

**The Economic and Socio-Political Factors**

**Influencing**

**Labour Relations within Iscor from 1934 to 1955**

by

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**The Economic and Socio-Political Factors  
Influencing  
Labour Relations within Iscor from 1934 to 1955**

by

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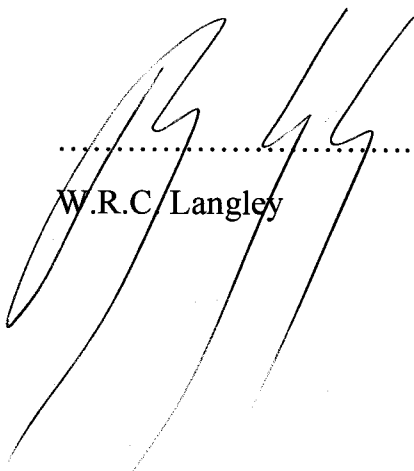
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- to my Creator, without whom I could not have achieved this.

**DECLARATION**

I declare that "The Economic and Socio-Political Factors Influencing Labour Relations within Iscor from 1934 to 1955" is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signed:



W.R.C. Langley

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**ABBREVIATIONS**

ANC	:	African National Congress
ISCOR	:	South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corporation Limited
ISTORES	:	Iscor Utility Stores (Pty) Ltd
NP	:	National Party
PRESCO	:	Pretoria Steel Corporation
SAR	:	South African Railways
TB	:	Tuberculosis
USCO	:	Union Steel Corporation
VECOR	:	Vanderbijl Engineering Company
VESCO	:	Vanderbijl Park Estate Company
VD	:	Venereal Disease
YSKOR	:	Suid Afrikaanse Yster en Staal Industriële Korporasie Beperk

## **SUMMARY**

Founded in 1928, Iscor was intended to make South Africa self sufficient in the provision of steel while providing employment for poor whites. Economic considerations prevailed when Iscor began replacing expensive white labour with cheaper black labour. From 1934 to 1948 black labour was employed to curtail costs. While being replaced by black labour, white employees' salaries and fringe benefits remained better than those of their black colleagues. Affordable houses were provided for white employees while blacks were housed in overcrowded compounds. No medical or pension benefits were made available to black employees or their families, while white employees enjoyed both. White employees were provided with what were arguably the finest sports facilities in the country while black facilities were neglected. With the National Party victory in 1948 more emphasis was placed on the employment of Afrikaans speaking white South Africans at the expense of blacks and English speaking whites.

### **Key Concepts:**

Poor whites; economically viable labour; wage disputes; arbitration; housing; migrant labour; compounds; social control; medical, health and retirement benefits; recreation; apartheid in sport; racial differences; Afrikaner empowerment.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgments	II
Declaration	III
Abbreviations	IV
Summary	V
Table of Contents	VI

### CHAPTER

<b>One</b>	Introduction	1
<b>Two</b>	The Early Years	11
<b>Three</b>	Iscorians in the Work Place	31
<b>Four</b>	Housing and Accommodation	67
<b>Five</b>	Medical, Health and Retirement Benefits	119
<b>Six</b>	Sport and Recreation	147
<b>Seven</b>	Conclusion	170
	Sources	177

## CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

My interest in this topic arose while employed by Iscor, from 1988 to 1996, during which time I spent four years living in housing supplied by the corporation in Pretoria West as well as at Sishen Iron Ore mine in the Northern Cape. This eight year sojourn at Iscor brought me into contact with the wide range of facilities offered by the corporation. Whilst working at Sishen I became acutely aware of the vital role which Iscor played in the community by way of providing recreational and medical facilities for employees as well as the other members of the community.

At the same time, however, I became aware of the fact that there were different facilities for white and black employees and even after the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) and other freedom parties and the ANC victory at the election poles in 1994 there was no noticeable difference in Iscor's attitude toward their black employees. In fact, by early 1996, it was still virtually unheard of to see black employees making use of the Iscor Club at Sishen or being treated at the Iscor clinic in the town. In both instances black employees still had their own facilities, located near the mine hostels, which were situated a few kilometers outside the town.

This, coupled with the privatization of Iscor in 1991 and the resultant publicity which accompanied this historic move raised questions and a curiosity about the origins and functions of these services and the part played by them in regulating the economic and socio-political factors which influenced labour relations within Iscor. Knowing the effect which these had on labour relations nearly seventy years after the founding of Iscor, the decision was made to investigate these relationships during the early years of the corporation's existence. The year 1934 is used as the starting date of this topic as this was the year in which Iscor began production for



the first time at their Pretoria steel plant, whilst the year 1955 is taken as the cut-off date, taking us to the end of the first 21 years of production and industrial relations at Iscor. Investigations around the topic revealed a substantial gap in South African historiography in this field, with Nancy Clark's book, Manufacturing Apartheid, State Corporations in South Africa, Yale University Press, 1994, being the only published work which more or less touches on this topic. There are two doctoral theses which deal with Iscor and both of these focus mainly on the economic aspects of Iscor while the socio-economic and political aspects have been ignored.<sup>1</sup> C.S. Richards deals with the economic considerations which influenced the decision of the government of the day to go ahead with the founding of Iscor and covers the period to 1937. T. Cross, on the other hand, deals with the economic development and importance of Iscor from 1928 to 1989.

An economic and socio-political topic dealing with Iscor therefore appeared to offer scope for a contribution to a relatively undeveloped area of historical writing in South Africa. A preliminary survey of primary sources indicated that a study of a topic of this nature was possible. This was also a topic capable of being handled within the parameters of a dissertation of this nature. While researching, sources were found to be more sketchy and superficial than originally thought and it became necessary to research parallel topics so as to be able to piece together the jigsaw puzzle of missing information. This meant that Iscor had to be placed in context in the political and socio-economic scenario in South Africa during the period under discussion and could therefore not be looked at in isolation, which in the end allowed for a more objective approach to the topic.

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<sup>1</sup> T. Cross The Political Economy of a Public Enterprise: the South African Iron and Steel Corporation, 1928 to 1989, D. Phil Theses, Oxford University 1994 (unread); C.S. Richards, The Iron and Steel Industry in South Africa, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1940.

With the start of production at the Pretoria Works in 1934 it was deemed necessary by the Board and especially Dr. van der Bijl, Chairman of the Board, that good quality affordable housing<sup>2</sup> should be provided by the corporation for their white employees. The development and planning of the Iscor township at Pretoria West was laid out along the lines suggested by the South African Public Health Act of 1919 and the 1920 Housing Act, which bore a close resemblance to the English Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909 and the resolutions adopted by the international community at the Inter-Allied Housing and Town Planning Congress held in Paris early in 1920.<sup>3</sup>

Black employees, however, were not so lucky and found themselves confined to compounds in Pretoria, and later at Vanderbijl Park and at Thabazimbi Iron Ore mine in the Northern Transvaal. Although facilities left much to be desired in the compounds and the workers were sometimes harshly treated, especially at Thabazimbi mine, their conditions were far better than those to be found on the gold and diamond mines of Southern Africa.<sup>4</sup>

With the development of Vanderbijl Park in the second half of the 1940's, even more detail was given to the development and the layout of the town. There, unlike at the Pretoria Works, the entire town was planned from scratch with regard to the layout of the industrial areas, residential areas, ( both black and white),

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<sup>2</sup> Housing and Accommodation are dealt with in Chapter 4.

<sup>3</sup> S. Parnell, Creating Racial Privilege: The Origin of South African Public Health and Town Planning Legislation, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 19 (3), 1993.

<sup>4</sup> R. Turrell, Kimberley's Model Compounds, *Journal of African History*, Vol. 25 (1), 1954; C. Van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933*, Pluto Press, 1976.

business and health facilities, right down to sport and recreational facilities.<sup>5</sup>

In the area of health care, Iscor spent vast sums of money in building clinics and hospitals for their white employees, these being some of the finest facilities in the country at that time. Much thought and planning was given to the design and development of these facilities for white employees<sup>6</sup>, while black employees, although they had access to black clinics and hospitals provided by Iscor, had no medical benefit scheme for themselves and their families. Chapter five explains the difference in approach by both industry and government to the provision of medical facilities and aid to blacks, as opposed to whites.<sup>7</sup>

Like the Medical Benefit Fund, the Iscor Pension Fund was also not made available to black Iscor employees. This form of old age security was denied

<sup>5</sup> Annual Reports. Address by Dr. H.J. van der Bijl, Chairman of the Corporation at the 16<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Meeting of Shareholders at Pretoria on 28 November 1945; So lyk Vanderbijl Park, The South African Treasurer, Vol. 55 (1), 1983; Vanderbijlpark, "A City of Ideas and Ideals", The Vanderbijl Park Estate Company, January 1948; Iscor News, from 1947 to 1955; TAB, Volume 2186 Ref. TALG 17704, TPD, First Annual Report of Vanderbijl Park Health Department's Medical Officer, 22 July 1948; SAB, Volume 1864 Ref. 6/206, G.G., Office of the Gov-Gen of South Africa, Rede gehou deur sy Ed. Agb. Eric H. Louw, L.V., Minister van Ekonmiese Sake, by geleentheid van die openingsplegtigheid van die Vanderbijl Park Staalwerke op Saterdag 4 Oktober 1952, as well as His Excellency's Engagements and Patronage, Formal opening of Iscor's New Works at Vanderbijl Park, Saturday 4 October 1952.

<sup>6</sup> E. Rosenthal, The History of Iscor, 1969 (unpublished); Iscor News, from 1936 to 1955; TAB, Volume 2186 Ref. TALG 17704, TPD.

<sup>7</sup> E. Van Heyningen, Epidemics and Disease: Historical Writing on Health in South Africa, South African Historical Journal, Vol. 23, 1990; S. Marks and N. Anderson, Issues in the Political Economy of Health in Southern Africa, Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 13 (2), 1987; K.A. Shapiro, Doctors or Medical Aids – The Debate Over the Training of Black Medical Personnel for the Rural Black Population in South Africa in the 1920's and 1930's, Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 13 (2), 1987; G.W. Gale, Government Health Centres in the Union of South Africa, South African Medical Journal, Vol. 23 (7), 1947.

black Iscor employees until 1965 when a separate pension fund was created for them. Until that time, there was no fund available to look after black employees and their families at the termination of their employment due to old age. (See also Chapter 5).

The final aspect covered in this dissertation is that of sport and recreation which is dealt with in chapter six. Once again, the development of Iscor's sport and recreation facilities was the brainchild of Dr. Van der Bijl, who felt that a healthy and controlled sports and social life for employees would improve productivity, reduce medical costs and develop a spirit of camaraderie amongst employees, not only in the work place, but also on the sports fields. It was also hoped that this interaction between employees would lead to a greater understanding and regulation of relationships between management and workers.

As was the case with most other facilities provided by Iscor for their employees, the white employees were provided with some of the finest facilities available in the country while the black employees had to be satisfied with the bare essentials. This was in line with the government's policy of the day with regard to sport and recreational facilities and contact in this regard between blacks and whites.<sup>8</sup> In

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<sup>8</sup> E. Rosenthal, The History of Iscor: Iscor News, from 1936 to 1955; TAB, Volume 3/4/1096 Ref. 89/10, MPA, Letter from the Secretary South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corporation Ltd. to Town Clerk, City Council of Pretoria, dated 14 May 1937, Re: Application to Lease Recreation Ground for Native Employees, as well as Letter from the Deputy Town Clerk to Mr. Bloemsa, Re: Application South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corporation to Lease Recreation Ground for Native Employees dated 11 August 1937; Steel in South Africa, Cape Times Limited, Parow, 1953; Iscor Annual Reports, Address by Dr. H.J. Van der Bijl, Chairman of the Corporation, at the 10<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Meeting of Shareholders at Pretoria on 27 October 1939; Union of South Africa-Debates of the House of Assembly, Vol. 48, (6 March to 14 April 1944), Reported and Printed for the House of Assembly by the Unie-Volkspers Beperk, Parliamentary Printers, Cape Town, 1944.

the immediate aftermath of the Second World War there was a momentary hope shared by a wide range of South Africans that the segregation of the Colonial period might be in retreat. This, however, was shattered by the election into power of a N.P. Government in 1948.<sup>9</sup>

In researching this dissertation, use was made of primary sources from various archives and libraries. A problem which arose with regard to the availability of primary sources, was the fact that virtually all early documents held by Iscor, and which dealt with labour aspects, were destroyed several years ago due to a shortage of storage space in the Iscor archives. No thought was given to micro-filming these documents or of handing them over to the State Archives for safe keeping. If documents did not relate directly to the iron and steel manufacturing process and were not of technical value to Iscor, they were destroyed. Much valuable information though was gleaned from the Central Archives Depot as well as the Transvaal Archives Depot, both of which are situated in Pretoria. At the same time some useful information was found in the Iscor Archives as well as the Iscor Pension Fund Archives. The largest proportion of information acquired, which shed light on labour related activities at Iscor during these early years, was the twenty volumes of the Iscor News which are held at the Iscor Library, as well as the Iscor Public Relations Department, both situated at Iscor Head Office in Pretoria.

A number of in-house publications proved to be of assistance although they only

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<sup>9</sup> C. Merrett, (University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg), "In Nothing Else are the Deprivers so Deprived" : South African Sport, Apartheid and Foreign Relations, 1945-1971, Paper read at the 1995 Australian Society for Sports History Conference, University of Queensland, Brisbane, 27 June 1995, p1.

very fleetingly touched on labour related matters.<sup>10</sup> These publications tended rather to deal with the production of iron and steel at Iscor and to set out in detail the technological advances made by the corporation rather than examine the advances made in labour relations. They tended only to deal with the number of people employed by Iscor, and regrettably not much else. They did, however, provide a clear background to the type of conditions under which the employees, both black and white, would have been expected to work. However, one must remember that the technology of those days did not allow for the type of working conditions which we have come to expect today, where not only air pollution and safety measures are stringently controlled, but also noise pollution and conditions of employment.

A work which provided interesting material is Eric Rosenthal's, The History of Iscor, 1969 (unpublished). This work, which runs to over 750 typed pages, is in the Iscor Archives and was intended to be the definitive work on Iscor, but for reasons which remain vague, it was never completed. This work, as can be determined from the magnitude of information contained therein, deals with all facets of Iscor, from both a technical and an industrial relations point of view, although like the majority of the other works on Iscor, the largest proportion of the work deals with the technological development in the iron and steel industry through the years.

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<sup>10</sup> (Iscor) Opening of the Iron and Steel Works at Pretoria, August 1934, by the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Clarendon, P.C., G.C.M.G., Governor-General of the Union of South Africa and her Excellency the Countess of Clarendon, published by the South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corporation Limited, 1934; Iscor, its Founding, Growth and Operation, (issued in April 1978 by the South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corporation Limited); Steel in South Arica 1928-1953 (Published on occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corporation Limited, Cape Times Limited, Parow, 1953).

In examining the economic and socio-political factors influencing labour relations within Iscor during the years 1934 to 1955 a study has been made of an aspect of Iscor's history which has, until recently, been neglected. As has been pointed out above, much valuable primary documentation has been destroyed over the last few years and this has meant that considerable use has been made of secondary sources so as to supplement the available primary material. This has made research difficult and it is for this reason, amongst others, that more emphasis has been placed on white labour aspects than on black, as white labour aspects have been more fully documented. Most of the remaining literature and documentation relating to black labour is of a rather paternalistic nature and this had to be borne in mind whilst researching the dissertation, and was particularly true of the in-house publications. A further reason for the sparse reference to black employees in this dissertation is the fact that black employees of Iscor during this period were denied membership of Iscor's Medical Benefit Society as well as Iscor's pension fund, while their sporting facilities were virtually non-existent. There is, therefore, very little which can be said about these aspects with regard to the black employees except to point out the shortcomings in Iscor's labour policy, and try to place this in the context of the wider political picture in South Africa.

In view of the above, therefore, an attempt has been made, where possible, to place certain aspects of black labour relations in perspective in relation to the white employees and their benefits, as well as in relation to the political situation prevalent in the country at that time. Iscor can therefore not be looked at in isolation, but needs to be placed in perspective, bearing in mind the fact that Iscor

was a para-statal which meant that the Chairman and the Board had, to a certain extent, to be seen to adhere to and implement government policy.<sup>11</sup>

A further aspect which has only briefly been touched on in this dissertation is that of the conflict of the language question between English and Afrikaans speaking white employees after 1948. Although it became a burning question after 1954 and with the advent of Dr. H.F. Verwoerd to the Premiership in 1958 and the rise of the Broederbond as a power in government and commerce, it only hovers on the fringe of the period under discussion and has therefore not been dealt with in detail. It does, however, provide a topic for further study and could possibly even be developed into a doctoral thesis.

This dissertation is an attempt to place Iscor in the wider context of the political situation in South Africa, and in this way highlight the aspects which influenced

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<sup>11</sup> For further reading on black labour relations within South Africa the following references are useful: N. Clark, *South African State Corporations: "The Death Knell of Economic Colonialism?"*, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 14(1), 1987; G.W. Gale, *Government Health Centres in the Union of South Africa*, *South African Medical Journal*, Vol. 23(7), 1949; S. Parnell, *Creating Racial Privilege: The Origin of South African Public Health and Town Planning Legislation*, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 19(3), 1993; R. Turrell, *Kimberley's Model Compounds*, *Journal of African History*, Vol. 25(1), 1984; E. Van Heyningen, *Epidemics and Disease: Historical Writing on Health in South Africa*, *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 23, 1990; G.V. Doxey, *Industrial Colour Bar in South Africa*, Greenwood Press Publishers, Westpoint Connecticut, 1974; N. Herd, (Ed). *Industrial South Africa*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 1970, Seal Publishing Company (Pty) Ltd., 1970; D.O 'Meara, *Volkskapitalisme. Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism 1934-1948*, Cambridge University Press, 1983; C. Van Onselen, *Chibaro. African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933*, Pluto Press, 1976; I. Wilkins and H. Strydom, *The Super Afrikaners*, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1978.



and controlled labour relations at Iscor during this period. It is also hoped to show that Iscor, by providing all the facilities set out in this dissertation, hoped to gain control of the lives of its employees and in this way try to ensure their loyalty. By providing the facilities set out above, it was hoped that the employees would find themselves in such a position socially and economically, that it would become extremely difficult for them to resign from Iscor. Iscor would have a well trained and stable workforce upon whom the corporation could rely to maintain production, regardless of what the country's economic position was at any given time. It should be borne in mind though, that this was a tactic used by mine owners and industrialists the world over and was not unique to Iscor alone, (see Chapter 2 for further discussion on this aspect), but was well implemented by Dr. van der Bijl at Iscor, and later by his successor Dr. Frikkie Meyer. The control and maintenance of good labour relations at Iscor was therefore a well thought through strategy which was to bear fruit once production began at Iscor in 1934.

## CHAPTER 2 - THE EARLY YEARS

To fully appreciate the economic and socio-political factors which influenced labour relations at Iscor during the period, 1934 to 1955, it is important to firstly examine the reasons for Iscor's establishment and only thereafter can the economic and socio-political aspects be better understood.

State corporations in South Africa have usually been viewed as a means of employing white Afrikaners, especially poor white Afrikaners. The state corporations were seen to represent the interests of local capital and political goals, while the rest of South Africa's economy was there to satisfy foreign interests. The Nationalist Government, of course, had always been the most vociferous in making this claim, portraying the state corporations in glowing, patriotic terms.<sup>1</sup>

The founding of Iscor in 1928 was seen by the government of the day as being a means to provide the necessary heavy industrial base for the development of light industry and manufacturing in South Africa, while at the same time increasing and providing much needed employment prospects for whites, especially the "poor whites" who were becoming more and more prevalent in South Africa at that time. Of all the basic industries the production of iron and steel is possibly the most important. Every industry is dependent on steel products for its successful operation and it is certainly an industry which no ambitious country can afford to

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<sup>1</sup> N. Clark, *South African State Corporations: "The Death Knell of Economic Colonialism?"* *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 14 (1), 1987, p 99; N. Clark, *Manufacturing Apartheid, State Corporations in South Africa*, Yale University Press, 1994.

neglect. This was a lesson which South Africa had learned during the 1914-1918 war.<sup>2</sup> Iscor's founding was therefore two fold in its purpose.

No single class of industry in South Africa has played such an important role in the industrialization and development of the country as has the iron and steel industry. By 1938 it accounted for 20% of total employment and 22% of all salaries and wages paid in all industries. In order for such an industry to survive, it had to produce a range of competitively priced goods. Cheap steel is essential to the development of production industries and the entire industry taken as a whole.<sup>3</sup> Further, and possibly most importantly, it is dependent on a well motivated and contented work force in order to succeed.

From its inception in 1928, the South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corporation Ltd. (Iscor) has steadily grown into an industrial giant. It has extended its initial production capacity of 160 000 tonnes of steel per annum to the present figure (1997) of approximately 6,66 million tonnes. Its output represents more than two-thirds of all steel produced in South Africa. Iscor, however, was not the first or only attempt at steel making in South Africa, although undoubtedly it has been the most successful. The origins of the smelting of iron ore are lost in the mists of antiquity, but it is believed that Africa was the birth place of this art.

From 1853, when the first pioneering efforts were made to establish an iron industry in South Africa by Theophilus Shepstone, until the promulgation of Act No. 11 of 1928 which brought about the founding of the South African Iron

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<sup>2</sup> V. Bosman, (Ed), Industrial Development in South Africa and Facilities for the Establishment of Factories, published by the Department of Commerce and Industries, Government Printer, 1936, p103.

<sup>3</sup> G.C.R., Bosman, The Industrialization of South Africa, Firma G.W. Den Boer, 1938, pp 172-174.

and Steel Industrial Corporation, many unsuccessful attempts had been made to launch an iron and steel industry in South Africa.<sup>4</sup> These failed for two reasons, firstly, insufficient capital to launch a project of this magnitude and secondly a lack of necessary expertise to run a steel mill. However, by 1928 these problems had been resolved and the South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corporation was constituted on the 14 April 1928 by Act No. 11 of that year. Dr. H.J. van der Bijl, one of the country's leading industrialists, was asked by the government to undertake the task of establishing Iscor. The first sod was turned on the work site in Pretoria on 1 May 1930, when the clearing and terracing work was started. The No. 1 blast furnace was commissioned on 9 March 1934 and the first Iscor ingot was put through the heavy mill on 4 April 1934. This last date is regarded as the start of production at Iscor, the ultimate outcome of close on three quarters of a century of endeavour.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps it is necessary to briefly digress here so as to look at the history of Dr. van der Bijl, the man who was to stamp his character on the corporation from its inception until his untimely death in 1948.

Dr. Hendrik Johannes Van der Bijl (23 November 1887 to 2 December 1948) was an electro technical engineer by profession who studied at Victoria College, Stellenbosch, from which he obtained a B.A., with honours in physics, in December 1908. He decided to concentrate on electro-technology and moved to Germany where he studied at the University of Leipzig. He obtained his Ph.D. degree in 1913, after which he was appointed an Assistant in Physics at the Royal

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<sup>4</sup> W.R.C., Langley, The Development of the Steel Industry in South Africa: The Founding of the South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corporation Limited in 1928. Research Project (Hons BA), University of South Africa, 1993.

<sup>5</sup> The South African Iron & Steel Industrial Corporation Limited and its Subsidiary and Associated Companies, Radford Adlington Limited, 1936, p 9.

School of Technology at Dresden where he continued his research into photo-electricity. It was here that his research confirmed the electron theory of the American, R.A. Millikan. His treatise, in which this work is described, appeared in the Verhandlungen der Deutschen Physikalischen Gesellschaft (1913) and attracted the attention of Millikan himself, who now persuaded Dr. Van der Bijl to join the American Telephone and Telegraph Company and the Western Electric Company in the United States.

His work and his stay in the United States did much to influence him as a personality, a research worker and an industrial organizer. During the next few years he was one of the scientists in the vanguard of America's technological development. He applied himself particularly to radio and wireless telephony. He recorded the results of his research in his treatise, The Thermionic Vacuum Tube, which was published in 1920 and remained the standard work on this subject for 20 years.

The next great turning-point in his life came in 1920 when General J.C. Smuts, Prime Minister of the Union, asked him to become technical adviser to the Department of Mines and Industries. In spite of his prospects in the United States he accepted the offer, as he believed in the potential of his country. Diverse legislation was passed to prepare the Union for the impending industrial development and Dr. Van der Bijl himself was responsible for the important Weights and Measures Act of 1922.

What the country needed most urgently at that stage though was a country-wide system for the supply of electricity. With Sir Robert Kotze, Dr. Van der Bijl set about drafting the Electricity Act. Shortly afterwards, in 1923, the Electricity Supply Commission (Escom) was established and he became its first Chairman. It

was at Escom that he gained his basic experience in the world of finance and business administration.

He believed from the beginning that South Africa's industrial future depended upon two factors: cheap electricity and cheap steel. His next step, therefore, was to try to meet the second requirement. Until then, nearly all steel had been imported from abroad. In 1928 Act No. 11 of that year was passed by Parliament and the South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corporation (IsCOR) was established. Dr. Van der Bijl became Chairman of the corporation and remained so until his death in 1948.

In time Dr. Van der Bijl realized to what extent the country's supplies of base metals had been neglected and often wasted through the export of high grade ore. With his assistance steps were taken in 1937 to establish the African Metals Corporation (AmCOR) to develop the exploitation and processing of metals. At the end of the war (1945), he played a leading part in the establishment of the Vanderbijl Engineering Works Corporation Limited (VecOR) which was to ensure that South Africa would become even more independent from the outside world. When parliament passed the Industrial Development Act, Act No. 22 of 1940, Dr. Van der Bijl became Chairman of the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), established in terms of this Act.

During the Second World War General Smuts made Dr. Van Der Bijl Director of War Supplies, a designation which was subsequently changed to "Director of Supplies". He carried out this important and exacting work for six years without remuneration. Dr. Van der Bijl also took a keen interest in the welfare of his

employees, ensuring harmonious relations between employer and employee and saw to it that the interests of the workers were effectively protected. He introduced pension and medical aid schemes. His thorough study of town-planning led to the establishment of the Iscor Housing Utility Company and the Vanderbijl Park Estate Company, which had to provide adequate housing for staff.

