners managed to do this.

GOVERNMENT HELP

In the last chapter we saw how important the mines were to the government. We also saw how powerful the mine-owners were. When the mine-owners called for

a large supply of cheap labour, the government passed laws to help them.

The government helped them to get labour in two important ways:

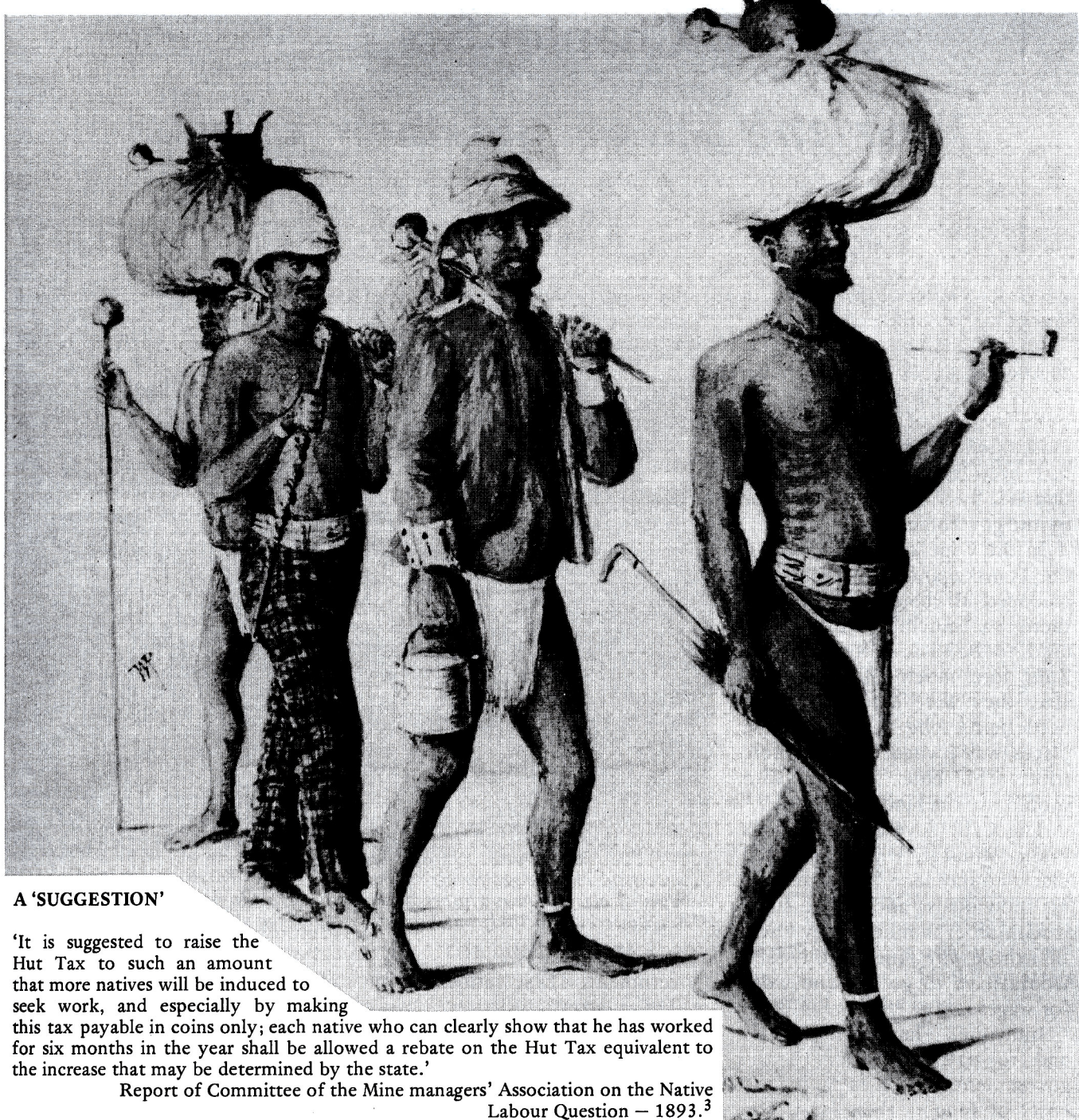
- (1) They made laws on taxes.
- (2) They made laws about land.

In this chapter we shall look at the tax laws.

TAXES

The government used taxes to get people to leave their lands and go to work on the mines. How did they do that?

The government made new



A 'SUGGESTION'

'It is suggested to raise the Hut Tax to such an amount that more natives will be induced to seek work, and especially by making this tax payable in coins only; each native who can clearly show that he has worked for six months in the year shall be allowed a rebate on the Hut Tax equivalent to the increase that may be determined by the state.'

Report of Committee of the Mine managers' Association on the Native Labour Question — 1893.³

laws saying that taxes had to be paid with money — not with cattle as before. But subsistence farmers did not have much money. So people had to leave the land and earn money to pay the taxes.

Black subsistence farmers had to pay a number of taxes.

* **There was the hut tax.** The tribes had to pay one Rand for every hut. Eighty years ago a man who worked hard for three months on the mines could earn enough money to pay the hut tax for himself, his family and his parents. So, many subsistence farmers went to work on the mines to earn this money.

* **Black farmers also had to pay a poll tax.** Every man, black or white, who was older than 18 years old had to pay a poll tax of R2 every year. (In the Cape, the poll tax was R4.) Black unskilled workers were earning anything from five cents to 19 cents a day on the mines. Out of that money they had to buy food and clothes for themselves. It took them months of extra work on the mines to pay for the poll tax.

* **Then there was the labour tax.** In the Cape, the prime minister and mine-owner Cecil John Rhodes, passed a law called the Glen Grey Act. This law forced blacks in the Cape to pay R1

every year. But they did not have to pay this tax if they could prove that they worked for wages for three months. In this way, the Cape government tried to push more men into working for wages.

The government aimed to do two things with these taxes:

* Firstly, they aimed to collect money to build roads, railways and offices, and to pay government officials.

* Secondly, they wanted to help the mines. One government report in 1903 openly said that the taxes were specially made to 'force the Natives to work in the towns and on the mines.'²