By 1948 Dr. Van der Bijl was on the crest of a spectacular career and was still a young man in appearance and spirit. However, in that year he contracted an incurable disease and died shortly after his sixty-first birthday.<sup>6</sup>

Besides its strategic value, the founding of Iscor had also been promoted for another reason. In the 1920's, the Union of South Africa was faced with a serious "poor white" problem. During the depression years, and up until the mid 1930's, it was not unusual to come into contact with large numbers of whites who had flocked to the towns in search of work and relief from the depression in the rural areas and many of these people eventually found employment at state corporations such as Iscor.<sup>7</sup>

In any society a disruption of status almost always brings in its wake, to those deposed, a host of almost insoluble problems of trying to adapt to changed circumstances, particularly where there is no immediate change in the environment

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<sup>6</sup> W.J. de Kock, (Ed-in-Chief, until 1970), D.W. Kruger, (since 1971), Dictionary of South African Biography, Vol. 2, Published for the Human Science Research Council, Tafelberg Publishers Limited, Cape Town, 1972, pp 766-769; Van der Bijl, Hendrik, 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Memorial Lecture, 1996, Presented by Hans Smith under the Auspices of the Pretoria Engineers Liaison Committee, Dr. Hendrik van der Bijl -A Man of Vision.

<sup>7</sup> H.J. van Eck, Some Aspects of the South African Industrial Revolution, Grocott and Tapp (Pty) Ltd, 1951, pp 15-16.

in which they live. This is as true of the social aspects as it is of economic life and indeed, in the modern industrial society, the closely knit interdependence of the two makes the consequences of disruption of status even greater.<sup>8</sup>

In order to understand the interaction between employer and employee which took place at Iscor during the years 1934 to 1955, one needs to understand firstly the poor white problem which had developed in the country, while at the same time realizing that it had become more important to make Iscor economically viable rather than merely a place of employment for unskilled, jobless poor whites. There was thus a clash of interest between these two aspects of economic life as Iscor developed and found itself needing to become more competitive internationally.

Up until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, virtually every white man that was mentally and physically normal was able to make a reasonable living out of agriculture, particularly in areas of recent settlement. A sudden change in the economic structure was, however, brought about by the discovery of diamonds and more particularly gold. Foreigners as well as European capital came pouring into the country. A prevailing subsistence farming style was drawn into a modern “money economy”.<sup>9</sup>

Not long after 1890 a drift to the towns was noticeable in South Africa and increased after the South African War of 1899-1902. The census figures of 1921 showed that since 1911 a number of Cape and Free State districts had suffered an

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<sup>8</sup> G.V. Doxey, The Industrial Colour Bar in South Africa, Greenwood Press Publishers, Westpoint, Connecticut, 1974, p 76.

<sup>9</sup> The Poor White Problem in South Africa, Report of the Carnegie Commission, Vol. 1, Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia Druckery, 1932, p 5.



absolute decrease in their rural population, a simultaneous increase in the number of rural black persons was noticed. It would seem as if they also contributed towards pushing white “bywoners” and farm labourers off the land. The rapid increase in the black population often caused congestion in their own territory so that many of them were willing to accept work on farms at relatively low wages.<sup>10</sup>

Under these conditions the poor white problem was rapidly becoming an unemployment problem as well. The unskilled rural white person found virtually no opening in the existing system of labour, except occasionally where the system was altered, or in some new branch of industry, as was the case with the founding of Iscor, where he could obtain employment. However, certain kinds of work employers felt, could not be offered to a white man. The general feeling was that manual labour was socially inferior, but this was certainly not the case with the Afrikaner, most of whom had grown up on farms where manual labour was accepted as the order of the day. In the general view of the white population though, certain forms of service came to be considered as somewhat humiliating.<sup>11</sup>

It was felt that the idea of an unskilled labourer, if he was white, always being entitled to higher pay for the same quality of work executed by a black, should be discouraged. Minimum wages and reserved employment for whites in occupations not of a rural nature resulted in sharper black competition on farms, thereby aggravating the rural exodus.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p 8.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p 9.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p 11.

With the massive exodus of poor-whites to the towns and cities, it became of the utmost importance to create opportunities for finding employment. Not being a skilled worker and not wanted, due to higher wages, as an ordinary unskilled labourer, a place had to be found for him in the industry where work of a semi-skilled nature, repetition work, easily and quickly learned, was open to him. At the same time it was felt that it was necessary to regulate the social conditions in this new field of activity for him and especially with regard to housing so as to allow this newly recruited industrial worker to strike a fair balance between his wage and his cost of living and to give him the opportunity to mix socially with the fellow workers of his class as well as with others.<sup>13</sup>

Thus with industrial development forging ahead fairly rapidly the question which had to be answered was “how it could be made possible for the poor white to obtain employment in factories and workshops which needed increasing numbers of semi-skilled and unskilled workers?”

The politicians too, used the poor white problem to score political points. In their struggle to capture the poor white vote, political movements were torn between the need to sponsor re-distributive, if not socialist, policies and their continued commitment to capitalist profitability, which in turn supported the fiscal viability of the state which they meant to control. The Union Government of Generals Louis Botha and J.C. Smuts from 1910-1924 had its populist side but it usually associated with rather strong pro-capitalist policies. The First World War had brought about an enormous demand for South African products and stimulated a

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<sup>13</sup> P. du Toit, (Compiler), Report of the National Conference on the Poor White Problem, held at Kimberley, 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> October 1934, p164.

boom that benefited the poor. Afterwards, however, economic crisis again acutely raised the question of poverty amongst a white voting population.<sup>14</sup>

It is commonly assumed that the Pact Government, which brought Hertzog's Afrikaner Nationalists together with Labour in a coalition government in 1924, aimed at defending the national economy, promoting the interests of the white working man and farmer and championing the poor white, changed all this radically. In reality the situation was far more complicated. The Pact Government, despite its rhetorical support for a so-called civilized labour policy that would force industry to hire workers at wages fit for white men, and that could provide a good standard of living, actually did little to bring white men into jobs held at low wages by women or children and by those of colour in the private sector. A huge gap continued to exist between the life style of the well-paid skilled male workman and the unskilled white worker.<sup>15</sup>

Under the Pact Government, many white men were employed by the state itself. Their pay, however, was kept sufficiently low so as to discourage featherbedding and also to prevent the system from becoming uneconomic. However, prior to South Africa departing from the gold standard in 1933, the uneven crisis in the reproduction and accumulation of capital produced massive unemployment amongst workers of all races. By September 1933, approximately 22% of all white and coloured males were officially registered as unemployed. The ranks of the unemployed were swollen by the thousands of white farmers driven off the land and into acute poverty by drought and the depression.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> R. Morrell, (Ed), White but Poor, Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa 1880-1940, University of South Africa, 1992, p XVII.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p XIX.

<sup>16</sup> D. O'Meara, Volkskapitalisme, Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1943-1948, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p 37.

There existed, however, no statistical means to measure African unemployment and poverty. Yet, in reality, both were acute. During this period the “civilized labour policy” of the state sought to remedy white unemployment at the expense of the blacks by replacing black workers with white labour. In all sectors of the economy except mining, the ratio of black to white workers fell dramatically. Unemployed Africans were forced back into the overcrowded, impoverished “native reserves”. Government reports and commissions of this period warned of unbelievable poverty in these reserves and raised the nightmare of mass starvation.<sup>17</sup>

When South Africa abandoned the gold standard in 1933, local industry quickly recovered from the depression and boom conditions were under way within a couple of years. The private sector could make use of literate white foremen and skilled workmen while the state used education and labour policies to give potential supporters advantages.<sup>18</sup> From 1939-1948 the South African economy grew rapidly with Gross National Income rising from £395.6m per annum to £850.5m per annum during this period. A profound change in the structure of capitalist production now occurred. An almost total dependence on mineral and agricultural exports rapidly gave way to relatively high levels of industrialization. The contribution of private manufacturing to national income first surpassed that of agriculture in 1930 and outstripped mining in 1943 to account for almost a quarter of national income by 1950. A substantial and strategic state owned industrial sector now developed, centred in the steel, chemical and infrastructural industries.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> R. Morrell, (Ed), White but Poor, Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern African 1880-1940, p XXI.

<sup>19</sup> D. O’Meara, Volkskapitalisme, Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934-1948, p 226.

This long period of uncertainty and struggle eventually gave way after the arrival of the restructured National Party into office in 1948, to the years of apartheid. Apartheid has always been seen as the political and economic control over black workers, but it represented also the triumph of the poor white strategies of the politicians for whom it was a crucial element in the classless white dispensation of the new era.<sup>20</sup>

It was against this background that Iscor had been established in 1928 with a twofold objective, namely that of promoting South Africa's economic development, as well as that of providing jobs for the unemployed and unskilled whites who had become an increasingly sensitive political issue.<sup>21</sup> It was in the light of this that in his address to the Economic Society of South Africa (Johannesburg Branch), Dr. van der Bijl, Chairman of the Iscor Board, stated in 1932 that the company's general policy was to be one of "white labour". Management now set about employing white labour on a larger scale than would normally have been the case. To begin with, these labourers were employed on humanitarian and not economic grounds. This ultimately led to over-staffing with the resultant low level of productivity which always accompanies such wasteful labour practices.<sup>22</sup>

To complicate matters further, Iscor did not have a minimum wage system to begin with but, as a guide line to managers and departmental heads, a maximum wage was set down so as to establish some measure of uniformity in the wage increases

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<sup>20</sup> R. Morrell, (Ed), White but Poor , Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa 1880-1940, p XXI.

<sup>21</sup> N. Clark, South African State Corporations: "The Death Knell of Economic Colonialism?" Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 14(1), 1987, p 111.

<sup>22</sup> C.S. Richards, The Iron and Steel Industry in South Africa, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1940, p 296.

recommended from time to time by the officials. The employees regarded these as the minimum wages and not the maximum as was intended. Furthermore, a holiday bonus, three weeks paid leave and a non-contributory pension scheme for employees was introduced. These all led to increased labour costs, although Iscor was only following the general prevailing labour practices of the time. Without these though, Iscor would most probably have found it difficult, if not impossible, to have either obtained or retained an adequate skilled labour force, taking into account the exceptional conditions in the local market during the first three or four years of its existence.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, these artificially high wages also applied to the unskilled and semi-skilled workers.

When production at Iscor began in 1934, whites made up 55% of Iscor's labour force. This was, however, not an even distribution as only whites were employed at two of Iscor's mines while at Thabazimbi Iron Ore Mine, the blacks far outnumbered white labourers. Furthermore, Dr. van der Bijl had stated that blacks would only be used in mines and not at the works, yet when the factory opened in March 1934 there were almost as many blacks employed there as there were whites. At the January Board Meeting, the Directors had reversed an earlier policy and for economic reasons decided to employ blacks in the factory.<sup>24</sup> The reason for this was that Iscor could employ blacks in unskilled and semi-skilled jobs at lower wages than it had to pay whites. This would, it was hoped, make Iscor more economically viable.

A.P.J. Fourie, Minister of Commerce and Industries, after investigating the labour

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, pp 297.

<sup>24</sup> N. Clark, South African State Corporations: "The Death Knell of Economic Colonialism?" Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 14(1), 1987, pp 117-118.

situation at Iscor found that there were 1715 whites and 1356 blacks employed by the corporation. He advised Dr. van der Bijl to reduce the number of blacks employed, by pointing out that the public regarded Iscor as a Government undertaking, funded with tax payers' money for the purpose of employing white South Africans.<sup>25</sup> Dr. Van der Bijl, however, failed to mention to the Minister that a large number of the whites employed were not local citizens, but had been recruited from overseas due to the critical shortage of local skilled labour in South Africa for such a highly specialised industry.

In the end neither political pressure from government nor union agitation could help Iscor's white employees. When it became apparent that white labour would become even more expensive if labour demands were successful, management's position hardened. Simply put, Iscor faced a decrease in profits with a resultant shortage of funds for further self financed development if it continued to use white labour. The Government, although publically committed to the use of white labour, did little to stop Iscor's actions. As it was, J.H. Hofmeyr, the Minister of Labour, signed the Industrial Agreement which effectively torpedoed the position of unskilled white labour in the iron and steel industry and thereby gave support to Iscor's policies.<sup>26</sup> The Industrial Agreement which was signed on 1 December 1937 covered the entire industry, reduced wages in certain areas, and was initially fixed by the arbitrators for a period of eight months. As a result of this, from 1937 onwards Iscor increasingly replaced whites with blacks, thus gaining significant control over its workforce and its ability to ensure profits.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p 118.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p 121; See Chapter 3 for a more indepth study of the factors surrounding the signing of the Industrial Agreement.

<sup>27</sup> C.S. Richards, The Iron and Steel Industry in South Africa, pp 299-300.

From its inception, Iscor had been faced with two major problems, namely acquiring control of the market, at the same time reducing the cost of local production. The South African steel market was almost totally dominated by overseas producers who could, due to their economy of scale, choose either to raise prices, or lower them to such an extent that they could completely undercut Iscor's prices and thus make it impossible for her to trade. Iscor's high production costs were eventually overcome by disregarding the political rhetoric of Iscor being established to accommodate unemployed whites which had surrounded her inception, entering into agreements with private producers and, finally, trading expensive white labour for much cheaper black labour in unskilled and semi-skilled posts.

In the end, Iscor achieved both goals set out at her inception, even though they were reached at the expense of political justification for Iscor's creation. In order to secure its markets, Iscor joined with overseas firms or those South African mining houses with overseas shareholders, and in exchange, South African capital continued to flow to overseas investors with relatively small amounts accruing to the corporation. Iscor labour policies now also conformed to private practices, with skilled jobs going to men from overseas while the bulk of the work force was drawn from the local supply of cheap black labour.<sup>28</sup>

Although the passing of the Iscor Act in 1928 had been preceded by bitter parliamentary debates and opposition to the establishment of the corporation by the general public and, even though Iscor had come in for a fair amount of

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<sup>28</sup> N. Clark, South African State Corporations: The Death Knell of Economic Colonialism?" Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 14 (1) 1987, p 117.



criticism for her labour policies, the company did much to compensate her employees in other ways. The white employees especially were well looked after by Iscor. A fair share of company funds were spent on sport and recreation facilities for employees as well as good quality affordable housing being erected at the various centres to ensure that white employees did not end up living in slums. Although the black employees' recreation and accommodation facilities could nowhere compete with those of the whites, they were better than those supplied by most other industries in South Africa.

Further to this, excellent medical and health benefits were afforded all employees of the company although it was only white employees who qualified for membership of the Iscor Medical Benefit Fund. Clinics and hospitals were built and dental facilities were provided for the well being of all employees and the families of white employees. Also, pension, retirement and insurance benefits were made available to white employees which helped them plan for a secure old age. It was, unfortunately, only in 1965 that pension benefits were extended to black employees.

In the course of time, group insurance schemes and the Iscor Employees Mutual Aid Society were established, the latter with the aim of providing employees with the benefits of co-operative purchasing power. Bursaries too, were made available to children of white employees, as well as to white employees themselves, so as to afford them the opportunity of further study in an academic direction approved by Iscor. It also became one of the main objectives of the corporation to cultivate an Iscor "culture" amongst the children of white employees, with the intention of grooming them to become loyal future Iscorians.

It would also appear that in supplying all these facilities for its white employees, Iscor was less concerned about their welfare than about protecting its investment in trained white labour. In some cases they were merely complying with legislation and the accepted norms of the day. At the same time the government was assuring itself of the support of these whites at the polling booths, especially after the National Party of Dr. D.F. Malan came to power in 1948. It was therefore seen as a means of gaining and maintaining support for the party, as well as maintaining a grateful and loyal workforce.

In this final regard, perhaps a parallel can be drawn between Iscor and some European and British mines and plants, especially those in Germany and Austria. It should, at the same time, be remembered that Dr. Van der Bijl spent a number of years studying and working in Germany. If one looks at the similarity between the Austrian and German companies' approaches to employee relations and those introduced at Pretoria and later at Vanderbijl Park, then one would find strong grounds for believing that Iscor, and especially Vanderbijl Park, was modelled on these companies by Dr. Van der Bijl.

In Germany, a cumulative company welfare policy was established after 1905 and was intended to legitimise a general and moral claim to leadership using a counter-plan of a 'works culture'. The company welfare policies which now developed, created a social bureaucracy in all large scale industries and concentrated on developing company and family insurance schemes, company housing, company training and careers and company retirement benefits. At the same time it also often included efforts to encourage loyalty to the company at the expense of unions by supporting moves to establish factory clubs and associations. In this

way, the employers used the company family health insurance and factory relief fund, for example, as a means of counteracting, at factory level, the increased influence of unions after 1906. Here the intentions of the employers became most obvious in company housing, even if the direct threat to evict those in breach of contract was actually rarely carried out. These measures were, however, ultimately successful in slowing down the high labour turn-over rate, at least within the core of the labour force.<sup>29</sup>

In Austria, social benefits supplied by management and intended to promote a positive influence amongst the miners were also seen in their coal mines. The whole idea of company social welfare benefits lagged behind Germany, but during the Nazi occupation of Austria plant managers were instructed to intensify the mutual trust within the plant community and as a logical consequence, to work towards a banning of all disputes within the plant community. The practical execution of these theoretical programs had the plant management really trying harder to expand the social benefits passed on by the plant in earlier years. Housing projects and different forms of leisure activities, whether for physical, sporting, artistic or literary purposes, were also expanded.

Extensive housing programmes were planned for various mines and factories and although the economic aspects of the house-building activity was still always emphasised, healthier living quarters were seen as one of the possible routes to a productivity increase in German mining and industry. This resulted in workers' families enjoying the benefits of new flats and houses, with their living standards

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<sup>29</sup> D. Feldman, and K. Tenfelde, (Eds), Workers, Owners and Politics in Coal Mining: An International Comparison of Industrial Relations, Berg Publishers Limited, USA, 1990, pp 141-143.

greatly improved. The Siedlerstimmen, or “voices of the estate inhabitants”, seen in the works newspapers, has to be read with a certain amount of scepticism, but like those at Iscor, it is certain that they had some foundation in fact. The estates were, to name a few advantages, near to the place of work, they offered more living space and, on the land belonging to the houses, there were facilities for market gardening, which was especially valued by the workers.

Sport and fitness were held in high regard and the sports fields already in existence were improved or extended, new ones were laid out, and in the works newspaper, works sports activities were reported on more frequently than before. The existing works libraries or those newly opened formed part of the policy of spreading facilities as broadly as possible, and this policy extended to the organisation of diverse cultural events with the occasional film show also taking place.

Finally, the plant management paid special attention to hygiene and health care and to family welfare. They saw to it that, in cases where no such facilities existed, baths, laundries, works clinics and treatment rooms were set up and that the industries employed their own doctors and nursing staff. All this was supposed to help stabilise the plant community, so dear to the firm’s management and to the party. It is, therefore, understandable that efforts were made to inform the employees via the works newspapers about the various social benefits, and the diverse financial aid measures with which, in special cases, they were complemented. All this was carried out in the hope of winning over the loyalty of the employee, stabilising labour turn over and pushing up production.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid* pp 326-343.

Although very much the same pattern existed in Britain <sup>31</sup> and France, <sup>32</sup> the Iscor model, as will be seen later, was based very closely on the German, and especially, the Austrian models. The last two, it is almost certain, given Dr. Van der Bijl's contact with Gerday, could have formed the blue-print for Iscor's economic and socio-political development and social welfare planning during the early years of the corporation's labour relations development phase.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid pp 24-36.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid pp 290-291.

### CHAPTER 3 - ISCORIANS IN THE WORK PLACE

As was pointed out in the introduction, it was initially Iscor's intention to provide work for large numbers of unemployed whites and this aspect of job creation, together with the strategic importance of a country having its own steel mill, formed the corner stone for the founding of Iscor.

C.S. Richards (C.S. Richards, The Iron and Steel Industry in South Africa, p 293), points out that Dr. Van den Bijl made it very clear in his address to the Economic Society of South Africa, (Johannesburg Branch), in May 1932 that it was Iscor's intention to employ mainly white labour. However, it was at the same time stated that Iscor was to be run on an economic basis, a clear contradiction in terms taking into account the wage differentiation between salaries paid to whites and those paid to blacks for performing the same work and possessing the same skills.

Eventually experience proved that a labour policy of this nature could not be effective and as subsequent events showed, Iscor repeatedly tried to bring itself into line with the realities and necessities of running a major corporation economically and profitably. As we will see later in this chapter, this eventually led to the appointment of a Conciliation Board in 1937, and when this failed to resolve the salary dispute, which had brought about its appointment, they resorted to arbitration.

To begin with Iscor had to decide during the initial stages whether to over employ unskilled whites and to ultimately select from them those capable of performing skilled operations or alternatively to import virtually the entire initial operating force, so as to achieve the best results in the operation of the plant with the resultant minimum damage to the plant and also to reduce operating losses. If the

second option had been adopted it would have meant local men could only have been engaged as apprentices when vacancies occurred and this would have resulted in them having to wait years before filling most of the positions at the works. However, if the first option was followed it would then only be necessary to import the minimum number of skilled operatives and to engage local unskilled men to be trained in the various operations from the start of production. There were, however, two major risks attached to this course, namely (a) it would take longer before the plant could operate at full production and maintenance costs during this training period would be very high, and (b) the local men would have to be given free reign in their various jobs from a very early point in time and this, it was feared, would give them the erroneous impression that they were fully qualified to do the job and this could create the wrong mental attitude. After careful consideration it was decided to adopt this option. As the unskilled tasks were gradually filled from this labour reservoir, the unskilled general labourer operations were vacated by the men being promoted to higher posts. Thus by 1936 Iscor decided that in a number of areas it was no longer necessary to continue to employ unskilled white labourers, but that it would be more economically viable to employ blacks in jobs which had been originally earmarked for them. Thus it came about early in Iscor's history that economics began to take precedence over job creation for whites and more particularly the unskilled and semi-skilled poor whites. In fact, this event occurred so rapidly, that the question can be raised as to whether job creation for whites was ever a serious consideration by those in power, or whether it was merely a guise to swing the vote in parliament and the senate in favour of establishing an integrated steel mill in South Africa.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Richards, The Iron and Steel Industry in South Africa, pp 294-295.

The most important problem facing the Board from the beginning was the satisfactory establishment of labour relations on a trade union level within Iscor. The original scheme under which Iscor was to relieve the general depression, by taking on large numbers of whites for unskilled work, was as we have seen, gradually discarded, as the economic position of the country improved, and in March 1935 a deputation made up of interested persons, who approached Iscor to find permanent employment for unemployed whites, was turned down on the grounds that management could not discuss its labour policy with outsiders, and that in any event the works already had a full complement of staff. On the other hand, Dr. Van der Bijl met representatives of the Building Workers Industrial Union in July 1934 who urged upon him the establishment of the "closed shop" and the payment of double time on Sundays. Neither proposition was accepted, and a further request for an interview in March 1935 was rejected. When in October 1934 moulders in the engineering shops of the Witwatersrand area had asked for wage increases of 10/- a week, the employees organization, the Transvaal Engineering and Allied Industries Federation, questioned Dr. J.H. Dobson, a member of Iscor's Board and the Corporate Secretary, with regard to Iscor's attitude. Not being party to the Industrial Agreement, Iscor decided to judge each such request on its merits.<sup>2</sup>

During 1935 there was some controversy regarding the employment of apprentices in industry and Iscor was notified by the Apprenticeship Board that they were to retrench four apprentices as it was felt by the Board that Iscor had too many apprentices and also objected to them taking on first year apprentices. At the same time Iscor had been approached by the Juvenile Affairs Board and other bodies to

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<sup>2</sup> E. Rosenthal, The History of Iscor, (Unpublished), Iscor Archives, 1969, p 591.



enquire as to whether they could help with the employment of young men. It was felt by Iscor officials that it would be to their advantage to train these young men correctly from the beginning in some of the special problem areas occurring at works such as Iscor, for example the operation of open hearth furnaces, casting of steel and the application of special welding techniques needed in such an undertaking.<sup>3</sup>

In a letter to the Secretary for Commerce and Industry, Dr. van der Bijl pointed out that the extent to which the Apprenticeship Board had limited the employment of apprentices throughout South Africa so as to curtail the number of apprentices, had the effect of creating a situation where it was necessary to train blacks to do the work. Iscor, it was felt, should be given free scope to train young men in the specialised work connected with the manufacture of steel.<sup>4</sup>

The Department of Labour agreed with this view and held that the Transvaal Mechanical and Electrical Engineering Apprenticeship Committee had no concern with the employment of minors by Iscor, unless they were employed in a designated trade and it was clear that specialised work connected with the manufacture of steel was not included in any of the designated trades.<sup>5</sup>

In June 1935 the Secretary for Labour queried the hours of work at Iscor, as complaints

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<sup>3</sup> SAB, Volume 3274 Ref. 509/20, HEN, South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corp. Ltd., Letter from W. van Dalsen, Secretary to Dr. H.J. van der Bijl, Ref 13/16/36 dated 30 January 1935.

<sup>4</sup> SAB, Volume 3274 Ref. 509/20, HEN, South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corp. Ltd., Letter from Dr. H.J. van der Bijl, Chairman, to W.J. Lamont, Secretary for Commerce and Industry, dated 8 February 1935.

<sup>5</sup> SAB, Volume 3274 Ref. 509/20, HEN, Department of Labour, Letter from Mr. L. Walker to Mr. Lamont, the Secretary of Commerce and Industry ref no C.T./C. 1031 dated 23 February 1935.

had been received from white workers that they were apparently expected to work unreasonably long hours. It was pointed out to him by Iscor management that the hours of work for single shifts were 48 hours per week and those for continuous shifts, 56 hours per week. Single shift men working in excess of the normal shift period were paid at the rate of time and a half for the additional time. Men doing continuous work were paid at the rate of time and a half for all week days in excess of the normal shift time. Further, it was pointed out, that they were paid for normal Sunday shifts at time and a half and for hours in excess of their normal Sunday shifts, at double time. In addition to this, all employees were granted at least 11 days paid leave after 12 months continuous service, together with certain statutory public holidays.<sup>6</sup>

By 1936 Dr. van der Bijl needed capital to continue subsidiary developments and this could only be achieved by cutting costs. Costs at this time were as much as £ 1-00 per ton higher than those of European producers because of high capital costs, due mainly to costly sea and land transport of the plant and equipment, customs duties and the higher construction and erection costs experienced in South Africa. Capital costs were fixed and there was no means by which Dr. van der Bijl could lower them. The only means of lowering costs further was by attacking labour costs either by reducing the work force through mechanisation, thus increasing capital costs, or by lowering wages. This was not a phenomena unique to Iscor, but was one experienced world wide. In England, for example, the increasing mechanisation of production also proved to be a source of friction, for innovation brought with it the threat of substituting semi-skilled and unskilled

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<sup>6</sup> SAB, Volume 1318 Ref. C1061/5. ARB, Letter from the Secretary, South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corp. Ltd, to the Secretary for Labour, dated 10 June 1935.

labour for skilled workers and the introduction of fixed rates as part of the search for more efficient utilisation of capital and labour.<sup>7</sup> In the face of much opposition and controversy Dr. van der Bijl, none the less, chose to cut wages.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, despite Government rhetoric about providing sheltered employment for poor whites, these workers had little more protection at Iscor than they had in the country's gold mines. Iscor, because of its vast mining activities, fell under the Mines and Works Act and not the Factories Act as would be expected. In addition, Iscor had not joined the Engineering Industrial Council, through which employees and employers could negotiate wage agreements, nor could Iscor's white employees have their grievances heard by the Government's Wage Board, because they were organised into labour unions that were required by law to use the Industrial Council to settle disputes. The only protection therefore afforded white Iscor employees was their right to strike and the privileges afforded them under the civilised labour policy, which had been introduced by the Pact Government during the 1920's. The civilised labour policy was principally enforced through the granting of tariff protection to those industries employing whites, (Iscor had been refused this protection), so even this avenue was of little use to the corporation's white employees.<sup>9</sup>

In brief, though, a combination of circumstances, largely unavoidable in the starting up of a new plant where virtually all local labour was unskilled, resulted in initial production difficulties, involving higher costs which were helped on by

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<sup>7</sup> R. Church, Herbert Austin: The British Motor Car Industry to 1941, Europa Publications Limited, London, 1979.

<sup>8</sup> N.L. Clark, Manufacturing Apartheid, State Corporations in South Africa, Yale University Press, 1994, p 96.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pp 96-97.

Iscor's rather too generous wage and labour policy. Nevertheless the adoption of the alternative policy of importing a higher proportion of skilled workmen would, initially anyway, have involved still higher costs.<sup>10</sup>

In May 1936 the differentiated salary policy of Iscor eventually resulted in more than 1 000 white South African employees of Iscor leaving the Boiler Makers Union and the subsequent founding of the South African Iron and Steel and Kindred Trades Association. The new union quickly took up the cause of the unskilled and semi-skilled workers employed by Iscor, who were both envious of the higher wages paid to the immigrant white workers while at the same time fearing replacement by cheaper black labour. The union's timing was not very good for by this time Iscor had already committed itself to a number of large scale ventures by investing £ 136 000 in USCO, PRESCO, Fowler Tar Spraying Co. and the Steel Sales Company. At the same time Iscor's financial results were due to be published and it became abundantly clear that it was not possible for Iscor to issue dividends at this stage. Iscor somehow had to lower costs and could therefore not even consider raising wages, let alone continuing to employ white labour, when it could easily hire much cheaper black labour. As it was, Iscor began reclassifying "white" jobs as "general labourer" jobs for blacks, at extremely low wages, during the same year.<sup>11</sup>

Thus by 1936 matters had reached a head regarding labour relations and wage demands by white employees at Iscor. Action was now taken by Iscor to place

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<sup>10</sup> C.S. Richards, The Iron and Steel Industry in South Africa, p 297.

<sup>11</sup> N. Clark, South African State Corporations: "The Death Knell of Economic Colonialism?", Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 14(1), 1987, p 120.

matters on a more sound basis. Though the locally recruited labour force had improved greatly in skill, time studies on scientific lines were carried out and as vacancies occurred or men were promoted the unskilled jobs were filled by blacks. This very necessary policy on the part of Iscor unfortunately became linked to a wage dispute between themselves and 878 white employees. The demands of the South African Iron and Steel and Kindred Trades Association, made to Iscor's management between 26 May 1936 and 26 October 1936 included the following complaints; (a) wages, (b) rates, (c) replacement of white employees by blacks, (d) that whatever award was granted, some of these should be retrospective in different departments from different dates. The majority of those workers involved in the dispute though were not union members and were riding on the back of the union to achieve what they felt should be a better deal. As negotiations dragged on it became clear that an agreement would not be reached between Iscor and the union as to wage increases and the matter was therefore referred to a Conciliation Board on 9 February 1937. The Claims submitted for increases were in the most part excessive, being in the region of 30-40% and in some cases were even in excess of 50%. As can be expected with demands of this magnitude, no agreement could be reached and on 3 September 1937 negotiations finally broke down and on 9 September the whole dispute was referred to arbitration.<sup>12</sup>

To the dismay of the workers, the arbitrators found that the excessive wages paid for unskilled work was totally unjustifiable on economic grounds and they upheld Iscor's policy that blacks should be employed in unskilled work and in most of the semi-skilled work where the degree of skill was low. They further condemned any attempt, and rightly so, of introducing a purely white labour policy, and rather

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<sup>12</sup> C.S. Richards, The Iron and Steel Industry in South Africa, pp 297-298.

pointed out that the attitude of the men "*that they were entitled to continuity of employment irrespective of the work available,*" was totally unacceptable on economic grounds and that nowhere else in the capitalist world was this accepted as the norm.

They further declared that Iscor should not be seen as a means of raising taxes nor as a means of subsidising white labour. They further were not prepared to consider the retrospective payments as requested by the union. They laid down minimum wages on the lines recommended by Iscor for the various job classifications, determined bonus payments on a sounder and more scientific basis and set out regulations for the replacement of whites by black labour in the unskilled and semi-skilled posts. The arbitrators felt that there was no reason why Iscor should not follow the general practice prevalent in commerce and industry with regard to the employment of cheaper black labour in these posts. This, of course, torpedoed the idea of Iscor being a place of employment for poor whites, but then the main purpose of any industrial undertaking should be that of making a profit. The award, although originally being fixed for a period of 8 months effective from 1 December 1937, continued on beyond the expiry date and eventually merged in an Industrial Agreement covering the entire industry.<sup>13</sup>

In retrospect, the arbitrators' rates were considered to be very fair and compared most favourably with international standards. They were, in fact, even better than those found in continental iron and steel industries. None the less labour costs were and remained an important element in the unit cost of production at Iscor, comprising 42% of the total manufacturing cost. Thus it was, that from 1937 onwards Iscor increasingly replaced whites with blacks and, during Parliament that

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 298-299.

year J.J. Haywood, N.P. Member of Parliament for Bloemfontein (South), raised the question of the desirability of Iscor replacing some 3 000 semi-skilled white labourers with blacks and whether the government would take steps to prevent whites being replaced by blacks on the steel works. The Minister of Commerce and Industry, A.P.J. Fourie, avoided the question and refused to answer, stating that he was unable to reply to this question until he had acquainted himself with all the relevant information regarding these circumstances.<sup>14</sup> In light of the fact that it was almost common knowledge by this time that Iscor could no longer afford to employ whites at the same salaries they were demanding, it is hard to believe that Fourie was not aware of what was taking place. As a result of government's complacency therefore, Iscor gained significant control over its workforce and its ability to ensure profits by increasing its percentage of black workers at the expense of more expensive white workers.

After the signing of the Industrial Agreement, the Union appealed to the Government, but to no avail. It filed legal charges against the Minister for Labour, J.H. Hofmeyr, Iscor and the Industrial Council for having published an industrial agreement during the Conciliation Board hearings that left any Board decision moot, but it failed to have the decisions of the arbitrators or the agreement changed in any way. Throughout 1938 the Union continued to complain about Iscor's black labour policies and that the government was creating a "swartmanswerkplek".<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Union of South African-Debates of the House of Assembly, Vol. 28, (8 January to 5 March 1937), Reported and Printed for the House of Assembly by the Nationale Pers Beperk, Cape Town, 1937, col. 1234-1235.

<sup>15</sup> SAB, Volume 3248 Ref 509/Vol. 3, HEN, Blanke Werkers by Yskor op Groot Skaal deur Naturelle Vervang, Die Transvaler.

The opposition Purified National Party, formed in 1934, seized upon the issue in late 1938 at the time of the Centennial Commemoration of the Battle of Blood River, by organising protest meetings in Pretoria when thirty white employees were retrenched. According to a memorandum, issued by Iscor in November 1938 though, the statement confused two separate issues. The one was the so-called "Native Labour Policy" of Iscor and the other was the issue of the retrenchment of 28 daily paid white employees and two monthly paid staff men, who had become redundant and for whom, at the time, no other work at Iscor was available.

In connection with the so-called "Native Labour Policy" of Iscor, it was publicly stated that a great number of white employees were dismissed in order to be replaced by blacks at lower wages. These statements were condemned by Iscor as being irresponsible, dangerous and untrue and a statement was issued by management stating that '*there has not been one single case where an European employee has been dismissed or retrenched from the service of Iscor in order to fill his place with a Native*'.<sup>16</sup>

Whether this was true or not, would not be easy to prove and although we can retrospectively and objectively weigh up the pros and cons of employing more economical and cheaper black labour at the expense of white labour in unskilled and semi-skilled posts, we must not lose sight of the fact that this was without doubt a very emotive political point, especially in view of the high percentage of poor unemployed and displaced whites, especially Afrikaners.

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<sup>16</sup> SAB, System 01, Volume 8 Ref CI 34, MES, South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corp. Ltd, Memo, dated November 1938, p 2.



In order to train large numbers of local men, a certain measure of over engagement of local unskilled whites was necessary as a large percentage could prove to be wholly unsuitable for skilled production operations. As the initial over engaged reservoir became depleted it was felt that it would be uneconomical to replenish them with whites at wages far beyond the value of the unskilled functions provided by them, yet low for a man with a family living in Pretoria. It was felt therefore that the only sound procedure would be to engage black employees as and when functions became vacant. But, under no circumstances, were any white employees specifically removed from Iscor's service in order to make room for black workers.<sup>17</sup> The decision to retrench the men was made by the full Board of Iscor after lengthy deliberations in which all aspects were considered in the light of the Board's experience and in accordance with acceptable industrial practices.<sup>18</sup>

On account of the dissatisfaction still existing in Pretoria over the reversal of Iscor's white labour policy, it was stated in the Rand Daily Mail of 22 December 1938 that Mr. J.A.P Venter, N.P. Member of Parliament for Wonderboom, intended to place before the Minister a scheme for subsidised white labour. Although it was his intention to urge on Dr. Hans Pirow that the government subsidise them out of the profits of the company, nothing came of this promise.

In the end neither political pressure nor union agitation could help Iscor's white employees. As it became apparent that white labour would become more and more expensive as a result of the actions of organised labour, Dr. van der Bijl became intransigent on the issue, believing that Iscor's profits would evaporate if

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p 3.

<sup>18</sup> SAB, System 01, Volume 8 Ref CI 34, MES, Letter from Dr. H.J. van der Bijl, Chairman of Iscor to the Honorable A.P.J. Fourie, MP dated 7 November 1938.

he was forced to use white workers rather than blacks, (by 1938 there were 2 250 white employees at Iscor).<sup>19</sup> Although Hertzog's government was publicly committed to the use of white labour, neither J.H. Hofmeyr, the Minister of Labour, nor Fourie, the Minister of Commerce and Industries, took any steps to change Iscor's policies. As it was, Hofmeyr's signing of the Industrial Agreement in 1937 effectively removed a large segment of white labour from the iron and steel industry and indicated tacit support for Iscor's policies. From 1937 until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, Dr. F. Meyer, Pretoria's Plant General Manager, continued to replace white workers with blacks.<sup>20</sup>

The financial results of Dr. van der Bijl's actions were considerable. Although Iscor had sustained losses in its first two years of production, by 1936 it showed a profit of £ 435 665 while in 1937 the profit was £ 669 279. These profits were to be expected given the high level of market protection, price stabilisation and subsidiary development attained. In 1938 profits rose to £ 1 236 122, which was an increase of 84% over the previous year's figures. This dramatic rise was largely attributable to lowered production costs, which in turn were the result of the implementation of the labour arbitration award. In the end, market agreements with private sector producers and the adoption of harsh labour policies secured Iscor's strong financial standing. By the end of the 1930s 47% of the workforce was white, a considerable drop from the 55% employed in 1934, and very different from Dr. van der Bijl's 1932 claim that he intended using only white labour in the production process.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Iscor News Vol. 3 No. 5, May 1938, Building up South Africa, A study of Employment at Iscor, p 295.

<sup>20</sup> N.L. Clark, Manufacturing Apartheid, State Corporations in South Africa, p.101.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.103.

One of the original reasons offered for the founding of Iscor was the chronic poor-white problem facing South Africa in the 1920s.<sup>22</sup> However, it was not long before it became apparent that Iscor had to function on a profitable basis and expensive white labour began to be replaced by cheaper black labour.<sup>23</sup> This did not satisfy the Afrikaner nationalists at the time as it was felt that Iscor had been partially created to employ poor whites and not to become a “swartmanswerkplek.”<sup>24</sup>

Driven by the perennial logic of profit maximisation, costs had to be pared to the bone, and in many cases the bone turned out to be the welfare of the black workers. A large body of cheap unskilled mine and industry labourers had to be created to extract the ore from the rock and haul it to the surface, or to keep the factories running. To do this a migrant labour system was instituted where wages paid were only equal to the maintenance cost of the worker. The maintenance and reproduction costs of the worker's families were supposed to be met by agricultural production in the rural reserves. Thus it was that industry's need for a cheap labour supply required the destruction of the rural economy to force labour from the rural reserves into the capitalist centres of production. Cost minimisation, however, dictated that this destruction only be partial so as not to drive the entire rural black population into the cities, thereby overrunning the urban areas with unemployable blacks.

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<sup>22</sup> For further discussions on the poor white problem see: The Poor White Problem in South Africa, Report of the Carnegie Commission, Stellenbosch, 1932; P. du Toit, (Compiler) Report of the National Conference on the Poor White Problem, held at Kimberley, 1934; R. Morrell, (Ed), White but Poor, Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa 1880 - 1940; D. O'Meara, Volkskapitalisme, Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism 1934-1948.

<sup>23</sup> N. Clark, South African State Corporations: “The Death Knell of Economic Colonialism?”, Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 14(1), 1987, p 120.

<sup>24</sup> SAB, Volume 3248 Ref. 509/Vol. 3, HEN, Blanke Werkers by Yskor op Groot Skaal deur Naturelle Vervang, Die Transvaler.

Having ensured a constant supply of migrant workers, the next step in labour cost minimisation was taken at industry level. A “maximum average system” was introduced to ensure that wages were uniformly low. The contract system restricted the contractual rights of workers while the pass system, enshrined in the Labour Regulations Act of 1911, provided downward pressure on wages as black workers had to find employment within six days of arrival in the white areas or face fines, imprisonment and expulsion. All these measures increased the mine owners’ and industrialists’ control over the labour force and accentuated the powerlessness and extreme vulnerability of black workers, thus ensuring a constant supply of ultra - exploitable migrant workers for South Africa’s mines and industries.<sup>25</sup>

During the war years 1939-1945 managers at Iscor were hard pressed to maintain production both in manufacturing and mining, while faced with shortages of labour and supplies, as well as demands for wage increases from black and white workers. Management chose in most cases not to try to intimidate its work force, but adopted a flexible approach, alternating between coercion and conciliation, in an attempt to control them.

One of Iscor’s most important war time operations and one in which a largely homogeneous work force was employed was its mining division. Production at Iscor’s Thabazimbi iron ore mine almost doubled and it was important not to disrupt that production. Owing to the mine’s isolated location in the Northern Transvaal and its large black migrant work force, the mine managers felt that they

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<sup>25</sup> C. Pycroft and B. Munslow, *Black Mine Workers in South Africa: Strategies of Co-operation and Resistance*, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 23 (1-2), 1988, p 157.

could take drastic steps to ensure worker productivity without fear of disrupting production.

The new demands for increased production at Thabazimbi quickly strained the ability of management to provide housing and adequate care for the black workers. The number of miners increased from 667 in February 1940 to 2 000 in May 1941, while their housing, which consisted of crude iron buildings, did not expand proportionally. The accommodation quickly became intolerable due to over crowding of sleeping and ablution facilities with the resultant decline in health standards.<sup>26</sup>

Pressed as they were to meet production targets and budget, Iscor was unable to improve the conditions of the employees. This inadvertently led to worker dissatisfaction and the Superintendent of Thabazimbi mine, C.J.N. Jourdan, was faced with labour problems and desertions. In their attempts to control black workers, Jourdan and his white subordinates resorted to corporal punishment which not surprisingly brought about a serious decline in morale of the black work force. From February 1941 to June 1942 a number of complaints were received from black mine employees which suggested that they were being subjected to corporal punishment by the Compound Manager,<sup>27</sup> as well as being

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<sup>26</sup> SAB, Volume 9923 Ref. 521/408C, NTS, Letter from I.P. O'Driscoll, Assistant Native Commissioner, Pilansburg, to the Additional Native Commissioner, Rustenburg re: Inspection of Thabazimbi Mine, dated 30 May 1941.

<sup>27</sup> SAB, Volume 9923 Ref. 521/408C, NTS, Letter from I.P. O'Driscoll, Assistant Native Commissioner, Pilansburg, to the Additional Native Commissioner, Rustenburg re: Complaint against Thabazimbi Mine, dated 30 May 1941; Memorandum From I.P. O'Driscoll, to Additional Native Commissioner, Rustenburg, re: Inspection of Thabazimbi Mine, dated 30 May 1941.

assaulted by white mine employees.<sup>28</sup> These complaints were thoroughly investigated by I.P. O'Driscoll, Assistant Native Commissioner, Pilansburg, and Inspector of Native Labour, by way of visits to Thabazimbi Mine as well as interviews with all complainants and witnesses.<sup>29</sup>

O'Driscoll's investigations brought to light the fact that assaults had in fact taken place against blacks by whites at Thabazimbi Mine, as well as floggings at the hands of the Compound Manager, P. Heystek. When news of these assaults reached Iscor Management, strong action was taken by Dr. F. Meyer, the Works Manager at Iscor, who along with senior management at Head Office instructed the Superintendent of Thabazimbi Mine to notify all white employees that any assault by them on black employees would lead to severe disciplinary action on the part of the corporation.

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<sup>28</sup> SAB, Volume 9923 Ref. 521/408C, NTS, Letter from K.K. Meshake, Room No.5 Thabazimbi Mine, to the District Commissioner, Teujateyaneng, dated 23 February 1941; Letter from the District Commissioner Teujateyaneng, Basutoland to the Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, dated 25 March 1941; Statement from Round Co. No. 885, Thabazimbi Mine, sworn before I.P. O'Driscoll, Assistant Native Commissioner on 13 May 1941; Statement from Simon Meshack. Co. No. 1202, Thabazimbi Mine, sworn before I.P. O'Driscoll on 14 May 1941; Statement from Davidson Moyo Co. No. 2010, Thabazimbi Mine, sworn before I.P. O'Driscoll on the 14 May 1941; Statement from Gideon Malebye, Thabazimbi Mine, sworn before I.P. O'Driscoll on 14 May 1941; Statement from Janke Masepampya Co. No. 679, Thabazimbi Mine, sworn before I.P. O'Driscoll on 14 May 1941.

<sup>29</sup> SAB, Volume 9923 Ref. 521/408C, NTS, Letter from I.P. O'Driscoll to the Additional Native Commissioner, Rustenburg, re Complaint against Thabazimbi Mine, dated 30 May 1941; Letter from E.W. Lowe, Director of Native Affairs, Johannesburg, dated 2 July 1941; Extracts from Memorandum to Works Manager, Pretoria, from Superintendent of Mines, Thabazimbi dated 2 August 1941.

Dr. Meyer also informed the Compound Manager that the practice of flogging black employees was to cease with immediate effect and would not be tolerated in the future.<sup>30</sup> In some instances blacks even complained of being flogged when reporting in sick, as they were then accused of being lazy.<sup>31</sup>

When all the facts and evidence are examined, there can be no doubt that certain irregularities were perpetrated at the mine, supposedly to maintain control and discipline over the black work force. At the same time there were also complaints against the conditions of employment and payment of salaries on the mine which also resulted in an average of 40 desertions per month.<sup>32</sup> After these complaints were investigated mine management made attempts to rectify matters and at the same time to normalise labour relations. The workers though continued to protest against their conditions of employment. The Native Affairs Department proclaimed Thabazimbi a labour area which necessitated regular review by a

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<sup>30</sup> SAB, Volume 9923 Ref. 521/408C, NTS. Letter from I.P. O'Driscoll, to the Additional Native Commissioner, Rustenburg, re: Complaint against Thabazimbi Mine, dated 30 May 1941; Letter from J.E.K. Tucker, Secretary Industrial Iron and Steel Corporation Limited, to The Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, re: Complaints by Native Labourers - Thabazimbi Mine, dated 19 September 1941; Letter from I.P. O'Driscoll, to Additional Native Commissioner, Rustenburg, re: Inspection of Thabazimbi Mine, dated 30 May 1941; Letter from I.P. O'Driscoll, to the Additional Native Commissioner, re: Inspection of Thabazimbi Mine, dated 4 June 1942.

<sup>31</sup> SAB, Volume 9923 Ref. 521/408C, NTS. Letter from K.K. Meshake, Room 5, Thabazimbi Mine, to the District Commissioner, Teujateyaneng, dated 23 February 1941, Statement from Simon Meshack, Co. No. 1202 Thabazimbi Mine, sworn before I.P. O'Driscoll on 14 May 1941.

<sup>32</sup> SAB, Volume 9923 Ref. 521/408C, NTS. Letter from I.P. O'Driscoll to the Additional Native Commissioner re: Inspection of Thabazimbi Mine, dated 30 May 1941.

department official whose principle duty was the collection of fees and taxes from black workers which amounted to approximately £ 5 000 per year.<sup>33</sup> Iscor built a new fenced-in compound policed by Iscor security officers. N.L. Clark makes the statement that by January 1941 Iscor had total control over the lives and movements of its black work force. This, however, is not correct, as O'Driscoll in 1942 reported that there was at that time little effective control in any direction. Thabazimbi had, in fact, recorded 119 desertions over a four month period. There were also complaints by mine management that due to the lack of any arrangement for punishing of black employees this resulted in them being absent from work without leave or being drunk on duty, or they plainly refused to work and in other ways contravened the Native Labour regulations.<sup>34</sup> From this it is clear that management had by this time not yet gained complete control of their black work force. One year later the black miners took the unprecedented step of going on strike to protest their low wages and poor working conditions. The strike was quickly squashed and many of the workers were dismissed. Control was eventually regained at the mine, but the price of such control was an unstable, ever changing and disgruntled work force.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> SAB, Volume 9923 Ref. 521/408C, NTS, Letter from I.P. O'Driscoll, Assistant Native Commissioner, Pilansburg, to the Additional Native Commissioner, Rustenburg, re: Thabazimbi Mine - Proclamation as Labour Area, dated 23 January 1942; Letter from Assistant Native Commissioner, Pilansburg, to J.M. Brink, Assistant Director of Native Labour, Johannesburg, dated 4 June 1942.

<sup>34</sup> SAB, Volume 9923 Ref. 521/408C, NTS, Letter from I.P. O'Driscoll, Assistant Native Commissioner, Pilansburg, to the Additional Native Commissioner, Rustenburg, re: Thabazimbi Mine - Proclamation as Labour Area dated 23 January 1942; Letter from I.P. O'Driscoll to the Additional Native Commissioner Rustenburg, re: Inspection of Thabazimbi Mine, dated 4 June 1942.

<sup>35</sup> N.L. Clark, Manufacturing Apartheid, State Corporations in South Africa, pp 119-120.



Forceful methods of labour control which were effective at a remote mine like Thabazimbi could not easily be applied at Iscor's Pretoria Plant. At Thabazimbi unskilled migrant black workers could easily be replaced, but at Pretoria, Iscor employed highly skilled foreign artisans and semi-skilled local whites under union agreements as well as many black workers who performed jobs requiring training on specialised machinery. It was realised that should these workers down tools or quit, it would not be so easy to replace them at short notice. Iscor's management therefore needed stability in the Pretoria Plant's work force. However, oral evidence led by L.J.R. Nunez indicates that there were instances of assault by white employees on black colleagues at Pretoria works and that this led to friction between the groups. Just as at Thabazimbi though, this type of action was not condoned by Iscor's management.

A further labour problem facing Iscor during the war years was the question of foreign nationals or descendants, especially those of German stock. On 5 September 1939 the decision was taken by Iscor management that all Iscor employees of German and Austrian nationality were granted leave of absence on full pay. The suspension of these employees created difficulty on the staffing side since many of them held key posts. The remaining staff were obliged to carry increased responsibilities, with those who had been engaged in less urgent work being transferred to production. During the second session of Parliament in 1939 J.S. Marwick, Member of Parliament for Illovo, asked R. Stuttaford, the Minister of the Interior, whether immigrants from Germany had entered the Union in terms of the Immigration Regulation Act of 1913 and the Aliens Act of 1937 for employment at Iscor and if so, how many had been repatriated under the

Immigration Regulation Act? Stuttford replied that none had been repatriated under the Act, but that ten German Nationals had returned to Germany at Iscor's expense.<sup>36</sup>

From this it would appear that Iscor went to great lengths to assist those dismissed in this way. On 23 May 1940 a further 34 German and ex-German employees were discharged by Iscor. The retrenchment package offered to these men was made up as follows:

- a) the daily-paid employees were paid ex gratia, a month's (26 shifts) pay, although they were on 24 hours' notice;
- b) the salaried employees were paid their salaries up to the end of June;
- c) all the employees had their leave credit fully paid out;
- d) Iscor, in association with the Director-General of War Supplies set up and equipped an "auxiliary workshop" in Pretoria in which employment was made available to as many of those men as possible, who had been discharged. A number of these men took up employment here.<sup>37</sup>

Iscor's actions were reasonable if one bears in mind that South Africa was at war with Germany and Iscor was involved in the manufacture of strategic war commodities.

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<sup>36</sup> Union of South Africa-Debates of the House of Assembly, Vol. 33, (3 February to 31 March 1939), Reported and Printed for the House of Assembly by the Nationale Pers Beperk, Cape Town, 1939, col. 2086-2087.

<sup>37</sup> SAB, Volume 3274 Ref 509/19/20/24, HEN, Letter from the General Manager Iscor, to Secretary for Commerce and Industry, Re: Employment of German Ex-employees, dated 9 September 1940.

During 1940, three ex-German nationals were interned for  $\pm 2$  months before being released. On enquiry being made to the Internment Department as to whether the Department had any charges against them, Iscor was informed that they had been unconditionally released and that there was nothing being held against them. They now approached Iscor's Management with a request to be re-employed. The Board now took the decision not to re-employ any person who had been interned.

The dismissed workers now realised that only a direct instruction from government would be able to influence the Board decision. They met with the Minister for the Interior, but without success.<sup>38</sup>

The Board held that under existing conditions Iscor could not possibly consider any change to its present practice of not re-employing enemy subjects who had been released from internment, or any naturalised Union Nationals who were previously citizens of enemy countries. The same, it was felt, applied to South African nationals who were interned, and at one time when feeling in the works was running high against anyone who was thought to have enemy sympathies, it would have been courting trouble to re-employ anyone who had been interned.<sup>39</sup>

With the outbreak of hostilities, highly trained white artisans were in great demand by the armed services as well as the mining and engineering industries. At Dr. van der Bijl's request in his capacity as Director-General of War Supplies,

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<sup>38</sup> SAB. Volume 3274 Ref. 509/19/20/24. HEN. Letter from South African Iron and Steel Traders Association to Mr. I. Wallach, House of Parliament, Re: Re-employment of interned ex-German Nationals, dated 24 February 1941.

<sup>39</sup> SAB. Volume 3274 Ref. 509/19/20/24. HEN. South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corp. Ltd, Letter from Mr. A.C. Mc Colm to E.P. Smith, Secretary of Commerce and Industry dated, 11 July 1941.

Prime Minister Smuts placed all artisans in the country under the supervision of the Controller of Industrial Manpower in March 1941, thus halting the mobility of these workers. The Controller had the power to fix standard conditions of employment throughout the country and also to direct men to work at certain firms. Iscor soon benefited from the new regulations as the Controller of Industrial Manpower gave Iscor the highest priority for obtaining men as a result of its pivotal role played in defense production. These men's wages were set relatively high though to compensate for official control and as a result Dr. Meyer tried to keep their numbers as low as possible. Thus, throughout the war, Iscor benefited from the support of State officials and enjoyed relative peace and stability in its relations with the majority of its most skilled white workers. It is interesting to note that the controller was an ex-union leader, who was chosen by Smuts to fill this post.<sup>40</sup>

Skilled workers, however, remained relatively scarce during the war and Iscor became more dependent upon its semi-skilled, or operative labour, especially at the rolling mills where the steel billets were produced. They were responsible for manufacturing the bulk of Iscor's products during the war. In 1941 though, the white operatives went on strike at the rolling mills over the issue of job security. The strike began when Dr. Meyer laid off one shift of men at the heavy rolling mill. He had been forced to shut down the blast furnaces for maintenance and, since he could neither produce nor import enough steel to keep the mills working at full production, he laid off the men. In protest, the other two shifts went on strike, bringing to a standstill the plant's major production division. The strikers

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<sup>40</sup> P. Alexander, *Collaboration and Controls: Engineering Unions and the South African State, 1939-1945*, *South African Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 27(2), 1996, p 72.

demanded that Iscor guarantee their hours of work and thus their take-home pay. Dr. Meyer claimed this was not possible and further claimed that they had no right to strike.

Faced with the prospect of having to fire one hundred men, retraining new employees and running the risk of concerted action by the other operatives, Dr. Meyer reached a compromise with the workers. He now set up an unemployment insurance fund for the operatives. Iscor contributed equally with the employees to create the Iscor Daily Paid European Employees Lay-off Wages Insurance Fund.<sup>41</sup>

In November 1942 Iscor's management stated its desire to have an Industrial Council established so as to control the conditions of employment at Iscor's Pretoria and Vanderbijl Park Works. It was further pointed out that the Industrial Council for the Iron and Steel Manufacturing and Engineering Industry (Tvl) had already been advised of this and that the Trade Unions concerned had all been consulted by Iscor's management.<sup>42</sup>

Iscor now began to hire more and cheaper white workers as, for the first time in the corporation's history, white employment began to rise faster than black. Between 1934 and 1940 the percentage of white workers had dropped steadily from 55% of the number of men employed at Iscor, to 38%. By 1944 with Iscor's total labour force more than doubled, whites comprised 49% of the corporation's

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<sup>41</sup> N.L. Clark, Manufacturing Apartheid, State Corporations in South Africa, pp 121-122.

<sup>42</sup> SAB, Volume 370 Ref. 1058/154, ARB, South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corp. Ltd.; Letter from R.H. Miller, Labour Engineer, to The Industrial Registrar, Department of Labour, Ref. No.142/11 Re: Conditions of Employment Iscor and Vanderbijl Park, dated 13 November 1942.

employees. Only a small part of the white work force (13%) though, was skilled, as most of the growth in white employment took place in operative positions. Through a mixture of legal controls, conciliation, and deskilling, Dr. Meyer had finally given Iscor the appearance of being committed to the old policy of civilised labour, yet without fundamentally raising Iscor's production costs or weakening its position at the hands of organised labour.<sup>43</sup>

During the mid to later war years, Iscor's Board of Directors became increasingly concerned about the consequences of relying on considerable numbers of black labourers in the steel plant. War time inflation hit black consumers hardest and spurred demands for higher wages in all industries. Dr. Meyer, now General Works Manager, met representatives of South African Iron and Steel Trades Association to discuss their request, initiated by the expiry of the Industrial Agreement, to ask for all round wage increases. Having heard all the arguments, he pointed out that several financial benefits had already been granted partly as a result of cost of living allowances.

Finally both parties agreed that, whilst demands for all round increases in wages could not be considered, some adjustments were made to the wages of general labourers and black factory workers, whose wages were increased fourfold, thus nearly doubling the hourly rate. A further easing of relations was stimulated by a change in the pension regulations which, with effect from October 1944, applied to all white employees who had completed not less than 10 years service upon reaching the age of 60 years, as well as to those who had retired earlier.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> N.L. Clark, Manufacturing Apartheid. State Corporations in South Africa, pp 123-124.

<sup>44</sup> E. Rosenthal, The History of Iscor, p 690.

In 1944 Iscor received instructions from the Director General of Supplies to scale down operations at the plants and to dispense with the services of the personnel to be released. Management felt that Iscor could not be held responsible for finding other employment for personnel no longer required for the operation and maintenance of the Director General's war plan, although they would assist in this respect. In certain cases Iscor was able to offer alternative employment to the men released, but in some cases vacancies only existed for jobs carrying lower rates of pay than the men in question had been earning in the Director General's plant. It remained, however, Iscor's prerogative to retain or retrench these men.<sup>45</sup>

With the cessation of hostilities in 1945 Iscor paid out a bonus to all its employees for their efforts during the war, as well as to mark the end of hostilities. This was referred to as a "Victory Bonus". The bonus was paid to all existing employees who had been in the employment of Iscor during the war years, with the exception of approximately 600 special police employed by Iscor during the period December 1939 to April 1944.<sup>46</sup> The bonus was a graduated one based upon length of continuous service (including any periods of active service during the war) and was paid out to both white and black Iscor employees.<sup>47</sup>

During 1948 the question of the re-employment of internees was once again raised at Iscor. The question of the re-employment of the Germans and ex-Germans

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<sup>45</sup> SAB, Volume 1318 Ref. C 1061/5, ARB, Letter from F. Meyer, General Works Manager, to Secretary for Labour, Re: Employees formerly employed on war work, 6 January 1944.

<sup>46</sup> SAB, Volume 7799 Ref. F117/16, TES, Memo in regard to special Police employed by Iscor during the war period, 1 May 1947, p 1.

<sup>47</sup> SAB, Volume 496 Ref. W9/2, BVE, South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corp. Ltd, Address by Dr. H.J. van der Bijl, Chairman of the Corporation, at the 16<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Meeting of Shareholders, at Pretoria, on 28 November 1945, p 1.

(naturalised) who were interned during the early days of the war or were discharged from Iscor's service towards the end of May 1940 was considered by Iscor on several occasions after the cessation of hostilities in 1945. The reason given for not re-employing these persons was that it would cause friction and discontent amongst Iscor's existing employees and would disturb the harmony and good relations that existed at the time amongst employees and between the employees and management.<sup>48</sup> L.J.R. Nunez, however, disagrees with this statement and contends that there was little if any conflict between German speaking employees and South African born nationals. It was felt that Iscor's objectives and responsibilities in this respect was to do their best to maintain good relationships amongst their employees and between the employees and management in the general interest of the corporation so that the production of iron and steel could be maintained at the maximum possible level.<sup>49</sup>

In December 1948 Dr. van der Bijl died after a long illness and was replaced by Dr. Meyer, who was at that stage General Works Manager. The new National Party Government had been suspicious of and antagonistic towards Dr. van der Bijl, due to the fact that he had been enticed back from America by General J.C. Smuts to assist with the development of industry in South Africa. He was therefore seen as being a Smuts man who had English interests at heart and discriminated against Afrikaners and this suspicion was re-enforced by the fact that most of the top posts at Iscor were held by English speaking South Africans or immigrants who had been brought out to South Africa to provide the badly needed skills which were in short supply in the country. They reacted differently however

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<sup>48</sup> SAB, Volume 3274 Ref. 509/19/20/24, HEN, Letter from Mr. A.M. Hagard, General Manager, Iscor, to the Secretary for Commerce and Industries dated 9 September 1948.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



to Dr. Meyer. Although he was not considered as dynamic or talented as some other officials at Iscor, he had gained considerable experience in the industry as well as having close personal connections with the new party in power. Dr. Meyer had in fact been present at the 1939 “Volkskongres”, and he was rumoured to be a member of the “Broederbond” although this has never been proved. There were, however, many other employees at Iscor who were members of the Broederbond.<sup>50</sup>

The economic goal of Afrikaner nationalism was to increase the Afrikaner’s share of South Africa’s economic wealth and thereby diminish the extent of English and foreign control of the economy. This goal had its historical roots in the fact that the white Afrikaans speaking population group had entered the twentieth century in an insecure economic position. The discovery of gold and diamonds had transformed a largely subsistence rural economy into an industrial economy tied to British imperial interests dominated by mining and controlled, like industry and commerce, by non-Afrikaners. Initially in the south of the country, in 1915, Afrikaners launched an economic movement to improve their position. However, it was only in the 1930’s that this movement actually became a concerted strategy. Members of the Afrikaner culture and business elite embarked upon a plan of ethnic mobilisation to improve the economic position of the Afrikaner. The spearhead of this movement was the Afrikaner Broederbond. In 1939, through the Federation of Afrikaner Cultural Associations, the first Afrikaner Peoples’ Economic Congress (Volkskongress) was organised to review the economic

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<sup>50</sup> I. Wilkens, and H. Strydom, The Super Afrikaners, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1978; Oral evidence led by P. Fairman confirmed this fact and it was pointed out by him that he recognised a number of the names appearing in Wilkens’ and Strydom’s book as being employed at Iscor.

position of the Afrikaner people. This called for Afrikaners to capture their legitimate place in the economy through the pursuit of people's capitalism (Volkskapitalisme). In the 1950s after the National Party had come to power in the 1948 elections, this struggle was renewed. In 1950 a second Volkskongress had been called which reiterated the project, but this time in unqualified capitalist terms. However, despite the longevity of the economic struggle, by the early 1960s Afrikaners still remained in an economically inferior position compared to their white English speaking counterparts. The Afrikaner's share of the private sector of the economy was only 27%, and when agriculture was excluded it fell to 18%.<sup>51</sup>

After the National Party victory in 1948 the position of the Afrikaans speaking white operatives gained increasing political significance, with these workers epitomising the contradictions of sustained economic development and continuing white political dominance. At the same time that Iscor was demanding increased funding from government for the expansion of plant, Iscor officials realised that they could not ignore these workers in staffing plans for the expanded facilities. Once again Iscor found that changes in production altered carefully arranged labour relations.<sup>52</sup>

Commencing immediately after the war, the principle struggle at Iscor was between the white artisans and operatives over skill and race as the determining measure in the industrial labour hierarchy. In 1949 the artisans demanded a wage

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<sup>51</sup> T. Cross, Afrikaner Nationalism, Anglo-American and Iscor: The Formation of the Highveld Steel and Vanadium Corporation, 1960-1970, Business History, Vol. 36(3), 1994, pp 81-82.

<sup>52</sup> N.L. Clark, Manufacturing Apartheid, State Corporations in South Africa, pp 149-151; Iscor Annual Reports, address by Dr. F. Meyer, Chairman of the Corporation, at the 24<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Meeting, held on Wednesday 25 November 1953.

increase. Dr. Meyer rejected their demands on the grounds that he would no longer sanction any demands by white workers, artisans or operatives, for higher wages. Nevertheless, the white workers called Dr. Meyer's bluff as they had in 1941 and, threatening to go on strike, won an arbitration award when a dispute in regard to the wages and certain other conditions of employment was declared between the Suid Afrikaanse Yster en Staalbedryfsvereniging and the Transvaal Iron and Steel Manufacturers Association.<sup>53</sup>

In 1951 Dr. Meyer was again forced to raise the operatives wages, this time to a level equal to that throughout the industry. This was bought about when a new Labour Agreement for the rest of the industry was negotiated by the private firms. These concessions created dissatisfaction amongst the artisans and in 1952 the Amalgamated Engineers Union led a strike to force Iscor into granting higher wages to the artisans.<sup>54</sup>

Dr. Meyer could hardly afford to lose these workers, most of them foreigners recruited overseas during 1950 when Iscor was faced with a serious shortage of skilled workers. As a result, the dispute with the Amalgamated Engineers Union quickly went to arbitration and these workers also won significant wage increases. Both groups of white workers, politically important South Africans and technically valuable foreigners, had to be placated and were protected in a modified wage structure, which valued race but not entirely at the expense of skill.

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<sup>53</sup> SAB, Volume 398 Ref. 1058 163-2A, ARB, Minutes of meeting of National Industrial Council for the Iron, Steel Engineering and Metallurgical Industry, held 30 March 1947 at 10:15 am.

<sup>54</sup> Union of South Africa - Debates of the House of Assembly, Vol. 77, (18 January to 14 March 1952) Reported and printed for the House of Assembly by the Unie-Volkspers Bpk., Parliamentary Printers, Cape Town, 1954, col 1649.

The fate of Iscor's black workers though was less clear. The decision to promote white operatives on the basis of race rather than skill opened the possibility for the use of blacks on the factory floor with jobs defined by their race rather than the skills involved in their work. As a consequence, the figures for black workers continued to rise, from 10 000 in 1950 to 11 600 in 1955, with approximately only 2 000 of these being employed at the Thabazimbi mine. Nevertheless, the Board was quick to point out to the government in 1950 that since Iscor's inception, its total wage bill amounted to £ 33 000 000 per annum, of which only £ 7 500 000 went to blacks. In other words, no matter how many blacks were employed, whites were reaping the primary financial benefits of employment.<sup>55</sup>

By 1953 it was generally accepted that an important aspect of Iscor's growth was the fact that it had provided employment to many thousands of South Africans both directly and indirectly. By 1953 Iscor employed 20 000 whites and blacks while its subsidiaries and associated companies employed thousands more. The millions of pounds of increased purchasing power which arose from wage and salary payments to these employees had also had a great effect in stimulating commerce and industry.<sup>56</sup>

In the works great attention was paid to the safety of employees and to the maintenance of favourable working conditions. The security of white employees in their old age and of their dependents in the case of their premature death, was

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<sup>55</sup> N.L. Clark, Manufacturing Apartheid, State Corporations in South Africa, p 152.

<sup>56</sup> Iscor Annual Reports, Address by Dr. F. Meyer, Chairman of the Corporation at the 24<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Meeting of Shareholders at Pretoria on Wednesday 25 November 1953, p 3.

provided for by the Iscor Pension Fund. The Medical Benefit Fund assisted them in case of illness. The Iscor Recreation and Social Club provided at all centres the facilities necessary for the mental and physical recreation of the white employees.<sup>57</sup>

During the war years a great deal of camaraderie was exhibited amongst white Iscorians, especially towards those active in the armed forces. An example of this was the establishment of the Parcels and Benevolent Fund on 21 October 1941. A donation of £ 25 was made by Iscor to inaugurate the fund and within a week the employees had contributed a further £ 77.0.0. It was then decided to dispatch a parcel to all Iscorians up north who were unable to obtain leave and who would be spending Christmas away from their families. The fund, it was decided, was to be a permanent one for the duration of the war.<sup>58</sup> In this way Iscor showed its solidarity with those of its employees who had left to join the armed services during the years of crisis. Iscor also made up the difference between service pay and normal earnings for men and women in the armed forces.

During the course of the war 229 white Iscorians joined the armed forces of which 17 were killed while on active duty. It is interesting to note that no black Iscorians joined the armed forces. These men were all volunteers who had joined as a result of their own convictions and the urge of their own moral ideals. Many of those who came back, came back with wounds and scars of war which they were to carry with them for the rest of their lives. Those that returned to Iscor were well received and were soon once again part of the Iscor "family". Had they been permitted to do so, more Iscorians would no doubt have joined the armed forces, but as a result

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Iscor News Vol. 6 No. 11, November 1941, Parcels and Benevolent Fund for Iscorians up North, p 778.

of Iscor's strategic importance, the Director General of Supplies would not permit any persons highly skilled in the industry from joining the forces as it was felt that their skills and services could better be served at home in the production process.<sup>59</sup>

A number of years after the cessation of hostilities Iscor paid homage to those employees who had made the ultimate sacrifice during the war. Shortly after three o'clock on the afternoon of Wednesday 25 February 1950, a bronze tablet containing the names of those who had died, was unveiled at a ceremony performed by Dr. F. Meyer, Chairman of the Board of Directors. The tablet was erected in the hall of the main offices at Iscor and contained the names of all those who had died on active duty. This was viewed as being a small enough gesture by which to remember them.<sup>60</sup>

As Iscor developed, management was continually on the lookout for ways and means of increasing and encouraging productivity. With this in mind, management introduced a new scheme into the workplace in July 1947. Hereby Iscor recognised the value of the ability and ingenuity of its employees and encouraged them to develop their ideas. Employees with valuable suggestions or ideas were offered cash rewards.

The main feature of this scheme was that the value of an idea to the corporation would be assessed by a Suggestions Committee and the amount of the monetary

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<sup>59</sup> Iscor News Vol. 15 No. 2, February 1950, Unveiling Ceremony of the Iscor Roll of Honour, The Chairman's speech, p 102.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

reward to the originator was also assessed by that committee. A valuable suggestion or idea could therefore earn a substantial pecuniary reward, but it had to be innovative, and it had to work. In this way employees were being asked to provide suggestions which could improve efficiency and/or working conditions. This scheme, however, had one flaw and this was that it was not made applicable to senior employees of Iscor with regard to improvements which fell within the scope of their expertise. With regard to junior employees who relieved in supervisory positions, such employees were not entitled to a reward or prize unless the suggestion or invention went beyond the normal call of their duty. This, however, was a totally subjective means of judging what the normal call of duty was and thus left the scheme open to manipulation especially where money was involved. Even though suggestions made by them were submitted to and assessed by the Suggestions Committee in the usual way so that the suggestions could be recorded to their credit, it still meant that certain persons were rewarded financially, while others could, if they were lucky, expect a slight edge over the competition when it came to promotions.<sup>61</sup>

In November 1954 Iscor announced the introduction of long service increments for all employees. In this way Iscor recognised the valuable services of Iscorians whose loyalty and consistency had proved to be one of its greatest assets. It had by now become evident that Iscor's strenuous endeavours to provide amenities which permitted white Iscorians and their families a large measure of security was reciprocated by a fair measure of loyalty without which no organisation could hope to prosper.<sup>62</sup> The black employees on the other hand, although they did not receive

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<sup>61</sup> Iscor News Vol. 12 No. 7, July 1947, A reward for your ingenuity, p 564.

<sup>62</sup> Iscor News Vol. 19 No. 11, November 1954, Special Editorial, Iscor's recognition of loyal service and long service increments for Iscor employees, p 37.

all the perks provided to white employees, had no alternative but to accept what was handed out to them at Iscor or face the prospect of joining the masses of unemployed. This was particularly true of the migrant workers who had no prospect of employment in the reserves or in the neighbouring countries from which they came.

As one of the largest employers of labour in South Africa, Iscor's management was continuously confronted by a bewildering variety of tasks, problems and opportunities. The need to supplement the growing shortage of artisans in South Africa was achieved by judicious importations carried out by Dr. S.A. Warren who undertook a special overseas trip to recruit artisans. Further, wage increases, extra compensation for victims of accidents, improvements in arbitration procedures, measures against silicosis among bricklayers and in the area of refractories, were some of the benefits awarded to Iscor employees, both blacks and whites. Cash awards to blacks who had manifested exceptional bravery during life threatening situations at the plant, cheaper rents for white tenants in the lower grades, encouragement to mechanical and electrical engineers to train at local universities, group life insurance for white employees, regulations for personnel interested in politics and scores of other matters occupied management. In all this, Iscor's management at the end of the day made a concerted effort to keep the work force content and stable and by so doing were able to contain costs by saving on training and maintenance and increasing production throughputs. Without a stable work force production costs could easily have escalated out of control which would have resulted in serious financial losses to Iscor. Management had recognised the value of sound labour practices in containing production costs and improving productivity. This, unfortunately, could not be said of the way in which they dealt



with their black labour, especially at Thabazimbi mine. As they were not skilled labourers, it was easy to threaten them with dismissal, or, as happened during the war years, ensure their co-operation by co-ercion. None of these would have made for good labour relations and could only have created bitterness and resentment amongst the black employees, something which no company could afford.

## CHAPTER 4 - HOUSING AND ACCOMMODATION

As has been pointed out in the introduction, one of the ancillary reasons for Iscor's coming into existence was the need to create employment for the large numbers of displaced rural whites who had moved to the cities in search of work. A feature though of these poor whites finding employment in the city was that as soon as they drew a small regular income, they strove to purchase or to build a small house of their own, preferably in semi-rural surroundings. In many cases these people settled on the outskirts of the towns, where land was cheaper. Thus it was that on the edge of the towns of the Witwatersrand, Pretoria, Cape Town and Bloemfontein such rural suburbs sprang up, mainly populated by the Afrikaans speaking people of the working class. A persistent feature of these areas was that they had a tendency to degenerate into low-income or slum areas.<sup>1</sup> It was for this reason, therefore, that Iscor investigated the possibility of developing quality housing for its workers, preferably in close proximity to the work place, as this would obviate unnecessary traveling as well as placing them in a controlled housing area which could be governed by the corporation, thus preventing a slum or sub-economic housing situation arising.

Explanations for the rise of urban segregation in South Africa have traditionally concentrated on the creation of separate and unequal administrative structures that control black residence. These accounts create the false impression that segregated and better standard white residential areas developed without any state interference. On the contrary, state manipulation of planning regulations to protect working class white residential conditions in the new industrial centres was an

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<sup>1</sup> The Poor White Problem in South Africa, Report of the Carnegie Commission, Vol. 1 pp 220-221.

early mechanism by which South African cities were racially segregated and the living standards of poor whites were protected. What were apparently non-racial regulations relating to overcrowding or slum removals as well as overtly racially discriminatory provisions, comprised a two tier system of urban administration whose application cast South African cities in a racial mould.<sup>2</sup>

While the introduction of modern town-planning practices may have aided the development of South African capitalism by alleviating the poor-white crisis and controlling the residence of African workers, attempts to stabilise sections of the working class through urban reform programs was not an indigenous idea. Enforcing racial segregation in South Africa involved considerably greater social engineering than that entailed in the fostering of a “respectable” British or American working class, although the processes are not dissimilar. The 1919 Public Health Act suggests that the export of British planning practices to South Africa nurtured the emerging racial and class differences. In the face of a growing urban poor-white problem, however, job reservation and urban welfare programs were incorporated into the evolving social system of racial domination.<sup>3</sup>

Thus it was that along with the commencement of actual production at Iscor went a beginning in the almost equally important field, namely that of human relations. Iscor’s original policy had been to erect only a “couple of dwellings” on the property, which had been set aside for housing development, but on 14 April 1934 Dr. Dobson, General Works Manager, reported to the Chairman that he wished to bring to his attention the great practical and economic inconvenience which

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<sup>2</sup> S. Parnell, *Creating Racial Privilege. The Origins of South African Public Health and Town Planning Legislation*, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 19 (3), pp 471-472.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p 471.

existed due to the fact that there were no residences for staff and employees at or near the works. In cases of emergencies and breakdowns whenever it was necessary to call upon any member of the staff and employees who were not on duty, a great deal of time elapsed between getting in touch with them by telephone and their arrival, coming as they did from distances of six miles and in most cases very much more.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, Iscor's initial concern was more for the maintenance of production at the new plant than for the well being of the employees as such, although it could possibly be argued that the fact that Iscor wished to reduce the inconvenience caused to employees in having to travel some distance to the plant when being called out at night indicates a concern for the well being of the employee. The former is the more likely though as the following indicate.

Under the arrangement existing at Iscor at that stage, staff obliged to attend the plant outside ordinary working hours were entitled to charge 8d. per mile for traveling. During February and March alone the sums so paid out had reached the amounts of £ 254.8.1 and £ 205.0.1 respectively. For this reason Dr. Dobson recommended that the question of a certain amount of housing at or near the works, be seriously entertained by the Board. He added that in Iscor's own interests a practice should be followed of letting key men live as close to the plant as possible.<sup>5</sup>

Dr. van der Bijl on 3 May, acknowledged the need to accommodate Iscor's employees as near the works as possible, and out of this almost casual statement developed a department which was to make Iscor one of the largest residential

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<sup>4</sup> E. Rosenthal, The History of Iscor, pp 587-588.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p 588.

property owners in South Africa. On 25 October 1934 Dr. Dobson put forward proposals for the erection of 12 residences for senior officials and in March 1935 discussions began with the Municipality of Pretoria on a project to build houses for Iscor employees on Proclamation Hill. Unforeseen difficulties, however, caused a start to be made with an alternative idea, the purchase of ground further west, sufficient for 60 houses. Not only did this scheme receive a welcome from the City Council, but the government gave its blessing under the Housing Act of 1920. In understanding the development of Iscor's townships for white employees it is necessary to firstly understand the official attitude toward town planning and public health before the first world war, as it was Johannesburg's first full-time Medical Officer of Health (M.O.H.), Charles Porter, who was recruited by Lord Milner in 1901, who was responsible for the development of a town planning policy in South Africa. It was this policy upon which Iscor based the development of its white employees townships, and especially in later years, that of Vanderbijl Park.

Porter's attitude to town planning had been shaped by his English experience and training. He also openly sought inspiration from planning activities elsewhere in the British Empire, notably India and Australia. Despite his admiration for German and even American urban developments his point of reference on urban policy remained Britain. After the political unification of South Africa, Porter extended his sphere of influence beyond Johannesburg as he agitated for the introduction of a Provincial and later a South African equivalent of the English Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909. He also stressed the importance of establishing separate locations for blacks, coloureds and Indians as an integral part of general town-planning provisions. For Porter it was an important matter from a

public health point of view to extend existing powers pertaining to blacks and to force coloureds and Indians to live in racially segregated municipal locations. In common with officials throughout the British Empire, he believed that the poor were incapable of even passable cleanliness. Porter argued that blacks were not only poor, but that their tribal ways left them ill equipped to deal with the health and social hazards of the city. Black access to urban areas should, therefore, be restricted to supervised municipal locations. Crucially, in the light of white urban poverty, Porter's commitment to segregation extended to regulating whites urban conditions as well as those of blacks.<sup>6</sup>

On 28 September 1936 in line with the above, Iscor set up the Iscor Housing Utility Company to build a white township and voted £ 5 000 towards preliminary expenses. Within another month the layout prepared by Adams, Thompson and Fry, Regional Town Planning Consultants, had been approved, and on 25 August 1937 a tender by A.M. Pattison of Pretoria for £ 16 174.18 was accepted on behalf of the Iscor Housing Utility Company for the construction of the first 20 houses<sup>7</sup> in line with the town-planning provisions that formed part of the South African Public Health Act of 1919 and the Housing Act of 1920.

These provisions bore a close resemblance to the resolutions adopted by the international community at the Inter-Allied Housing and Town Planning Congress held in Paris at the beginning of 1920. South Africa's adoption of international planning principles on overcrowding, housing funding and slum removals were a deliberate endeavour to forge segregationist urban policies by enhancing the urban

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<sup>6</sup> S. Parnell, *Creating Racial Privilege: The Origins of South African Public Health and Town Planning Legislation*, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 19 (3) 1933, pp 476-479.

<sup>7</sup> E. Rosenthal, *The History of Iscor*, p 589.

conditions of whites. The Public Health Act and the Housing Act would not apply to blacks for whom separate legislation was already being created. The emergence of a poor-white population that challenged the social order on which the advance of industrialisation depended made it imperative to enforce residential segregation. Segregation by black relocation to compounds or locations offered the possibility of controlling the black workforce. The poor-white population was not always employed and, unlike blacks, whites were wholly dependent on urban wages for subsistence.<sup>8</sup>

It was for this reason that at the same time that the development in white housing was taking place at Iscor, pressure was also being applied on Iscor to provide accommodation for their native employees. On the 8 August 1934 the Acting Additional Native Commissioner in a letter to the Town Clerk of Pretoria pointed out that there were some 800 natives employed by Iscor at wages ranging from 2/- to 3/- per shift and for whom food and quarters were not provided. It was further pointed out that in terms of Government Notice No. 1108 of 1925 appearing in Government Gazette No. 1486 dated 3 July 1925 that the Pretoria Municipality was empowered under the provisions of section one of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act 1923, to require every employer of blacks on work of a temporary or permanent nature within the urban area to make adequate arrangements, subject to the approval of the urban local authority, for the accommodation of such black employees.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> S. Parnell, Creating Racial Privilege: The Origins of South African Public Health and Town Planning Legislation, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 19 (3), 1993, pp 487-488.

<sup>9</sup> TAB, Volume 3/4/1096 Ref. 89/10, MPA, Letter from the Acting Additional Native Commissioner to the Town Clerk, Pretoria Municipality, Re: Natives employed by the South African Iron and Steel Corp. Ltd dated 8 August 1934.

The Urban Areas Act had been introduced to deal with migrant labour employed on the mines, although it eventually covered migrant labour in all forms of industry in South Africa. Originally the mine workers were seen as being “temporary” employed and would eventually return to their families in their own areas. It must be remembered that a migrant worker is not a farmer who comes to the city for a short time to earn extra money. To the contrary, a migrant worker is one who is forced to return periodically to a small patch of land which can never support him and his family. He is a worker and has basically the same needs and interests as other workers. Because of this one finds that migrant workers are more vulnerable to victimisation by management than are other workers. Migrancy represents the most fundamental component of the cheap labour system which operated under apartheid. The migrant basis of so much of South Africa’s workforce was maintained by a battery of repressive legislation and controls which served to stem the flow to the towns of blacks from the rural areas.<sup>10</sup> This idea was supported by the Stallard Commission of Inquiry into Local Affairs (1922) who were of the opinion that black workers were only to be allowed into urban areas while being employed by whites. These black workers were compelled to leave the urban areas on termination of their services. This principle was captured in a number of laws dealing with the settlement of blacks in urban areas, namely the Native (Urban Areas) Act (Act 21 of 1923) and the Native (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act (Act 25 of 1945). Pass laws were used as influx control mechanisms to apply the conditions stipulated in these laws. Although black labour was essential to most industries in South Africa, the permanent

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<sup>10</sup> R. Southall, Migrants and Trade Unions in South Africa Today, Canadian Journal of African Studies, Vol. 20 (2), 1986, pp 164-165.



presence in “white” cities was not welcomed by whites, who feared that the black labourers would swamp the cities and threaten their existence. The disruption of family life which resulted from the migrant labour system was totally disregarded.<sup>11</sup> It was these acts, therefore, which governed the housing of blacks in urban areas and therefore at Iscor.

Acting on the strength of the letter from the Acting Additional Native Commissioner, the Town Clerk approached Iscor requesting that they advise the council as to what the intentions of the corporation were in regard to the continued employment of these blacks and as to whether they were erecting the necessary compound or compounds.<sup>12</sup> Iscor had by this stage decided that due to economic reasons they would not be able to employ an all white labour force and that they would therefore have to consider the establishment of a compound for their black employees. The Medical Officer of Health set out the department’s requirements with regard to permanent black compounds.

There had to be:-

- a) Resident white supervision;
- b) Black police control;
- c) A compound consisting of an entirely enclosed area, with one entrance and exit (gateway only) and with offices and stores abutting on this entrance.

Twenty to thirty natives were to be placed in each room and 40 square feet of floor space and 400 cubic feet of air space was to be allowed per occupant. Each room

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<sup>11</sup> A. Minaar, (Ed), Communities in Isolation: Perspectives on Hostels in South Africa, Human Science Research Council, Pretoria, 1993, p 3.

<sup>12</sup> TAB, Volume 3/4/1096 Ref. 89/10, MPA, Letter from Town Clerk to The Secretary, South African Iron and Steel Corp. Ltd, Re Housing of Natives, dated 30 August 1934.

was to be laid out as follows: bunks to be of two tiers and the framework made of steel. The actual bed portion was to be formed from moveable planks. Trough water-closets were to be provided with urinals opposite them in a central water-closet block. In this block there also had to be washing accommodation for the blacks and for their laundry. A central kitchen was to be provided, preferably with steam cooking. Care also had to be taken in cooking so as to allow no destruction of vitamins in the food. Further a small medical block had to be provided in the compound and all cooks and persons handling food for the compound had to be regularly tested for typhoid and, if they tested positive, they were not to be employed on this work. An efficient disinfecting and deverminization plant had to be installed within the compound to allow for a thorough cleaning of human occupants, blankets and clothing. The plans, when completed, had to be submitted to the Pretoria Health Department for consideration and approval.<sup>13</sup>

Contrary to what has been said above, compounds were not ideal places of accommodation and were, in some instances, down right uninhabitable. Despite this, or possibly because of it, the social history of the compound system on the Witwatersrand and elsewhere in South Africa and of the lives of the thousands of men who lived in them remain little explored. The closed nature of the compound system has been mostly responsible for the absence of information on conditions inside them. Newspaper reports on events inside the mine compounds are also less than satisfactory and the compounds records of the various institutions are also not easily available.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> TAB, Volume 3/4/1096 Ref. 89/10, MPA, Natives employed by the South African Iron and Steel Corp. Ltd., 23 November 1934.

<sup>14</sup> K. Breckenridge, *Migrancy, Crime and Faction Fighting: The Role of the Isitshozi in the Development of Ethnic Organisations in the Compounds*, Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 16(1), 1990, p 55.

Closed compounds, like those at Iscor's Pretoria works, Thabazimbi Iron Ore Mine and later at Vanderbijl Park, were an early model of labour for an industrialising South Africa. They bridged the gap between two means of production. The laws of motion of a capitalist enclave in Kimberly began to extend its control over a labour supplying pre-capitalist hinterland. The mine owners had struggled to control their supply of labour throughout the 1870's and 1880's, just as Iscor did during the 1930's and 1940's. On the one hand, they needed experienced labourers in their mines and factories, on the other hand, they did not want an organised working class in their towns or cities. It was this contradiction that was bridged by the closed compound system. Unskilled black labourers from the rural areas became accustomed to mine and factory work and because of the system did not become a threat to white property, liberty and security.<sup>15</sup>

To truly understand the compound system though as it would have functioned at Iscor, it is necessary to consider the history of compounds in South Africa, especially the closed compound system. Compound life was the quintessential apartheid experience for millions of black South Africans. Men, denied the right to settle permanently in the towns where they were forced to seek work, and denied the right to be accompanied by their families, spent eleven months of each year in one or another compound, often returning for decades on end to the same dormitory, even the same bed.<sup>16</sup> The history of compounds began on the diamond mines of Kimberley in 1885, when black mine workers were housed in closed compounds for the first time. As a constant labour force was required, no

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<sup>15</sup> R. Turrell, Kimberley's Model Compounds, Journal of African History, Vol. 25(1), 1984, pp 73-74.

<sup>16</sup> D. Lewis, A House Devided: South Africa's Hostels, Aperture, Vol. 119, 1990, p 12.

desertions were tolerated. The closed compound system therefore compelled them to live in a walled or fenced in compound for the duration of their contract. They were only permitted to leave the enclosure under supervision to go to work. In general, poor conditions prevailed in the compound. In addition to the fact that the mine workers had to sleep on the floor in rooms without doors and with large openings between the walls and roof, the compounds were also overcrowded and very cold in winter.<sup>17</sup> This over crowding also proved a problem for Iscor employees housed in the municipal compound in Pretoria before Iscor's own compound was completed.<sup>18</sup> The total absence of privacy also proved most unacceptable in later years with workers consistently attempting to seal off their own portions of the building with rags or old blankets. This also resulted in homosexuality on the compounds becoming a problem between senior men and young boys.<sup>19</sup>

Homosexual relationships in the compounds often involved "marriages", which implied more than casual sex underground or in the rooms. These relationships were supposed to be exclusive, and hence men might sometimes fight over

<sup>17</sup> A. Minaar, (Ed), Communities in Isolation: Perspectives on Hostels in South Africa, pp 1-2.

<sup>18</sup> TAB, Volume 3/4/1096 Ref. 89/10, MPA, Letter from the Town Clerk, Pretoria, to the Acting Secretary, SA Iron and Steel Industrial Corp. Ltd, dated 10 August 1936; Letter from J.E.K. Tucker, Acting Accountant, to The Town Clerk, City Council of Pretoria, dated 13 August 1936; Letter from the City Engineer, City Council of Pretoria to the Town Clerk, dated 12 August 1936.

<sup>19</sup> K. Breckenridge, Migrancy, Crime and Faction Fighting: The Role of the Isitshozi in the Development of Ethnic Organisations in the Compounds, Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 16(1), 1990, p 61; A. Minaar, (Ed), Communities in Isolation: Perspectives on Hostels in South Africa, p 2; C. Van Onselen, Chibaro, African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933, Pluto Press, 1976, p 35; J. Segar, Living in Anonymity: Conditions of Life in the Hostels of Cape Town, South African Sociological Review, Vol. 3(2), 1991, pp 40-41.

attractive “boys”. As part of their normal duties boys would wash and iron their “husband’s” clothes and pack everything neatly. They did not wait to be told because it was their job. Mine “wives” took on the behaviour of women or servants in their relations with their “spouse”. In their sexual relations too, the young men were expected to behave with womanly decorum. It was accepted that mature men with authority in their social and economic sphere were entitled to regular sexual activity. The gender of their partner was of less importance than the overriding right to sexual congress. Furthermore, sexuality involved more than the physical act. It also involved a range of personal services that more senior men were extremely reluctant to be without. On the mines the privileges of status conferred certain domestic rights. To an extent this could be seen as comfort in a harrowing world, and for many of the men it no doubt filled needs for tenderness and companionship.<sup>20</sup>

Another factor which affected the compound inhabitants was that food supplies were inadequate and medical services of a low standard. The economy exercised in the rationing of food to black workers was reflected in quality as well as quantity. Much of the meagre food provided as rations was inferior, particularly the maize meal that constituted the bulk of the diet, as well as meat. Often the most convenient, although not necessarily the cheapest way of supplementing rations was to patronise an “eating house” which provided simple meals on a cash and credit basis. In many instances these were owned by Asians and formed

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<sup>20</sup> T.D. Moodie, Migrancy and Male Sexuality on the South African Gold Mines, Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 14(2), 1988, pp 234-254.

popular meeting places for black workers. In other cases it was owned by the company itself. Iscor in the early days did not provide this facility to its workers.<sup>21</sup>

By erecting compounds the mine and factory owners ensured a continuous, controlled and cheap labour force. Apart from the short term benefits for the mine owners there were also long term economic and political advantages. In due course the migrant labourer became an experienced yet affordable worker, whereas the possibility of an organised black working class being established in a white urban area remained slight. This cheap migrant labour was controlled by means of pass laws and the compounds.<sup>22</sup>

Compounds could be described as being autocratic and paternalistic. A white compound manager, assisted by black compound constables, was in charge of each compound.<sup>23</sup> Assault charges were continuously brought against these compound police. To promote and maintain order in compounds the management found it necessary to arm their "police" in one way or another. On occasions the weapon could be as trivial as a stick, or at the other end of the spectrum, as lethal as a gun.

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<sup>21</sup> A. Minaar, (Ed), Communities in Isolation: Perspectives on Hostels in South Africa, p 2; C. Van Onselen, Chibaro, African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933, pp 43-45; TAB, Volume 3/4/1096 Ref. 89/10, MPA, Resolution passed at a meeting of the Native and Asiatic Administration Committee held on 11 August 1938, dated 3 September 1938; Letter from the Chief License and Traffic Officer, City Council of Pretoria, to the Town Clerk, dated 7 September 1938; Letter from the Town Clerk, City Council of Pretoria, to The Secretary, Chamber of Commerce, Pretoria dated 18 April 1939; Letter from the Town Clerk, City Council of Pretoria, to the Chief License and Traffic Officer, dated 5 May 1939.

<sup>22</sup> A. Minaar, (Ed), Communities in Isolation: Perspectives on Hostels in South Africa, p 2.

<sup>23</sup> TAB, Volume 3/4/1096, Ref. 89/10, MPA, Natives employed by the South African Iron and Steel Corp. Ltd., 23 November 1934; A. Minaar, (Ed), Communities in Isolation: Perspectives on Hostels in South Africa, p 3.

But normally it was the central African hippo-hide vision of the leather whip or shambok, that formed the most important part of any compound “policeman’s” equipment.<sup>24</sup> Just as important though was the uniform that went with the job. The provision of uniforms served not only to separate the “police” from the workers, but also provided a gloss of legitimacy for the violence that was an integral part of the job. It was the compound “police” therefore who were in large measure responsible for the day to day operation of the compound system. Especially chosen and equipped for the role, they formed the abrasive edge of managerial practice and policy on the mines and in industry.<sup>25</sup>

The compounds, therefore, were used as a means of controlling and ensuring a continuous supply of unskilled migrant labour. Besides the compounds though, laws were also used as influx control mechanisms to apply the conditions stipulated by the Native (Urban Areas) Act. Although black labour was essential to most industries in South Africa, the permanent presence in white cities was not welcomed by the whites, who feared that the black labourers would swamp the cities and threaten their existence. The disruption of family life which resulted from the migrant labour system was totally disregarded by the mines and industry.<sup>26</sup> For their part, the migrant workers went to work on the mines and in industry for the money and although it was not good it was better than what they

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<sup>24</sup> C. Van Onselen, Chibaro, African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933, p 140; A. Minaar, (Ed), Communities in Isolation: Perspectives on Hostels in South Africa, p 3, N.L. Clark, Manufacturing Apartheid, State Corporations in South Africa, pp 119-120.

<sup>25</sup> C. Van Onselen, Chibaro, African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933, p 141.

<sup>26</sup> A. Minaar, (Ed), Communities in Isolation: Perspectives on Hostels in South Africa, p 3.

could earn in the trust areas or neighbouring Southern African countries, where most of them came from. They were, however, all looking for a way out, but found themselves ever increasingly tied into the system.<sup>27</sup>

It was for the sake of social control therefore that, in 1935, a Pretoria City Council resolution was passed stating:- *'That industrial concerns employing natives, including the South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corporation Ltd., be required to make their own provisions for the housing of their native employees in terms of the Native (Urban Areas) Act.'*<sup>28</sup> Iscor had by this stage still not finalised their plans for a black employees' compound.

After further pressure from the City Council in August 1936, regarding the overcrowding taking place at the Municipal Native Hostel, J.E.K. Tucker, Acting Accountant at Iscor informed the Council that Iscor would commence accommodating its black workers at its own black compound with effect from 1 October 1936. The first compound for black Iscor employees in Pretoria was thus occupied by the end of 1936.<sup>29</sup>

At the same time that developments in white housing were taking place at Pretoria

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<sup>27</sup> A. Sitas, From Grassroots Control to Democracy: A case study of the impact of trade unionism on migrant worker's cultural formations on the East Rand, Social Dynamics, Vol. 11(1), 1985, pp 32-43.

<sup>28</sup> TAB, Volume 3/4/1096 Ref. 89/10, MPA, Letter from Town Clerk's Department to The Secretary South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corp. Ltd., Re: Native Housing, dated 6 November 1935.

<sup>29</sup> TAB, Volume 3/4/1096 Ref. 89/10, MPA, Letter from J.E.K. Tucker, Acting Accountant, South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corp. Ltd., to The Town Clerk, Pretoria, Re: Iscor Native Compound, dated 13 August 1936.



accommodation for the white mine employees at Iscor's Thabazimbi Iron Ore Mine were, by 1936, well cared for. The mine at that stage employed about 65 white males, 36 of whom were married men living in houses built for them by Iscor, using white labour, while the remainder were housed in single quarters. The houses were considered comfortable with Iscor's power-station supplying electricity to every home while even the streets were lit at night. The employees themselves received their lights and water free. Sewerage was laid on to every dwelling and even up in the mountain, the sanitary requirements were taken care of by septic tanks. Here the white employees were certainly well looked after.<sup>30</sup> The black miners, in comparison, were housed in compounds similar to those described above and by 1941 their position, due to an increase in the number of black miners from 650 to 2 000, became untenable.

As a result of the second world war, increasing pressure was placed on the production of iron ore from Thabazimbi mine so as to supply the steel mills in Pretoria, Vanderbijl Park as well as in Britain. This resulted in a rapid increase in labour, especially black labour, with the resultant decline in facilities. An inspection of these facilities in 1941 revealed that the hospital facilities were dirty and overcrowded, while the compound was totally inadequate. Accommodation consisted of a number of corrugated iron sheds, approximately 18 meters in length by 4 meters in width, each housing 50 to 60 blacks. The floors were of earth while ventilation was provided by 4 or 5 small windows, generally blocked up by sacking, tin or boarding. Large numbers of blacks were also accommodated in older corrugated iron buildings whose doorways were in most case several feet

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Iscor New Vol. 1 No. 6, June 1936, Thabazimbi - The Mt of Iron pp 219-220.

above ground level and were either provided with makeshift steps or had none at all. Others again occupied some dilapidated huts scattered around the compound. In total, approximately 1 400 blacks were crowded into these sheds and huts.<sup>31</sup>

The compound kitchen was just as inadequate and unhygienic. The meat which had been prepared for cooking was placed on the bare floor or on a dirty sheet of corrugated iron in a room intended for the storage of vegetables. This room was unscreened and open to dust and flies. The mealie-meal cooked for distribution was often raw, while the preparation of the food was seen as generally being carelessly and indifferently carried out. The kitchen was surrounded by an appalling stench of slopwater with which the ground was saturated. Although disinfectant was provided, it was hardly ever used, which confirmed the fact that there was very little supervision of kitchen staff in the compound.<sup>32</sup> In fact, so unconcerned was management on the mine about health conditions, that effluent water was used to irrigate the vegetables grown for use in the compound kitchen. This was, however, finally stopped by the Senior Health Officer.<sup>33</sup>

Although a new compound was under construction in 1941, this was not completed until 1944, supposedly due to a shortage of building material, as a result

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<sup>31</sup> SAB, Volume 9923 Ref. 521/408C, NTS, Report from I.P. O' Driscoll, Assistant Native Commissioner, to The Additional Native Commissioner, Rustenburg, re: Inspection of Thabazimbi Mine, dated 30 May 1941; Extracts from Memorandum to Works Manager, Pretoria, from Superintendent of Mines, Thabazimbi, dated 21 August 1941, re: Native labour at Thabazimbi.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> SAB, Volume 9923 Ref. 521/408C, NTS, Letter from C.J.N. Jourdan, Superintendent of Mines (Iscor) to The Director of Native Affairs, Johannesburg, dated 28 March 1941.

of the war effort. By June 1942 though, the kitchen, wash houses and latrines had been completed and by all reports appeared to be operating satisfactorily. The problems experienced with these facilities in the old compound had now been eradicated. It was only the sleeping quarters and hospital which were still inadequately provided for.<sup>34</sup> If the conditions under which the black mine employees lived is considered, then it is difficult to believe that management had any real sympathy with their situation, regardless of whether there was a war being waged or not. The fact that it took three years to complete the new compound indicates a total disregard for the health and well being of Iscor's black mine employees.

Granted, once the new compound was completed, the facilities provided were more than adequate. Black employees were now accommodated in spacious, well ventilated rooms which each housed 20 persons. Each room was also equipped with a heater, which was a vast improvement on earlier accommodation. The kitchen was well equipped and beer rooms had also been erected. The hospital too was very modern and was double story, with separate apartments for injured workers, infectious diseases and other patients. Married quarters were also provided for and it appeared as if the black employees were now contented with their situation.<sup>35</sup> From this it would appear that management had learnt their

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<sup>34</sup> SAB, Volume 9923 Ref. 521/408C, NTS, Report from I.P. O'Driscoll, Assistant Native Commissioner, to The Additional Native Commissioner, Rustenburg, re: Inspection of Thabazimbi Mine, dated 4 June 1942.

<sup>35</sup> SAB, Volume 9923 Ref. 521/408C, NTS, Report from D.J. v. N. Groenewald, Assistant Native Commissioner, Pilansburg, to the Native Commissioner, Rustenburg, re: Inspection of Thabazimbi Mine Compound and Native Hospital, dated 2 February 1944; Report for D.J. v. N. Groenewald to the Native Commissioner Rustenburg, re: Inspection of Thabazimbi Mine Compound, dated 23 April 1945; Letter from C. Eagle, Assistant Health Officer to Mr. Jordaan, Manager, Thabazimbi Iron Ore Mine, June 1947.

lesson from the labour unrest during 1941/42 and that they had decided to try to gain the control and loyalty of their black workers the same way that they had with their white workers, namely by providing adequate facilities for their employees.

In October 1937 building was finally started on the first twenty houses of Iscor's Pretoria Housing Scheme. There were four house designs under construction, namely types b; c; d and e. The houses differed in design and size, so as to avoid giving the impression of a sub-economic housing development. This was something which Iscor wished to avoid at all costs as it was felt that it would also help maintain the individual identities of the employees.

The land on which the development took place was  $\pm 1\ 000$  acres in extent and provision was made in the town plans for garden islands, hardened roads etc. Each house had a garage, and native quarters with the stand being approximately 70 feet by 100 feet. Water, lights and sewerage were connected and provision was made in each house for a hot water system. These houses were intended to provide, within reasonable reach of the works, suitable housing accommodation for a portion of Iscor's employees and were laid out in accordance with the South African Public Health Act of 1919 and the Housing Act of 1920.<sup>36</sup>

The proposed date for the completion of the first twenty houses was February 1938, and in January applications were invited from employees for the tenancy of the houses. The following tariffs were applicable, exclusive of lights and water:-

Type B Houses from £7 to £7.5.0.

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<sup>36</sup> IsCOR News Vol. 2 No. 10, October 1937, Iscor's Housing Scheme, The first houses commenced, p 614; S. Parnell, Creating Racial Privilege: The Origins of South African Public Health and Town Planning Legislation, Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol.19 (3), 1993, pp 487-488.

Type C Houses from £6.15.0 to £7.

Type D Houses from £6.7.6 to £6.12.6

Type E Houses from £6 To £6.5.0<sup>37</sup>

By December 1939, sixty houses had been completed in the township and were already occupied by Iscor employees. The scheme thus proved to be a great success, with the tenants taking a keen interest in the appearance of their homes and gardens.

The demand for the Iscor houses was far greater than Iscor had anticipated and as a result of this they then decided to build a further forty houses. The idea had been to supply the white families at Iscor with an acceptable quality of affordable accommodation and this had been achieved. Overcrowding, disease and crime are all matters which are usually closely associated with bad housing conditions, and it was encouraging to see that Iscor was giving a great deal of attention to this extremely vital question. It was unfortunate though that this same measure of concern was not displayed for their black employees by Iscor. No doubt it was felt that if they could be controlled within their compound, the above problems would not exist. There can be no doubt that Iscor looked upon the white township as Iscor homes, and not as Iscor houses. The children too, it was felt, would set their standards of living by their early home life, and therefore by providing accommodation of this nature, the children of white Iscorians would obtain a healthier outlook on life.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Iscor News Vol. 3 No. 1, January 1938, Iscor Housing Utility Company, p 71.

<sup>38</sup> Iscor News Vol. 5 No. 4, April 1940, Iscor Township Gardens, Prize Competition Results, pp 264-265.

The world over industrialists, with the improvement of relations between employers and employees, had become convinced that suitable housing was one of the prime contributing factors towards stable labour conditions. Human happiness and contentment were seen as being dependent upon favourable home conditions and the sordid surroundings and unhygienic houses which disgraced many large industrial towns overseas placed a strain on and smothered the outlook of the unfortunates who had to reside in these areas. However, if one views the way in which black workers were treated in South Africa and were crowded into compounds under the most disgraceful conditions, this was then a contradiction in terms.

It appeared clear therefore that in order to give every workman an opportunity of taking an interest in his work, beyond that of getting his job done and drawing his pay, he must have decent, clean conditions in which to live. It was apparent therefore that good housing was essential to the creation of good homes, and the combination of both to the setting up of standards of culture and refinement, without which the world would be a sorry place to live in. It was, therefore, with a realisation of some of the benefits of good housing conditions and keeping in mind also the need for providing good houses at reasonable rentals, that the Iscor Housing Utility Company had been brought into existence in May 1937.<sup>39</sup> Once again, this only applied to white employees, while the needs of black employees were ignored. The effect of the migrant worker system on black employees and their families was totally ignored.

In 1941 Iscor decided to embark on a new scheme to assist white employees to

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<sup>39</sup> Ischor News Vol. 5 No. 11, November 1940, The Iscor Township by E.C. Oldridge, pp 676-679.

acquire their own homes. Loans would be granted to employees of three years service and over, for the purchase and erection of homes, up to an amount of £3 000. Loans were also made available for the payment of existing bonds. Interest was charged, at the rate of 4½% per annum and the monthly installments necessary to pay off the loans ranged from 12/- per £100 for a 20 year loan upwards, according to the shorter period required. In the case of employees with 10 years service the full amount could be advanced, while from three years to nine years service would entitle the employee to from 90% to 96% respectively. Collateral security in the form of an insurance policy was required, except in certain cases, and single premium policies could be arranged, the amount of the premium being added to the amount of the loan and financed through the monthly payments. In order to assist employees with advice on the design etc., Iscor retained the services of a qualified architect and a number of plans for residences, varying in size, cost of construction, design, specification, etc. was made available to employees for examination.<sup>40</sup>

As we have seen above, Iscor assisted its employees in their normal financial problems in a variety of ways. In the remote areas, Iscor took things a step further, taking upon itself the role of trader through the operation of the wholly owned subsidiary Iscor Utility Stores (Pty) Ltd., (ISTORES). This company was founded on 13 November 1942 and took over the Iscor Works Restaurant, the Thabazimbi Trading Store and the compound stores of Thabazimbi and Pretoria which had previously been run by Iscor itself. At Iscor's township in Pretoria they provided a department store, dairy, butchery and green grocers' shop for the benefit of

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<sup>40</sup> Iscor News Vol. 6 No. 9, September 1941, Iscor's New Home Ownership Scheme, Loans to be Made to Employees, p 603.

employees living in the area. The company also operated a dairy farm near Pretoria and a garage, farm and abattoirs at Thabazimbi.<sup>41</sup> The aim of the creation of ISTORES was to provide Iscorians with a good service, especially with regard to the provision of perishables and at a fair price.

By 1942 the number of blacks employed by Iscor averaged 4 704 per month. Of these approximately 3 962 were housed in compounds. The remaining 742 lived in the black location of Atteridgeville, situated a few kilometres to the west of the Iscor Pretoria works. At this time there was no public transport available for use by these employees between their place of employment and their place of residence.

After doing a survey of the possibility of constructing a line from Iscor to Atteridgeville, the South African Railways estimated that such a line would result in a loss of £18 000 per annum to them. Iscor now intimated that they would be willing to follow the government's lead and pay a pro-rata share of the proposed loss.<sup>42</sup> By September 1944 though, the South African Railways had amended their estimate of the loss on the proposed branch line (loss to be borne by the City Council) to £13 000 per annum.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Steel in South Africa 1928-1953, Published on Occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the South Africa Iron and Steel Industrial Corp. Ltd., pp 110-111; Iscor Annual Reports, address by Dr. H.J. van der Bijl, Chairman of the Corporation, at the 16<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Meeting of Shareholders at Pretoria on 28 November 1945, p 6.

<sup>42</sup> SAB, Volume 477 Ref. 16/275, MVE, Memorandum in regard to Native transport services: Pretoria 1945, Construction of Line Iscor-Atteridgeville 1942-1947.

<sup>43</sup> SAB, Volume 477 Ref. 16/275, MVE, Memorandum: For joint Deputation by City Council of Pretoria, Hospital and Iscor Authorities to the Minister of Railways on his return from Cape Town, April 1945.



In view of the rapid growth of Atteridgeville and other developments in that area, it was felt that there would certainly be a gain rather than a loss to the SAR within the first three years of opening up the line. At the same time Iscor were engaged in building approximately 400 cottages for their black employees. Partially because of this the potential number of blacks using the passenger service was expected to be in excess of 8 000 persons per day.<sup>44</sup> For this reason and with support and pressure coming from Iscor the SAR authorities were eventually convinced of the urgency of extending the railway line from Iscor to Atteridgeville, a matter of paramount importance to both the black and white inhabitants of Pretoria, as this would obviate the passage of large numbers of blacks through Pretoria Wests' suburbs, something which was seen as being critical to the white residents of that area.

By 1943 the original land set aside by Iscor for housing development in Pretoria had become too small and it therefore became necessary to purchase new land from the Town Council in order to accommodate the ever increasing white work force. The land which was proposed for sale and transferred to Iscor formed part of the remaining extension of the farm Pretoria Town and Town Lands number 599 District Pretoria, in extent 4 969 morgen and for this reason there existed no separate municipal valuation for the land. The actual value of the land was considered to be in the region of £700 per morgan. Therefore, the price of £1 000 which Iscor paid for the total extent of the land had to be regarded as nominal. This nominal purchase price, however, was fully compensated for by the advantages derived by the Council under the conditions under which the land was made over to Iscor. It was Iscor's intention to erect between 1 000 to 1 200 houses

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

on the land at an average value of £1 250 of which, by October 1943, 240 had been completed.<sup>45</sup>

The land, however, had been sold to Iscor under certain conditions. It was sold solely for the purpose of a township and housing scheme to be established by Iscor. All the streets in the township had to be constructed, macadamised, tarred, kerbed, channelled and provided with efficient storm water drainage by Iscor by means of covered pipes or drains in accordance with the requirements and to the satisfaction of the Council. It was, however, at the same time made very clear to Iscor that no erf, stand or portion of the land could be transferred, leased or in any other manner assigned or disposed of to any Asiatic, Cape Malay, black or other person of colour, nor would any such person other than the domestic servant of any owner or tenant of a property in the township be allowed to occupy any portion of the land.<sup>46</sup>

From this it is clear that Iscor was not permitted, under any circumstances, to accommodate its black employees in Pretoria West. This does, however, not excuse them from not undertaking a similar development for their black employees in an area set aside for black housing.

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<sup>45</sup> TAB, Volume 367 Ref. TA 23/1061-1062, TPB, Letter from Town Clerk, Pretoria, to the Provincial Secretary, Re: Proposed sale of land to Iscor Housing Utility Company, dated 7 October 1943.

<sup>46</sup> TAB, Volume 367 Ref. TA 23/1061-1062, TPB, Extract from the 635<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the City Council of Pretoria held on the 30 March 1939, Re: Housing Scheme: SA Iron and Steel Industrial Corp. Ltd.

It is interesting to note that this approach was indeed adopted by Iscor in the development and layout of Vanderbijl Park, but not in Pretoria. The reason for this however is not clear, as all the reasons given for the development of such a black township in Vanderbijl Park also applied to Pretoria.

By 1945, two companies had been established by Iscor with the sole purpose of supplying housing for Iscor workers. Both were non-dividend paying companies registered under section 21 of the Companies Act. The object of this was that whatever profits accrued from the sale of residential and industrial stands etc. would be put back into the provision of services and amenities for the benefit of the local community. The two companies so formed were the Iscor Housing Utility Company, established to provide housing for employees mainly in Pretoria, and the Vanderbijl Park Estate Company, formed for the purpose of handling the development of the town at Vanderbijl Park. With the restrictions on further development at Pretoria works, Dr. van der Bijl saw the solution of industrial development in the Transvaal as being on the banks of the Vaal River. The main functions of the latter company included the layout of townships for white and black residential purposes and for industrial purposes, the provision of roads and water, electricity and sewerage services in conjunction with the local authority as well as the layout of parks and a green belt and the general betterment of the town area.<sup>47</sup> The development of the industrial town of Vanderbijl Park was possibly Iscor's greatest achievement in the area of social development and without a doubt the greatest achievement of Dr. van der Bijl, the corporation's chairman. It was for this reason that on 28 December 1944 the Vanderbijl Park Estate Company was registered to forestall slums and unrestricted development of the new town.

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<sup>47</sup> Annual Reports, Address by Dr. H.J. van der Bijl, Chairman of the Corporation at the 16<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Meeting of Shareholders at Pretoria on 28 November 1945, pp 5-6; So lyk Vanderbijl Park, The South African Treasurer, Vol. 55(1), 1983, p 42.

When it became necessary to build a new iron and steel works for Iscor, it was decided in 1941 that the new works should be erected on bare veld 10 miles west of Vereeniging, to allow space for development. Dr. van der Bijl realised that here was the opportunity to establish a town on well-defined lines planned in advance and in this way avoiding haphazard growth. He felt very strongly, and rightly so too, that the residential environment of the worker has a far reaching effect on his state of mind and consequently on his efficiency and productivity. It was therefore decided that the workers in Vanderbijl Park should live in an environment which would be conducive to their greatest personal welfare and so too the welfare of the industries in which they were employed. This would entail not only decent houses and residential areas but also all the allied amenities like hospitals, schools, clinics, places of recreation and amusement and broader education as for example, art galleries and museums. In the end provision was made for all these in Vanderbijl Park.<sup>48</sup>

The town was divided up into residential areas called neighbourhood units, each of which was a self contained township with all the local amenities to be found in any suburb of a modern town. In order to maintain the standard of living aimed at with the establishment of Vanderbijl Park, buildings in the various neighbourhood units had to comply with the standards laid down by the Vanderbijl Park Estate Company. Further all services such as roads, water, electricity, sewerage, and stormwater drainage were provided. While every attempt was made to avoid the creation of class distinction between the various neighbourhood units, the needs of the various income groups of workers were also considered in the location of the various units. Workers in factories who might have to do shift work, it was felt

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<sup>48</sup> Vanderbijl Park "A City of Ideas and Ideals", The Vanderbijl Park Estate Company, January 1948, p 5; F. Meyer, Vanderbijl Park. A City of Ideas and Ideals and Progress, Vanderbijl Park Estate Company, Faraday House, Faraday Boulevard, Vanderbijl Park, 6 November 1954, pp 1-8.

would be better situated close to the industrial area, while office workers it was felt would prefer to live in the more distant districts.<sup>49</sup> Thus, although it was not the intention to create a class structure in Vanderbijl Park, this inadvertently happened.

Further, with the development of Vanderbijl Park it became evident that serious consideration would have to be given to the provision of housing for black as well as white employees. It was felt that the construction of a black township would have to be seriously considered, so as to accommodate the blacks employed in the area. Plans were therefore laid to provide accommodation for as many as 30 000 black men, women and children.<sup>50</sup>

In the planning of Vanderbijl Park, provision was made, therefore, for the establishment of five black residential areas so as to avoid the weakness in the planning of all industrial towns in South Africa in which a lack of attention was paid to the residential requirements of black labour. It was felt that the days when the whole of the labour force was migratory and housed in compounds on the site of each industry, was over. Dr. van der Bijl, whose brain child the whole scheme was, was emphatic that with regard to black labour the conditions which existed in other cities and towns would not arise here. Consequently the black residential areas reserved for housing were located so as to be in close proximity to the industries. Further, the black townships were so located as to obviate the mass traffic of blacks through white residential areas.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Vanderbijl Park "A City of Ideas and Ideals", p 15.

<sup>50</sup> TAB, Volume 507 Ref. N9/21/3, KJB, Native Squatters near Iscor Steelworks, Vereeniging, File No. 56/163, Report by J.J. Parsons, Inspector of Urban Locations, dated 7 July 1945, p 1.

<sup>51</sup> Iscor News Vol. 12 No. 17, July 1947, The Creation and Planning of Vanderbijlpark by DR. H.J. van der Bijl, PhD; F.R.S.; Dsc; LLD etc. p 556.

If Iscor wished to obtain a stable work force and if such an aim was to be achieved, certain inducements would have to be offered to the black workers. Consequently, every effort was made to create black residential areas at Vanderbijl Park which would encourage a high standard of living, promote a sense of citizenship pride and enterprise, and provide the black employees with amenities which would ensure that they gave of their best.<sup>52</sup> This was achieved by creating optimum living conditions for black workers. Whilst there were parks and open spaces in these areas, the inhabitants were also encouraged to establish their own gardens. Clinics were provided, whilst the health of the inhabitants was further safe guarded by the fact that any possibility of overcrowding was eliminated by the layout of districts. Water borne sewerage, water and electricity were provided throughout all the districts. Sites were reserved for schools, halls, shops and eating houses or black restaurants. Provision was also made for large recreation grounds on the outskirts of the residential areas where the inhabitants of the districts could indulge in various sporting activities.<sup>53</sup> Although this was the ideal, it was not until 1948 that the first black houses were occupied. Until that time the only accommodation available to black employees was the Iscor compound or the Vanderbijl Park Estate Company's temporary hutment scheme.

Ischor's black compound housed approximately 1 200 men. The compound was managed by a full-time compound manager and two other white assistants whose duty it was to control the area. Here too, the water supply was reticulated and a water borne sewerage system operated.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p 557.

<sup>53</sup> Vanderbijl Park, "A City of Ideas and Ideals", p 27.

On the other hand, the temporary hutment scheme housed 2 400 blacks in steel and corrugated iron structures. It was also felt that adequate ancillary facilities had been provided here. All toilets were connected to a sewer and were of the automatic flush trough type. Sixty stand pipes, thirty two showers, wash tubs, wash tables and toilets were provided, together with sixty four feet of urinal space and one hundred and fifty yards of clothe line for every 800 men. Cooking areas were also set aside for those blacks who did not wish to make use of the eating house in the area. This hutment scheme was purely temporary in concept, being designed to house black employees prior to their being able to obtain accommodation in the black township which was being built. The hutment scheme was managed by a white supervisor, working under the direction of the Non-European Affairs Manager, and who was employed on a full time basis. He was assisted in his duties by a corps of black policemen, whose duty it no doubt was to maintain control in the compound.<sup>54</sup>

Both the Iscor compound and the hutment scheme were designed solely for the accommodation of black males and all services were therefore communal services. In the black township, on the other hand, which was already under construction in 1948, all services were private. The main intention here was to create a home atmosphere and break away from the migrant labour concept and all its attendant ills. Each house had its own water closet, bath and wash-tub built as an integral portion of the house. All houses were of the semi-detached type and occupied two stands.<sup>55</sup> What needs to be borne in mind is the fact that even

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> TAB, Volume 2186 Ref. TALG 17704, TPB, First Annual report of Vanderbijl Park Health Department's Medical Officer, Dr. W.F. Mondriaan, MB, ChB, on 22 July 1948, pp 8-9; see also the beginning of this chapter for a description of compound conditions and control measures employed therein.

though all the facilities were provided for in the compound and hutment scheme, when you have 800 men with no tradition and background of the use of these facilities, it does not take long for them to degenerate into serious unhygienic conditions. If these conditions are not controlled, a breeding ground is created for the spread of disease. It was therefore of paramount importance to monitor hygiene in these areas so as to prevent this.

In the white residential areas on the other hand every advantage was taken of opportunities offered for parks and recreational areas. Over half a million trees of more than a hundred varieties were planted and forest drives exceeding 18 miles in length were laid out. An 18 hole championship golf course was designed and constructed and each suburb was given a large park area where sufficient land was available for tennis courts, swimming pools etc. The Vanderbijl Park Estate Company also developed its own nurseries with the prime object of meeting the tree planting programs it had on hand, but trees, flowers and shrubs were also grown for transplanting into the parks and for beautifying the area as a whole.<sup>56</sup>

The town was administered by a Health Committee established under Local Government Ordinance. Arrangements were made for the Vanderbijl Park Estate Company to initially finance and operate the principle services. The company was therefore responsible for operating the water, electricity and sewerage services etc. at approved tariffs. The Vanderbijl Park Estate Company (VESCO) was a public utility company registered under section 21 of the Companies Act No. 46 of 1926. It was the township owner of Vanderbijl Park who as such, was responsible for the design, layout and development of the various townships and the area in general.

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<sup>56</sup> Iscor News Vol. 12 No. 7, July 1947, The Creation and Planning of Vanderbijlpark by Dr. H.J. Van der Bijl, PhD; FRS; Dsc; LLD etc., p 559.



The income and property of the company had to be used solely for the promotion of the objects of the company, namely the development of Vanderbijl Park and the welfare of its citizens, and no portion thereof could be paid or transferred directly by way of dividend, bonus or otherwise of any kind as profit to any person. VESCO serviced its townships completely and the company furthermore made a contribution towards the development of parks and open spaces within each township. Despite the provision of all these services at its own cost, VESCO still paid the Health Committee the normal endowment fixed by the Township Board in respect of each township laid out.<sup>57</sup>

By 31 December 1948, 1 520 white and 299 black houses had been built in Vanderbijl Park, with a further 400 white and 200 black houses under construction. There was also a second primary school under construction as well as a library, which was completed by this time, with 320 members and over 2 500 books. Other facilities provided by VESCO in the interests of the inhabitants of Vanderbijl Park were a fresh produce market, primary schools, post-office and telephone services, police station, white hospital and parks and public places.<sup>58</sup> From this it can be seen that the needs and comforts of the white employees of Iscor were well catered for, as almost all these facilities set-out above were for the exclusive use of whites.

With regard to black housing, as we have seen, a start was made in 1948 with the building of the first 500 brick houses at a cost of £300 per house and by the end of 1948 a total of 192 of these houses had been leased to black tenants. In addition to these houses a total of 34 experimental houses were built during the year, of which

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<sup>57</sup> TAB, Volume 3/4/1096 Ref. 89/10, MPA Chairman of the Health Committee's Minute for the period December 1946 to December 1948, p 2.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., pp 3-9.

22 were taken over by the Health Committee in May 1948 and the remaining 12 in August and October 1948. All these houses consisted of 2 bedrooms, a living-room, a kitchen, a combined wc and bathroom, and were supplied with electricity, water and water borne sewerage.

As could be expected the demand for black houses was high with demand outstripping the building rate. This, however, was surely to be expected and it is interesting to note the surprise with which such revelations were always met by the authorities. By 31 December 1948, 750 applications had been received for homes and it became obvious that development would have to be accelerated to prevent overcrowding and the establishment of squatter camps. This was a task in which VESCO and the Health Committee eventually failed, as white housing, for political reasons, continued to enjoy a high priority.<sup>59</sup> Wilkins and Strydom point out that with the advent of the Nationalist Party Government to power in 1948, more and more emphasis was placed on the upliftment of the Afrikaner, whom it was felt had been seriously neglected under the Smuts Government.<sup>60</sup>

Vanderbijl Park was not claimed to be the final word in town development, but it would appear that an honest and sincere effort had been made to ensure that the town should incorporate and be the best that the experience of the men and leaders in industry could provide. It was also the desire of Iscor that the town should not be dependent upon the new steelworks alone. An indication of the rapid development of Vanderbijl Park, can be gleaned from the following comparative statement giving some idea of what occurred from January 1947 to June 1950 in the development of the town:- (see table 1 on page 100)

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p 9.

<sup>60</sup> I. Wilkins, and H. Strydom, The Super Afrikaners.

**Table 1**

	<b>JAN. 1947</b>	<b>JAN. 1949</b>	<b>JUNE 1950</b>
<b>POPULATION</b>			
White (approx.)	500	7 000	9 000
Black (approx.)	800	7 500	9 500
<b>HOUSING</b>			
White	100	1 520	2 218
Black	0	299	608
<b>OTHER BUILDINGS</b>			
Factories	1	4	10
Shops	1	18	36
Schools	1	1	4
Clinics	0	1	2
Electricity sub-stations	2	16	17
<b>VALUE OF PLANS PASSED</b>	0	£3 200 000	£4 058 945
Houses, Shops etc. (excluding Plant)			
<b>WATER SCHEME</b>	<b>miles</b>	<b>miles</b>	<b>miles</b>
Mains laid	19.2	51.3	77.42
House connections	4.1	11.1	11.70
<b>ELECTRICITY (Domestic &amp; Street lighting)</b>			
Total Units sold	24 336	405 800	13 674 132
Revenue	£104	£1 528	£59 457
<b>STREETLIGHTING (approx.)</b>	50	694	1 016
<b>DRAINAGE</b>	<b>miles</b>	<b>miles</b>	<b>miles</b>
Stormwater drains	5.9	16.7	23.21
Gutters	21.4	21.5	21.5
Kerbs	21.4	24.9	25.0
Catchpits	200	574	701
Manholes	64	187	234
Causeways	0	3	3
	<b>DEC. 1946</b>	<b>DEC. 1948</b>	<b>JUNE 1950</b>
	<b>miles</b>	<b>miles</b>	<b>miles</b>
<b>Tarred Roads</b>			
Constructed	3.5	33	40.32
Under construction	10.5	5.7	4.85
<b>SEWERAGE AND SANITATION</b>			
Sewerage mains laid	10.9	40.25	48.15
Pavement Macadamised	2.5	4.4	5.44

Total number of trees planted = over  $\frac{3}{4}$  million.

TOWNSHIPS	JAN. 1947	JAN. 1949	JUNE 1950
a) Proclaimed	Nil	5	5
b) Planned and developed	$\frac{1}{2}$	6	6
c) Industrial areas	Nil	2	2

During this period the value of land also increased enormously. The Vanderbijl Park Board's first valuation roll of the Vanderbijl Park township was completed on 31 July 1947 and reflected a site valuation of £2 110 710 and improvements valued at £898 890, making a total of approximately £9 380 000, the land itself being valued at £3 118 000 and the buildings at £6 262 000. It was wondered at the time whether progress of this nature could be equaled anywhere in the world. It had cost millions of pounds to bring the township to where it was now, while millions more would be spent to achieve the ideal in mind.<sup>61</sup>

A further interesting aspect of the economic and socio political factors at work at Iscor during these years was the differing attitudes of management toward the treatment of white and black employees. This without a doubt was directly as a result of the political climate in South Africa at that time. By examining such factors at Iscor, one sees South Africa in microcosm. This was indicated in the factors surrounding the request by Iscor to brew "Kaffir Beer" at the Vanderbijl Park Works, which was submitted to the authorities in 1948.

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<sup>61</sup> Ischor News Vol. 15 No. 9, September 1950, Vanderbijl Park by G.E.O. Reyburn, pp 763-765.

Before examining the facts surrounding the application to brew “Kaffir Beer” at Iscor, it is necessary to glance briefly at the history of the brewing of “Kaffir Beer” in South Africa. Beer drinking was common throughout African societies in South Africa. People brewed beer from the grain, corn or fruit of their lands. The most common drink was made from sorghum or maize. This beer was known as utshwala (Nguni) or byalwa (Sotho). Brewing could take from four to fourteen days. The final product was a thick, pink-coloured drink. It usually had a low alcohol content. It was refreshing to drink and also rich in nourishing vitamins. Women were usually responsible for brewing beer, while drinking beer was strongly associated with manhood. Men were expected to be beer drinkers. Beer served a number of purposes as well as being used as a form of payment. In some cases poorer people would give beer as a gift to more wealthy relatives. This gift reminded the rich relatives that the poor family needed help. Beer was also important at certain events because it helped to build relations with the other people. At weddings the beer-party united the family members of the marriage partners. Initiation, death and other important stages of life were associated with large beer-parties. The spirits of the ancestors could also be offered beer. It was not just beer drinking that was important. Rather, beer drinks helped to strengthen bonds between people. In this way, beer played an important role in everyday life in rural communities. With the discovery of gold in the Transvaal the mine owners believed that alcohol could help them in their search for workers. Most African mineworkers at this time came from the Portuguese colony of Mozambique. Many of them were used to drinking cheap Portuguese wine and spirits. When these workers arrived in Johannesburg, many of them were already addicted to alcohol. They spent a large part of their wages on alcohol. When workers spent money on alcohol, they saved less. Many of them were forced

to work for long periods on the mines before they had enough money to return to their rural homes. So liquor indirectly helped to lengthen periods of migrant labour.

In the mine compound workers were allowed to drink at specific times after work. For many workers, drinking amongst friends was the only comfort they had in the harsh world of the mines. Drink on the mines was also used as a form of reward. Liquor made workers more prepared to accept their miserable living conditions in the gloomy compounds on the Rand. But this dependence on drink could lead to addiction, and addiction often forced workers to lengthen their contracts on the mines. Dreams of returning home were shattered as workers wasted their wages on drink.

After 1937 beerhalls spread throughout South Africa. The municipalities controlled the beerhalls and the profits from the sale of beer. "Kaffir Beer" became big business for the municipalities and was aimed at controlling the illegal brewing of beer. One of the original reasons for the beerhalls was to control drinking and brewing but profit became the main objective. Municipal beer profits paid for cheap administration, housing and services. Employers and white taxpayers also favoured the system. Large beer profits meant that they did not have to contribute to these expenses. The government now attempted to make the liquor laws more flexible. In 1937 the Native Laws Amendment Act made sorghum beer legal and the law allowed the municipalities to control the sale of beer to blacks.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> P. la Hausse, Brewers, Beerhalls and Boycotts: A History of Liquor in South Africa, Raven Press, Johannesburg, 1988, pp 7-54; see also J.M. Orpen, Natives, Drink, Labour, Crosby and Co., East London, 1913.

In 1936 permission was granted by Government Notice Number 1714, which appeared in the Government Gazette published on 13 November 1936, for the brewing and consumption on the premises of Iscor at Quaggaapoort, Pretoria as well as Thabazimbi Mine, of reasonable quantities of “Kaffir Beer” to be supplied free to Iscor’s black and coloured employees.<sup>63</sup> However the same request for permission to brew “Kaffir Beer” in 1948 by the Vanderbijl Park Works was not so easily obtained.

At the same time as the request was made for Vanderbijl Park, Iscor also enquired whether it would be permissible to supply the Vanderbijl Park Health Committee with “Kaffir Beer”, which it required for resale to blacks in terms of a permit under section 34 of the Native (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act of 1945. If this was not permissible it was asked whether Iscor could allow the Health Committee the use of their plant, free of charge, to brew beer for which the Health Committee would supply the ingredients.<sup>64</sup> The authorities, however, pointed out that as a place where “Kaffir Beer” is brewed is classed as a factory, as defined in Act No. 22 of 1941, the plan of the building would have to be approved by the Divisional Inspector, Department of Labour, Johannesburg.<sup>65</sup> It was pointed out to the

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<sup>63</sup> SAB, Volume 7064 Ref. 424/322, NTS, South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corp. Ltd., Letter from the Secretary E.D.B. Rush to the Secretary for Justice re: Brewing of Kaffir Beer at Iscor Works Vanderbijl Park dated 29 June 1948; SAB, Volume 9923 Ref. 521/408C, NTS, Letter from Additional Native Commissioner, Rustenburg, to The Manager, Thabazimbi Mine, re: Brewing of Kaffir Beer, dated 12 May 1936.

<sup>64</sup> SAB, Volume 7064 Ref. 424/322, NTS, Letter from Secretary for Native Affairs to the Director of Native Labour, re: Application for permission to brew Kaffir Beer in terms of sec. 127(1) of the Liquor Act, 1928: Iscor Works, Vanderbijl Park dated 21 August 1948.

<sup>65</sup> SAB, Volume 7064 Ref. 424/322, NTS, Letter from G.I. Nel, Secretary for Native Affairs to the Secretary, South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corp. Ltd., re: Brewing of Kaffir Beer at Iscor Works: Vanderbijl Park, dated 16 September 1948.

authorities that Iscor did indeed comply with the requirements laid down by the law. The compound was properly constructed and enclosed with a barbed wire fence about 10 feet high, housing approximately 1 300 black males. There was a modern and up-to-date plant for the brewing of "Kaffir Beer" under white supervision. The beer would be issued twice weekly to the blacks, all employees of Iscor. The beer would be supplied free, as part of their free rations. No "Kaffir Beer" would be allowed to be taken out of the compound and each black would be supplied with two quarts at a time. Finally on 25 October 1948 recommendation was made to the Department of Justice by the Native Commissioner, that permission be granted to Iscor to brew "Kaffir Beer" at their Vanderbijl Park Works.<sup>66</sup> Four months after the request was first made, permission was finally granted.

Although vast sums of money were spent on the development of Vanderbijl Park and everything was done to ensure the comfort and well being of the white employees, by 1949 there was much dissatisfaction amongst the workers with regard to the monopolistic position in which Iscor found itself at the time with regard to Vanderbijl Park. This dissatisfaction was made abundantly clear during a debate in the House of Assembly on the 9 June 1949. During this debate, the white workers' dissatisfaction was spelt out by Dr. J.H. Looock, the Nationalist Party Member of Parliament for Vereeniging. The situation at Vanderbijl Park at that time was as follows:

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<sup>66</sup> SAB, Volume 7064 Ref. 424/322, NTS, Letter from C.K. Smith, Inspector, District Commandant Number 56 District to the Native Commissioner, Vereeniging re: Application for permission to brew Kaffir Beer in terms of Sec. 127(1) of the Liquor Act, 1928: Vanderbijl Park, dated 16 September 1948. Letter from R.L. Eaton, Native Commissioner, to The Director of Native Labour/Secretary for Justice, granting permission to brew "Kaffir Beer" at the Vanderbijl Park Works.



Iscor in creating Vanderbijl Park had at the same time created a total monopoly via its subsidiary companies. There was firstly the Iscor Housing Utility Company which provided houses. Then there was the Iscor Utility Stores which provided the shops for Iscor workers and which was also responsible for the hostels. There was also the Fowler Tar Spraying Company which had the contract to tar the streets. There was Vecor or the Vanderbijl Engineering Company as well as the Vecor Utility Housing Scheme. Finally there was the Vanderbijl Park Estate Company. All these companies were financed by Iscor as well as having the Boards of Directors controlled via appointments, by Iscor. So strongly did the workers view this monopoly, that Iscor was viewed by them as being a “fascist dictatorship”, with no proper channel whereby the Iscor worker could air his grievances.<sup>67</sup>

The policy of Iscor and its subsidiary companies therefore, as far as its white employees were concerned, was one of from the cradle to the grave. The Iscor worker’s child was born in an Iscor clinic, he was nourished from the Iscor shops, he was educated in an Iscor school, he lived in an Iscor house, he was eventually trained or employed in an Iscor shop and he was finally buried in an Iscor grave. Further, it was felt that Iscor’s housing rentals were excessively high in comparison with other industries. Where for example, employees of Cornelia Collieries and others paid £4 10s to £6 10s a month for housing, the Iscor employees at Vanderbijl Park paid £17 10s a month for a house.<sup>68</sup> This all came

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<sup>67</sup> Union of South Africa - Debates of the House of Assembly, Vol. 69, (3 June to 30 June 1949), Reported and Printed for the House of Assembly by the Unie - Volkspers Bpk., Parliamentary Printers, Cape Town, 1949, col. 7534-7535.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, col. 7535.

about as a result of the fact that Iscor had a total monopoly at Vanderbijl Park, (this problem was later also experienced at many of Iscor's mining centres). Thus although Iscor did a remarkable job in building and developing Vanderbijl Park, its eventual almost total control of the town and the resultant control which it exercised over the workers, led to much dissatisfaction amongst its white employees, it was for this reason, as we shall see later in this chapter, that the inhabitants of Vanderbijl Park began agitating for full municipal status for the town.<sup>69</sup>

While Vanderbijl Park was being developed and laid out however, life had not come to a standstill in Pretoria. On 18 February 1949 the hundredth house of a new building project at West Park was roofed. The houses were of two types, fifty having three bedrooms and fifty having two bedrooms. All had a comfortable lounge, the usual conveniences and a very large kitchen fitted with an adequate dresser, electric stove, electric geyser and stainless steel sink. Care was also taken regarding the exterior appearance. The architect, W.E. Mussman, working in close consultation with the company was at pains to avoid the monotony arising from similarity of design.

While the interior plan remained the same in the two types, from the outside the appearance varied considerably and this factor it was hoped would lend attraction to the township as it developed.<sup>70</sup> The houses were constructed from no-fines concrete moulded in steel shuttering and were situated on stands measuring 100 feet x 80 feet. The concreting of foundations was started on 16 January 1948, the superstructure and walls in April of the same year and from May 1948 a production

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<sup>69</sup> See TAB, Volume 2186 Ref. TALG 17704, TPB, for correspondence and lists of petitioners, drawn up in this regard by Iscor employees and their Provincial and Parliamentary representatives.

<sup>70</sup> Iscor News Vol. 14 No. 3, March 1949, One hundred new houses at West Park, page unnumbered.

of 10 houses per month was reached and maintained. By the end of January 1949 sixty of the houses were completed and leased to Iscorians, while the remainder were completed by March 1949.<sup>71</sup>

As Iscor expanded it became necessary in 1950 to amend the Iscor Home Ownership Scheme by extending the maximum period of repayment of the loans from 20 years to 30 years, with interest at 4¾% per year. It was felt that this extension of the repayment period would be of greater assistance in enabling Iscorians to purchase their own homes. (Note though, that this purchasing of homes applied only to white employees.) At the same time Iscor arranged for a number of houses owned by the Iscor Housing Utility Company, at both Pretoria and Vanderbijl Park, to be made available for sale to Iscorians under hire purchase agreements, the conditions of which would be broadly the same as those applicable to loans under the Home Ownership Scheme. It was hoped, in this way, to encourage private home ownership amongst Iscorians.<sup>72</sup>

A problem which now arose was that many approved employees were unable to take advantage of Iscor's Home Ownership Hire Purchase Scheme to buy their own homes, because they could not pay the transfer duty in cash at the date of purchase. Therefore in order to assist employees whose applications to purchase houses from Iscor's Housing Utility Company under the Hire Purchase Scheme were approved, Iscor arranged that the transfer duty on such sales would be paid by the Housing Company. The transfer duty would then be added to the amount of

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Iscor News Vol. 15 No. 7, July 1950, Iscor's Home Ownership Scheme, Including sales under hire purchase agreements, p 595.

the agreement, thus making it still easier for an approved employee to purchase his own home.<sup>73</sup>

As we have seen earlier, Vanderbijl Park was administered by a Health Committee constituted from nominated members, but by late 1947 the inhabitants of Vanderbijl Park, the majority of whom worked for Iscor, had become dissatisfied with this arrangement and began to press for an elected committee. To achieve these ends a number of petitions were drawn up and handed to the Administrator of the Transvaal. It was, however, to take a number of years before these goals were to be realised. In the years up to 1950, things moved slowly but in March 1950 it was announced by Dr. Meyer at a public function that he was prepared to wager that before the end of the year elections would be held in Vanderbijl Park to enable citizens to elect their own representatives to the Health Committee.<sup>74</sup>

Petitioners now contended that if an elected local authority existed in Vanderbijl Park, greater progress would be achieved in the development of the town. It is difficult however to believe that this could be achieved as the Health Committee's achievements in the two years of its existence up to this point in time had without a doubt been unparalleled in the history of local government in South Africa and holds true possibly even to this day. The Committee was of the opinion that, having regard to the almost negligible number of private property owners and rate payers in Vanderbijl Park, and the fact that the major rate payers (namely Iscor, Vecor, Vepro and Vesco) had representatives on the committee, the existing form

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<sup>73</sup> Iscor News Vol. 16 No. 7, July 1951, Home Ownership made easier, a memorandum dated and signed by A.E. Hardenberg, Personnel Manager on 17 May 1951, p 604.

<sup>74</sup> TAB, Volume 2186 Ref. TALG 17704, TPB, The Vaal Tribune, Thursday 9 March 1950, "Dr. Meyer is prepared to make a wager".

of local government should be allowed to continue for the time being. Dr. Meyer and the Chairman and members of the Health Committee had several interviews, both with the Administrator and with the Provincial Secretary regarding this matter. Dr. Meyer pointed out to the Administrator that there was no objection to a change being brought about in the Committee's constitution. Dr. Meyer also expressed the view that it was desirable for the public, through its elected representatives to accept some of the responsibility of self government. In addition, it was stated that it was also desirable to appoint persons who were not too closely connected with the Vanderbijl Park Estate Company, which owned the township. As was pointed out, the establishment of Vanderbijl Park had been an experiment in the development of an industrial town and had been properly planned and was being correctly developed. It was felt, that it would be a pity if the development of the area should at this critical stage be hindered or retarded. The first step therefore to complete local autonomy had to be the reconstitution of the Health Committee with a membership of nine, of which six were to be nominated and three independently elected by the white inhabitants of Vanderbijl Park.<sup>75</sup> This was eventually constituted as such at the end of 1950.

By June 1951, there were calls for a fully fledged town council to be constituted for Vanderbijl Park. During the initial stages of the development of Vanderbijl Park the appointment of a nominated Health Committee was justified and the Transvaal Municipal Association fully appreciated this position when the matter was originally discussed, but by 1951 the request was for a fully fledged town council. The Executive Committee of the Health Committee now felt that the time

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<sup>75</sup> TAB, Volume 2186 Ref. TALG 17704, TPB, Memorandum, Vanderbijl Park Health Committee: Reconstitution, 22 March 1950.

had perhaps come in the development of Vanderbijl Park for an elected town council to take over the running of the town as the present situation was regarded as no longer being satisfactory. It had to be remembered though that Iscor, through the Vanderbijl Park Estate Company, had invested large sums of money in the town, and they felt that they were entitled to continue controlling the town for the present.

All municipal services in Vanderbijl Park had been installed by Vesco, and they as township owner, had certain obligations in this regard. The main consideration was whether the Health Committee could take over and operate these services. Considering the size of the town and its ratable value, it was not foreseen that the Health Committee would have much difficulty in raising the funds to finance the cost of purchasing the various assets of the Estate Company, as represented by the municipal services. There was, however, an agreement between the Estate Company and the Health Committee regarding the provision of municipal services by the former. Each month the Health Committee was presented with a statement of expenditure incurred by the Estate Company on its behalf and although it had no control over this expenditure, it had to meet the costs. The Health Committee paid for everything completed by Vesco on its behalf and although it was not possible to determine whether the charges were reasonable or not, it was none the less felt that the Health Committee should have some say over its expenditure. The town of Vanderbijl Park, therefore, had reached that stage of development where it fully justified an elected town council and although this view was shared by the residents as well as the executive of the Health Committee, this result was not to

be forthcoming until 1952, when Vanderbijl Park was granted full municipal status.<sup>76</sup>

On Saturday 4 October 1952 the Iscor Steelworks at Vanderbijl Park were officially opened by the Honourable Eric H. Louw, M.P., Minister of Economic Affairs. In his speech he pointed out that Iscor was symbolic of what had been happening in all parts of the Union, a record of progress and development in the industrial sphere. The main difference at Vanderbijl Park was the way in which Iscor's employees had been provided for in the way of housing, medical care and various amenities. At this time South Africa's critics overseas had much to say about the denial of "Fundamental Human Rights" to blacks in South Africa. Article 55 of the United Nations Charter called upon all members of the United Nations to promote, inter alia, '*higher standards of living, full employment*', and to deal with '*social health, and related problems.*' Also, Article 25 of the Declaration of Fundamental Human Rights stated that:- '*Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services.*'<sup>77</sup> Considering the development taking place at Iscor, and especially the development of Vanderbijl Park, there could be no doubt that in the 1940s and 1950s, Iscor made a concerted effort to live up to the precepts of Article 55

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<sup>76</sup> TAB, Volume 2186 Ref. TALG 17704, TPB, Aantekeninge van 'n samewerking tussen die Uitvoerende Komitee en verteenwoordigers van die Transvaalse Munisipale Vereniging op Maandag, 11 June 1951; So Lyk Vanderbijlpark, The South African Treasurer, Vol. 55(1), 1983, p 42.

<sup>77</sup> SAB, Volume 1846 Ref. 6/206, G.G., Office of the Gov.-Gen. of South Africa, Rede gehou deur sy Ed. Agb. Eric H. Louw, L.V. Minister van Ekonomiese Sake, by geleentheid van die openingsplegtigheid van die Vanderbijlpark Staalwerk op Saterdag 4 October 1952, bl. 3-4.

and (b) of the United Nations Charter, and of Article 25 of the Declaration of Fundamental Human Rights. Likewise, during his speech at the opening of Vanderbijl Park, the Governor-General neatly summed up what Iscor had achieved at Vanderbijl Park with regard to socio-economic relations between Iscor and the employees. Residential areas were separated from the heavy industrial and clean industrial areas, without imposing excessive travelling on workers. White and black residential areas were segregated and the black areas were so placed that the residents were near to their places of employment which could be reached without having to pass through the town. In both the white and black areas, townships were laid out to form as far as possible, self contained units with their own parks, shopping centres and schools. Arterial roads which carried main traffic bound these townships, but did not pass through them. The services provided by the Vanderbijl Park Estate Company, roads, lighting, water reticulation, sanitation and so forth, measured up to the best modern standards.<sup>78</sup>

Considering the political situation prevailing in South Africa at the time it becomes clear that Iscor was a leader in the field of providing housing and amenities for all employees, white and black, and that in their approach to the provision of these basic human needs, they were a lot more enlightened than the Nationalist Party Government of the day. In fact, the thinking of Dr. van der Bijl proved to be

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<sup>78</sup> SAB, Volume 1846 Ref. 6/206, G.G., Office of the Gov.-Gen. of South Africa, His Excellency's Engagements and Patronage, Formal opening of Iscor's New Works at Vanderbijlpark, Saturday 4 October 1952; Draft Notes for speech by His Excellency the Gov.-Gen. on the occasion of the Official opening of Iscor Works, Vanderbijlpark, pp 3-4.



decades ahead of those of many other corporations at that time and was most certainly too enlightened for the government of the day.<sup>79</sup>

As the years passed the Iscor Housing Utility Company grew even beyond Dr. Van der Bijl's wildest dreams and expectations. An indication of the extent to which this had developed can be gleaned from the Director's report for the year ended 30 September 1953. By this time the value of its fixed property amounted to £4 264 579 and included property sold under suspensive sales agreements, together with a property in respect of which a lease with the option to purchase had been granted, at cost, but from which had been deducted the provision for completion of dwelling units and the balance of the provision for depreciation of dwelling units.<sup>80</sup>

By 30 September 1953 the additional 100 houses contracted for at West Park, Pretoria, in 1951, had been completed and brought into commission with effect from 1 November 1952, making a total of 550 houses and 16 flats erected by the company at West Park. Of the 550 houses 106 had been sold under hire purchase agreement as at 30 September 1953, leaving a balance of 444 houses and 16 flats

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<sup>79</sup> It should be remembered that Vanderbijl Park's conception, planning and execution took place during the Smuts era. Once the NP Government came to power in 1948 more attention began to be focused on the white worker, especially the Afrikaans speaking white worker, at the expense of the black employees and eventually also at that of the English speaking white employees. With the advent of legislated apartheid under J.G. Strijdom after 1954, the desirability of a migrant labour force ahead of a permanently settled black work force in the towns and cities, as envisaged by the NP Government of Dr. D.F. Malan after the 1948 election victory, was once again promulgated as government policy.

<sup>80</sup> SAB, Volume 0 Ref. N 1251, SES, Iscor Housing Utility Company, Director's report for the year ended 30 September 1953, p 4.

available for letting. In addition to this, the company continued to lease 50 flats in Mayville for sub-leasing to Iscor employees.<sup>81</sup> During the same period under review, at Vanderbijl Park, 206 houses and a block of 99 flats contracted for in 1951 were completed, making a total of 1 805 living units available for sale and letting at Vanderbijl Park. Of these units, 1 102 were regarded as salable and 480 of these had been sold as at 30 September 1953. To relieve the housing shortage at Vanderbijl Park, it was arranged with the Vanderbijl Park Estate Company that 100 of the houses to be erected by the company during 1953/54 would be leased to Iscor and the Housing Company, acting as agents for Iscor, would in turn sub-let these houses to Iscor employees.<sup>82</sup>

From scrutiny of this report, there can be no doubt that Iscor had become a major player in the residential property market in both Pretoria and Vanderbijl Park by the mid 1950's. Every effort was being made, especially at Vanderbijl Park, to provide Iscorians both black and white, with good quality affordable housing, while at the same time making home ownership for white employees more accessible. A great effort, therefore, was made to cater for the social needs of all employees and in this way to maintain a stable and contented work force.

The Housing Utility Company, which had been funded by Iscor since shortly after its inception, was forced in 1952 to seek alternative means of funding as the money used to fund the company was now required by Iscor to fund new business development projects. In the past all funds required by the Housing Company were provided by way of loans from Iscor. These loans were now in excess of

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid. p 6.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

£3 500 000. Iscor now wished to refund these loans by way of letter of credit with participation being extended to those institutions who in the past had helped financially, namely the Members Life Insurance Association, members of the Pension Provident Fund and the State Debt Commission. It was suggested that £2 500 000 be offered by way of letters of credit to these fund suppliers, as well as £2 000 000 to the Outstanding Liabilities Trust Fund, the Silicosis Board, the Witwatersrand Gold Mines Employees Provident Fund and the SA Mutual Life Assurance Society, to be repaid over a period of 10 to 15 years at an interest rate of 4½%.<sup>83</sup> On the 13 February 1952 permission was granted by the Treasury to Iscor for the issue of letters of credit for £2 500 000 by the Iscor Housing Utilities Company for the purpose of refunding. Thus began a new chapter in the company's history and one which made it more independent from Iscor control and policy.<sup>84</sup>

In 1954 the white tenants of Iscor houses in Pretoria West complained that house rentals were too high and that they had been increased twice in a short space of time. This problem was raised in Parliament on 26 May 1954 by Mr. Van der Walt, Nationalist Party MP for Pretoria West. In reply Eric Louw, Minister of Economic Affairs, in addressing Parliament, explained that on each occasion that rents had been increased, this was done on recommendations made to Iscor by the Pretoria Rent Board. After the increase, rent varied from £7 for a small house to

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<sup>83</sup> SAB, Volume 7799 Ref. F 117/16, TES, Suid-Afrikaanse Yster en Staal Industriële Korporasie Beperk, Memorandum vir die inligting van die Sektretaris van Finansies, Die uitreik van skuldbriewe deur Yskor Behuising - Utiliteits Maatskappy, Memorandum van Dr. F. Meyer aan Dr. Steyn gedateer 30 Januarie 1952; Voorgenome uitreiking van skuldbriewe deur die Yskor Behuisings - Utiliteits Maatskappy 12 Februarie 1952, Brief van Dr. F. Meyer aan Dr. Steyn.

<sup>84</sup> SAB, Volume 7799 Ref. F 117/16, TES, Letter from the Treasury Secretary to Dr. F. Meyer Chairman of Iscor Board dated 13 February 1952.

£20 for a large 3 bedroom house. It was pointed out by the Minister that if Iscor employees were to look for houses to hire in Pretoria West, they would not find similar houses at those rents. The return on capital invested by Iscor via these rentals was an average of 4½%, where speculative building companies were allowed 12% on investment capital. This meant that the Iscor Housing Utility Company had abided by the principles of such a company.<sup>85</sup> All things considered though, and considering the average rents for houses in Pretoria, it is doubtful whether these persons had cause for complaint. It must also be remembered that, apart from the rent, there were other conditions of service which were most advantageous to white Iscor employees, and which people in many other factories did not enjoy.

It would appear from what has been discussed in this chapter that Iscor went to some length to provide the most advantageous conditions of employment and housing to its white employees that it could, while at the same time neglecting the needs of its black employees, especially during the early years. With the development of Vanderbijl Park an effort was initially made to improve the living conditions of the black employees by moving away from the migrant labour system, if only partially. However, with the advent of the Nationalist Party to power in 1948, there were serious reversals in the fortunes of black employees, politically, socially and economically. Millions of pounds were spent on providing good housing for employees, both white and black, which were situated within close proximity to the work place. Very few white employees at that time could hope to find better terms of employment in factories and mines,

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<sup>85</sup> Quoted from the Union of South Africa - Debates of the House of Assembly, Vol. 86, (17 May to 15 June 1954), in the Iscor News Vol. 19 No. 7, August 1954, News about Iscor from the Parliamentary Debates, The Minister of Economic Affairs, Mr. E.H. Louw, p 57.

than were offered by Iscor and in some cases this applied to black employees as well.<sup>86</sup> The housing development schemes were to place Iscor in the forefront of labour relations. The corporation's desire to facilitate a good service to its employees in the housing sector was taken a step further with the registration of "Yskor Landgoed (Edms) Bpk" in 1954.<sup>87</sup> This wholly owned subsidiary of Iscor was formed for the more convenient administration of certain of Iscor's properties, buildings and houses. Thus an attempt was made to control even further the services offered to employees in the area of housing.

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<sup>86</sup> For further reading on the social structures present in black compounds see: G.W. Gale, Government Health Centres in the Union of South Africa, South African Medical Journal, Vol. 23(7), 1949; K. Breckenridge, Migrant Labour Crime and Faction Fighting: The Role of the Isitshozi in the Development of Ethnic Organisations in the Compounds, Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 16(1), 1990; R. Turrell, Kimberly's Model Compounds, Journal of African History, Vol. 25(1), 1984; C. Van Onselen, Chibaro, African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933; A. Minaar, (Ed), Communities in Isolation: Perspectives on Hostels in South Africa.

<sup>87</sup> Iscor Annual Reports, Address by Dr. F. Meyer, Chairman of the Corporation at the 25<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Meeting of Shareholders at Pretoria on Wednesday 24 November 1954.

## CHAPTER 5 - MEDICAL AND RETIREMENT BENEFITS

Medical history, which is the social history of medicine while at the same time being the political economy of health, has emerged late in South African historical writing due to the centrality of the medical profession in the telling of its own story. One reason for historians in South Africa failing to enter the field of health history has been the lack of suitable comparative research to provide a context for the local situation.<sup>1</sup> In researching this dissertation, the only documents relating directly to medical and health services at Iscor has been the Iscor News, a few in-house publications and a limited number of documents found in the Transvaal Archives Depot in Pretoria. Most of the research carried out until now deals with the gold mines, especially on the Witwatersrand and the relationship between mining and tuberculosis (TB) amongst black mine workers. However, much of what applies and has been said with regard to the gold mines also holds good for other industries in South Africa at this time.

Western medicine can be seen as “a cultural force”, an ideology and a tool of the empire. Medical practitioners were, in their relations with indigenous people, almost uniformly unsympathetic to traditional medical practices and they used their own modern scientific techniques to support the assertion of imperial control and to protect the interests of the rulers, often to the detriment of the ruled. Furthermore, disease was a powerful factor in the European idea of indigenous society as the civilisation of western medicine was measured against the uncivilised state of indigenous society. In keeping with this is the fact that epidemics have long been recognised as the sort of social crises which illuminates

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<sup>1</sup> E. van Heyningen, Epidemics and Disease: Historical Writing on Health in South Africa, South African Historical Journal, Vol. 23, 1990, pp 122-123.

the operation of society. In South Africa, public health policies during outbreaks of socially defined epidemics have provided a useful barometer of its political conflicts and socio-economic cleavages. The poverty which was usually always the underlying cause of epidemic diseases, interestingly, was almost never confronted.<sup>2</sup>

The main consideration here was the financial framework of health care, whereby local authorities were discouraged from treating blacks with TB or VD because they were only given a skeleton budget to pay for black health treatment. This brought about the practice of repatriating sick blacks to rural areas. In practice this meant that only healthy, able-bodied workers remained in urban areas. This policy was spelt out in the provisions of the 1923 Native (Urban Areas) Act. The repatriation of sick people and the screening of black urban immigrants for TB and VD was only one aspect of the strategy to create sanitised cities. Action against slums also received special consideration in discussions about a desirable public-health policy.<sup>3</sup>

From the beginning of the century black urbanisation led to white calls for racial segregation on health grounds. For urban authorities, industrialists and mine owners, migrant labour could be usefully justified as limiting the exposure of blacks to the adverse conditions of industrial life and providing opportunities for rest and recuperation in the reserves.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p 124.

<sup>3</sup> S. Parnell, Creating Racial Privilege: The Origins of South African Public Health and Town Planning Legislation, Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 19(3), 1993, pp 482-483.

<sup>4</sup> S. Marks and N. Anderson, Issues in the Political Economy of Health in Southern Africa, Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 13(2), 1987, p 180.

By the 1920s and 1930s there was a growing concern for the health of the black population in both the rural and urban areas of South Africa. The urban health needs of migrant mine labourers were met by and large, by the mine hospitals on the Rand and after its founding, in industry, by Iscor by way of its black hospitals and clinics in Pretoria and Vanderbijl Park and on the mines owned by Iscor. At the same time the prevalent socio-economic conditions in the rural areas were seen as a double menace to South Africa. Firstly, there was the immediate chance of the spread of infectious and contagious diseases from areas where they were practically endemic. These diseases could easily spread and reach epidemic proportions in the crowded compounds of the mines and industry. Secondly, there was the economic danger of the deterioration and eventual failure of the labour supply.<sup>5</sup> One of the more blunt statements to this effect was made by the Department of Health:

*'Apart from any question of humanitarianism or of our duty to a subordinate race, there is the obvious matter of self interest. Our mines and other industries are making increasing demands for cheap labour. Owing to the poor health and physique of the natives in our reserves half of those brought to the examining doctors by the mine recruiters have to be turned down. For that reason we have to import labour from Portuguese East Africa as well as from northern tropical areas. Our present requirements could all be met from our own reserve, if ill health, due to entirely preventable causes, was removed. The obvious advantage*

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<sup>5</sup> K.A. Shapiro, Doctors or Medical Aids - The Debate Over the Training of Black Medical Personnel for the Rural Black Population in South Africa in the 1920's and 1930's, Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol.13(2), 1987, pp 235-236.



*would be that money now taken out of the Union by this large army of natives would be spent in the Union.*<sup>6</sup>

This availability of a healthy black population in the reserves was just as important to Iscor as it was to the gold mining companies, because they also needed a large supply of healthy black employees in the Pretoria and later Vanderbijl Park works, as well as at their iron ore mine at Thabazimbi. This became even more important as Iscor tried to drive down production costs by replacing expensive white labour with cheap black labour. Once black labour had been recruited it became just as important to ensure their continued good health as it was to ensure a large pool of healthy black employees to draw from. This could only be achieved by providing a reasonable standard of health care for these employees at or close to the work place.

By the late 1930s medical persons outside the mines as well as members of the Department of Health, who were beginning to be aware of the deteriorating conditions in the rural areas and the appalling social conditions in the towns, realised that this could not be combated merely by limiting the exposure of migrant labour to the adverse conditions of industrial life. Poor housing and malnutrition were given as the critical causes of disease, especially TB, which was the greatest threat to mining operations. Thus it was that the views of more progressive and humanitarian medical officers began to influence public health policy during the short-lived period of reformism during and immediately after World War Two. This culminated in the recommendations of the National Health Services Commission of 1944 with its demands for a national health service for all

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p 236.

sections of the people of South Africa based on the modern conception of health ie. promotive and preventive community health services.<sup>7</sup>

In the light of what has been said above, it stands to reason that Iscor would take measures to protect the health of employees while in the employ of the corporation. It was for this reason therefore that the Iscor Medical Benefit Society came into existence on 26 July 1934, when approval was given to its draft regulations and the principle was adopted that not only should Iscor contribute on a pound for pound basis to this fund but should bear the costs of administration while at the same time appointing the necessary secretary and treasurer. Membership of the fund became compulsory with effect from 29 December 1934 for all white employees, while in August 1937 its scope was widened to include dental benefits.<sup>8</sup> Black employees, however, were omitted from this benefit scheme by Iscor although they could receive treatment for injuries and illness at Iscor's black hospitals and clinics.

In conjunction with the Medical Benefit Society, first aid training was introduced as a first line of action in the case of accidents, while safety training was made compulsory in the work place to prevent and stop unnecessary injuries. Through safety awareness it was hoped to reduce the number of injuries usually experienced in factory and mining institutions and in this way to avoid unnecessary loss of production as well as the costs involved in the rehabilitation of injury victims and the retraining of employees.

The safety of native employees it was claimed by Iscor, was a matter of special

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<sup>7</sup> S. Marks and N. Anderson, Issues in the Political Economy of Health in Southern Africa, Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 13(2), 1987, p 181.

<sup>8</sup> E. Rosenthal, The History of Iscor, pp 589-590.

concern to the corporation, since many of them came to Iscor directly from the rural areas and were completely unfamiliar with machinery or industrial life. In view of the fact that they were not members of the Medical Benefit Fund it became imperative to make extra provisions for their safety. Native Safety Inspectors were therefore appointed to assist the Safety Officers in ensuring that safe working practices were observed while “boss boys” attended special courses in safety training. In some sections a safety bonus was paid to “boss boys” based on the accident frequency rate. As a result of these efforts the accident frequency rate for blacks was considerably reduced and at times was lower than that for whites.<sup>9</sup> It might therefore have been beneficial for Iscor to reduce injuries in the work place amongst white employees as well and in this way cut back on medical expenses to the fund.

The blacks, unlike the white employees, were also keenly interested in first-aid training and large numbers, including all “boss boys”, attended the first-aid courses which Iscor organised. Awards were made to all who obtained first-aid certificates. An offshoot of this was that inter-centre competitions for first-aid were keenly contested by black employees. Perhaps it was reasoned by Iscor that if black employees did not belong to the Medical Benefit Fund they would be more safety conscious in the work place.

The priority that Iscor gave to medical services was made apparent in March 1934 when the first casualty station was established at Pretoria Works. The only medical equipment which it contained was a small first aid cabinet. In December 1935 G.L. Green was appointed Casualty Superintendent. The casualty station

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<sup>9</sup> Steel in South Africa 1928-1953, p 112.

at this time consisted of a general white and black combined dressing room, and a small "surgery office". First aid boxes were now installed all over the plant and by March 1937 Iscor had what was possibly the most up to date casualty surgery in the southern hemisphere. Every conceivable kind of accident could be dealt with with the greatest possible speed and efficiency and together with the "Gas Rescue Brigade" Iscor and the Medical Benefit Society were saved thousands of pounds in lost production and medical benefits.

With the construction of the black compound an important addition was brought to the station, namely a black hospital where the black employees working or housed in the compound could obtain good medical attention. Iscor's motto now became one of "Safety First" and this was an important factor in the successful production of steel.<sup>10</sup>

At the annual meeting of the Iscor Medical Benefit Fund held on Thursday 26 August 1937, an important alteration was made to the constitution. The alteration made provision for dental benefits to be provided to members with effect from 1 September 1937, and these ranged from free treatment for members with up to 33 $\frac{1}{3}$  % of dental costs only being for the members account.<sup>11</sup> So successful was this aspect of health care, that by April 1938 over 900 members of the Fund had already made use of these facilities.<sup>12</sup> The Pretoria Dental Association now set about erecting a clinic for use by the members of the Iscor Medical Benefit Fund.

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<sup>10</sup> Iscor News Vol. 2 No. 6, June 1937, The Central Casualty Station, A story of Endeavour, by G.L. Green, pp 335-337.

<sup>11</sup> Iscor News Vol. 2 No. 9, September 1937, Dental Benefits for Iscorians, Iscor Medical Benefit Fund, p 543.

<sup>12</sup> Iscor News Vol. 3 No. 4, April 1938, A Matter of Teeth, Free Dental Service Offer, p 260.

The new clinic building was completed in May 1939 and was a modern double storied building situated in Prinsloo Street and was fully equipped with the most up-to-date dental equipment while Iscor patients were attended by dentists practising in Pretoria and the services rendered were of the highest standard, in accordance with the agreement between the Fund's committee and the Dental Association.<sup>13</sup> This agreement with the Pretoria Dental Association lasted until 1943, when Iscor established its own dental department. The main reasons for establishing this department was to ensure that only the best services were given to members and their dependents as well as to counteract the high cost of dental services, which at that time cost the Fund and members £11 000 per year. The dental department though remained a heavy drain on the finances of the Fund, although the committee felt confident that the expenses could be met without increasing subscriptions. Further, so as to assist members who were not resident in or near Pretoria, a dental officer visited Thabazimbi at regular intervals and similar arrangements were made with regards to Vanderbijl Park. One of the dental officers also had rooms in the new casualty station at Iscor Works, Pretoria, and members could obtain the same service from him as they had obtained from the Pretoria Dental Association in the past.<sup>14</sup>

A more disturbing aspect for Iscor though, was that by December 1943 there was an increase in the accident frequency rate at the works. In an effort to combat this the task of educating Iscorians with regard to safety was left to a specially appointed Safety Engineer. Insofar as the white employees were concerned this was not a problem and regular safety articles were carried in the Iscor News,

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<sup>13</sup> Iscor News Vol. 4 No. 5, May 1939, The Pretoria Dental Clinic, Special facilities for Iscorians, p 353.

<sup>14</sup> Iscor News Vol. 8 No. 10, October 1943, Mutual Aid Expands, New Dental Departments, p 481.

which if carefully read and understood, left little excuse for a worker to injure himself. The black employees though, presented an entirely different problem.

The majority of black employees were unable to read and it was therefore useless to present them with articles to read and danger notices of various kinds to catch the eye. Safety talks and lectures, giving graphic examples, were one way of bringing to their attention the dangers connected with their work. Besides this, Iscor regarded it as the duty of every white employee in control of blacks to see to the safety of these workers. It was also compulsory under the Mines and Works Act for every white in charge of blacks to assume responsibility for the safety of the blacks under his control. It was viewed as criminal that a white overseer should control blacks and yet completely ignore the necessity for advising them as to the dangers attached to the job on which they were engaged and the safest way of working. Apart from purely humanitarian considerations, an operative laid himself open to prosecution by the Mines Department for failing to take reasonable precautions to ensure the safety of the blacks under his control. It was felt to be imperative that everyone on the plant who was in charge of blacks should clearly understand his responsibility. This was of course an entirely paternalistic approach and although not acceptable today, it was considered to be quite appropriate at that time. When it is considered that anything from 400 to 800 new blacks were recruited each month, it became clear why there was a real necessity for the training of these new black employees. It was regarded as an integral part of each man's job therefore to look after the safety of his black workers.<sup>15</sup>

In August 1942 the Iscor Medical Benefit Fund decided that members should have their own hospital. For this reason they had purchased White Lodge, but it soon

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<sup>15</sup> Iscor News Vol. 8 No.12, December 1943, Safe or Sorry?, by Safety Engineer, p 561.

became apparent that White Lodge, with only 37 beds, was too small. A larger and more up-to-date hospital was needed and various sites were examined and considered by the officials concerned with a view to the erection of such a hospital. Finally a site was selected in Arcadia and the final plans for the hospital were drawn up on clean-cut, modern lines.<sup>16</sup> The hospital was fitted out with the most modern equipment, and in addition to the normal theaters there were also fully equipped radiological and physiotherapy departments housed in one of the single storied wings. The best in design, construction and equipment were embodied in the new hospital, while the aesthetic effect of surroundings on convalescing patients was treated as an item of major importance. The hospital with its 70 beds was completed by the end of 1949, and was considered to be a valuable asset to Iscorians, as it provided them with first class medical facilities at an affordable price. It should, however, be remembered that this hospital was solely for the use of white Iscorians and black workers were excluded from receipt of its services.

At the same time that these developments were taking place in Pretoria, similar developments were under way at Vanderbijl Park. It was Iscor's contention that the employer's interest in his employees could not be confined to working hours only. An employee in ill health was seen as the concern of the employer, it was therefore decided that it was also necessary to create at Vanderbijl Park the Vanderbijl Park Medical Benefit Fund and it was further decided to incorporate into this new fund the means of stimulating preventive medicine, with the object of coming to grips with illness and disease in their early and compatible stages.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Iscor News Vol. 7 No. 12, December 1942, A New Hospital for Iscorians, p 556.

<sup>17</sup> Iscor News Vol. 12 No. 7, July 1947, The Creation and Planning of Vanderbijl Park by Dr. H.J. van der Bijl, PhD, FRS, Dsc, LLD, etc., Vanderbijl Park Medical Benefit Fund, p 559.

At this time the government was investigating the establishment of Health Centres throughout the country and they were viewed as being the practical expression of two of the most important and universally accepted conclusions of modern medical thinkers. The first was that the day of individual isolationism in medical practice was past and that medical practitioners and their ancillaries could make their most effective contribution to the needs of the people through group or team practice. The second was that the primary aim of medical practice should be the promotion and preservation of health. General practitioners would be supplied with adequate technical diagnostic equipment and would be assisted by nurses, radiographers, laboratory technicians, physiotherapists, etc. The foundation of the practice of the Health Centre would be the periodic medical examination, resulting in a continuous process of health education, in which the family doctor would play the leading part, rather than merely writing out prescriptions.<sup>18</sup>

Although due to a shortage of health personnel and equipment there was no Health Centre established by the government which provided anything like the complete personal health service envisaged by the 1944 Health Commission, especially in respect to dental services, this was precisely what Iscor attempted to achieve with its white hospitals and clinics and hospitals for black employees located in the compounds. Iscor was also to provide its employees with all the facilities envisaged by the Health Commission and here much emphasis was placed upon the importance of preventative medicine as opposed to curative medicine. The former, of course, being less financially draining on a Medical Fund.

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<sup>18</sup> G.W. Gale, Government Health Centres in the Union of South Africa, South African Medical Journal, Vol. 23(7), 1947, p 630.



As the aims of the 1944 Health Commission had been directed more at the upliftment and improvement of medical services for rural blacks than for whites, it is in the light of political thinking in South Africa at that time, not surprising that the recommendations of the Commission were dropped even before the Afrikaner Nationalists came into power in 1948. The central dictum of the Commission that unless there were drastic reforms in the sphere of nutrition, housing, health education and recreation, the mere provision of more doctoring would not provide healthier living for the people of the country, demanded a radical restructuring of the social order. This went well beyond the white consensus and perhaps even beyond the capacity of the political economy, which was still heavily dependent on the primary sections of mining and farming.<sup>19</sup> It was therefore left to companies such as Iscor as well as the large mining corporations to provide the necessary health services and centres for their employees both black and white. Without the provision of these services, the lot of rural black migrant workers would have been considerably worse and the sustained availability of cheap black labour would have been almost impossible to maintain. It was therefore in the economic interest of Iscor to invest in the health and safety of its black workers as well as that of white employees.

It was in view of the above therefore that construction started on the first hospital at Vanderbijl Park in 1947 of which the first unit cost in the order of £100 000. Thirty acres were set aside in the town for hospitalisation and the whole, consisting of the general hospital, maternity home, isolation hospital and main clinic for periodic examination etc. had already been planned, laid out and modeled as it would ultimately be. At the same time the erection of the first

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<sup>19</sup> S. Marks and N. Anderson, Issues in the Political Economy of Health in Southern Africa, Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 13(2), 1987, p 181.

health clinic had already been started and other health centres were listed for construction in the various townships as the need arose.<sup>20</sup>

As we have seen in the previous chapter, in 1948, Vanderbijl Park was run by the Vanderbijl Park Health Committee who had approved the appointment of an Honorary Medical Officer of Health who was also to function as the Clinical Medical Officer in the black location.<sup>21</sup> In his first Annual Report for the period 1 July 1947 to 30 June 1948 it would appear that every effort was made to keep the Vanderbijl Park area a healthy one and great care was taken to ensure that employees of Iscor and other business undertakings were treated as speedily and efficiently as possible for any infectious diseases. All black labourers were vaccinated prior to employment while white patients suffering from infectious diseases were transferred to hospital in Johannesburg. The Vanderbijl Park Medical Benefit Fund was open to all white residents of the town while membership of the fund was compulsory in the case of white Iscor employees. The black employees in turn were taken care of, when necessary, at the Iscor hospital for blacks.<sup>22</sup> From the start there was discrimination between white and black employees at Iscor's Vanderbijl Park works with regard to medical care and although political considerations and ideals of the day played a role, it could not have been cost effective for Iscor to duplicate services.

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<sup>20</sup> Iscor News Vol. 12 No. 7, July 1947, The Creation and Planning of Vanderbijl Park by Dr. H.J. van der Bijl, PhD, FRS, Dsc, LLD, etc., Vanderbijl Park Medical Benefit Fund, p 559.

<sup>21</sup> TAB, Volume 2186, Ref. TALG 17704, MPA, Vanderbijl Park Health Committee, Chairman's Minute for the period December 1946 to December 1948.

<sup>22</sup> TAB, Volume 2186, Ref. TALG 17704, MPA, First Annual Report of the Hon. Medical Officer of Health, Dr. W.F. Mondriaan, of the Vanderbijl Park Health Committee, for the period 1 July 1947 to 30 June 1948, dated 22 July 1948.

The control of medical costs has always been of paramount importance to medical schemes and it was for this reason that the Iscor Medical Benefit Fund set up specific machinery for the control and supply of medicines to members. It was pointed out to members that it was a waste of money to purchase expensive proprietaries when cheaper generics were available. This was seen as an aspect which the Fund Committee could not ignore and which had to be guarded against in the interest of members. Furthermore, to prevent wastage, a maximum dosage was decided upon after consultation with the doctors who were, as a body, in full agreement with this principle, but each doctor was given discretionary authority to prescribe any quantity they thought necessary, provided the prescription was marked "special case".<sup>23</sup> Thus even in these times financial considerations were playing a major role in the administration and funding of medical aid schemes. It had already become necessary to contain costs so as to be able to provide members with the best service possible while still keeping within the financial means of the member and the Fund. It was seen as the members duty to co-operate with the Fund so as to avoid the abuse of medicines.

In April 1950 the new hospital at Vanderbijl Park was opened. It was pointed out that no white Iscorian who was a member of the Medical Benefit Fund need feel disturbed in any way as his hospitalisation was now secured to him. Should he need a hospital bed he could obtain it. He could now have his own medical attendant's services. He would have all the medicine he required. The services of a specialist, medical or surgical, if needed, would be provided by the Fund.<sup>24</sup> Unlike the great majority of the people in South Africa, he had to pay nothing beyond his normal monthly subscription for all these services.

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<sup>23</sup> Iscor News Vol. 12 No. 10, October 1947, Iscor Medical Benefit Fund, Information Service to Members, p 863.

<sup>24</sup> Iscor News Vol. 15 No. 5, May 1950, Editorial.

In a short ceremony on Saturday 22 April 1950 at 15:30 Dr. Meyer, who had taken over as Chairman of Iscor on the death of Dr. van der Bijl in 1948, handed the keys of the new Vanderbijl Park hospital to the Administrator of the Transvaal, Dr. William Nicol. In his introductory speech Dr. Meyer expressed his gratification at the completion of the hospital. He went on to emphasize that a hospital could be viewed as an insurance, the provision of which is necessary. In addition, however, he recalled that all health, sporting and welfare amenities provided for residents at Vanderbijl Park in fact contributed to the truth of the axiom, "prevention is better than cure".<sup>25</sup> It was clear that the Vanderbijl Park Hospital, as was the case in Pretoria, was an institution of which any community could be proud. Once again Iscor had provided its white employees and their family members with the best medical services available. In fact, the facilities provided by Iscor for its white employees were some of the finest to be found in the country and it is clear that Iscor took a great interest in the physical health of these employees.

A further example of this was the building of a modern dental clinic by Iscor. At first a room in one of the houses at Vanderbijl Park was used as a clinic, this was in January 1947. In August 1948 the top floor of a building in downtown Vanderbijl Park was taken over and finally in November 1949 the first sod was turned and the building of a new and modern clinic was started. Once again it was of modern design and housed the most modern equipment. As well as dentists, there was also a dental mechanic in attendance with his own well equipped laboratory.<sup>26</sup> This was a service which at that time few people outside Iscor

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<sup>25</sup> Iscor News Vol. 15 No. 5, May 1950, The Vanderbijl Park Hospital Opened by the Administrator of the Transvaal, p 389.

<sup>26</sup> Iscor News Vol. 15 No.7, July 1950, The Dental Clinic at Vanderbijl Park, p 585.

had access to and was a major step forward in the provision of a total health care package for the employees.

One of the greatest advances in industry at that time was the attention paid to the worker's mental and physical health and consequently his security and happiness. Vanderbijl Park was a good example of this. Every facility provided was a step towards the ideal that the man who does the job should have the best in all spheres, that he should be freed as far as possible from worries that inevitably will tell upon his physical condition. Iscor therefore treated the matter of social security as one of prime importance. It is also well known what a paralysing effect a drawn out and expensive illness can have upon a family of moderate means. For that reason Iscor's all embracing Medical Benefit Scheme, the hospital at Pretoria, the Medical and Dental Clinic at Vanderbijl Park and the first aid training and safety awareness campaigns at its centres played a notable part in Iscor's success in the economic sphere and the stability of its work force. However, one aspect of Iscor's medical aid scheme still troubled members of the medical profession at the corporation, and this was the question of medical aid for Iscor's black employees.

It should be born in mind that at this time tuberculosis was rife amongst migrant workers, especially on the mines, and this would have affected Iscor's coal and iron ore mines, had it been allowed to take hold in the compounds, without the necessary medical attention being given to those afflicted, by Iscor's doctors. TB is perhaps a fitting symbol of the unique challenge posed by ill health in South Africa. It is a disease that originated among gold and diamond workers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, who then took it back to their families in the rural areas. TB demonstrates, in short, all the most important aspects of the health crisis in South Africa, namely: (1) great disparities in health between the white minority and the rest of the population; (2) the role of malnutrition, poor housing and sanitation; (3) the significant spatial interaction between industrial centres and rural peripheries

in determining the patterns of morbidity and mortality and (4) the facility of conventional curative approaches found within the apartheid system.<sup>27</sup>

Urbanisation after the First World War began the process by which rural ill-health was transferred to the growing cities and widened the pool of people susceptible to the disease. The rise in TB encouraged slum clearance efforts, but this contributed directly to the rising tide of TB since these efforts were directed primarily at removing African slums beyond the view of white society, reflecting the political and economic interests shaping urban reform. Far from dealing with the root causes of African health problems this pattern of urban reform simply transferred these problems to the increasingly overcrowded black locations and sprawling peri-urban slums which had sprung up around the country's major urban centres. These segregated areas provided ideal breeding grounds for TB. Under the Nationalist Party Government and especially during the Strijdom and Verwoerdian era, this policy took on national proportions with the fragmentation of health services and the creation of homeland health departments. Underlying this tragedy was the aspirations of the capitalist, industrial economy. Above all, not only did the working conditions of mines and industries and the living conditions in the compounds create a breeding ground for the disease, but the interests of the mine and factory owners influenced both the perceptions and policies of medical officers. Preventing the spread of TB became in effect a medical rationale for the use of migrant labour on mines and in industry.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> B. Wisner, Health and Health Care in South Africa: The Challenge for a Majority Ruled State, *Antipode*, Vol. 23(1), 1991, p 125.

<sup>28</sup> E. Van Heyningen, Epidemics and Disease: Historical Writing on Health in South Africa, *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 23, 1990, pp 129-131.

In view of the threat posed by TB amongst migrant workers for Iscor, the Iscor doctors tested all prospective black employees before appointment and they were thereafter checked on a regular basis. For this reason Iscor managed to avoid any crisis amongst their workers, although this was not always true of their families. Iscor black medical facilities were only available to employees and did not extend to their families. The effect was that should family members contract TB or any other contagious but curative disease there were no medical facilities available to them, especially in the rural areas, as we have seen earlier in this chapter. With regard to black employees, therefore, Iscor's responsibility stopped with the employee himself, unlike the white employees who had a medical fund which took care of their families' needs as well. It was for this reason that in 1951 Dr. Jordan, Chairman of Iscor's Medical Benefit Fund expressed his concern in this regard and pointed out that he felt that the time was rapidly approaching where serious consideration would have to be given to making increased medical benefits available to the whole of Iscor's black labour force. Iscor was already achieving a great deal in this direction, but more needed to be done to educate the black employees and to teach them to take a more positive interest in providing for their own needs during sickness or prolonged ill-health. He felt that Iscor had set the pace in so many fields, that it perhaps needed to take the lead here as well.<sup>29</sup>

Although Iscor provided medical facilities for black employees by way of their own hospital, facilities were nowhere near comparable to those of the white employees and it was only many years later that black employees also became members of Iscor's Medical Benefit Fund. In fact, even at this stage a certain

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<sup>29</sup> Iscor News, Vol. 16 No. 1, January 1952, Iscor Medical Benefit Fund Honours Retiring Chairman  
p 15.

degree of differentiation and segregation existed at Iscor with regard to the use of medical facilities. Whether this was by design or habit though, it is not possible to establish.

Another example of this segregation of benefits was the Iscor Pension Fund. Like the Medical Benefit Fund, the Iscor Pension Fund was also not made available to black Iscor employees and was only there for the benefit of the white employees. To this effect a major step in the direction of securing social security for Iscor employees was taken on 7 August 1935 when the principle of an employees pension scheme was adopted. The scheme was made applicable to all white employees of Iscor older than 20 years. This was soon extended to the personnel of the Steel Sales Company and the Fowler Tar Spraying Company who wished to join the Fund.<sup>30</sup> Thus it was that the Directors of Iscor established a non-contributory pension fund and on the advice of the corporation's actuaries a contribution of £20 000 was made to the fund for the period prior to 1 July 1936 while an amount of £50 000 was charged to the manufacturing account for the financial year 1936/37. The fund's total as at 30 June 1937 therefore amounted to £70 000. These pension fund monies were invested separately from the rest of the Iscor account.<sup>31</sup> On 17 June 1939, in terms of a Trust Deed, trustees were appointed by Iscor to administer the Iscor Pension Fund and at the close of that financial year all securities and investments previously held by Iscor on behalf of the fund had been handed over to the trustees, to whom Iscor's regular contributions to the pension fund were now also paid.<sup>32</sup> Because the fund was

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<sup>30</sup> E. Rosenthal, The History of Iscor, p 590.

<sup>31</sup> Iscor Annual Reports, Verslag van Direkteure en Rekenings vir die Jaar Geëindig, 30 Junie 1937.

<sup>32</sup> Iscor Annual Reports, Report of Directors for the year ended 30 June 1939.



a non-contributory one, it could not be expected to be as large as those in a contributory scheme, but the objective of the Board, which was to provide in some measure financial relief to employees during their old age, had been achieved.

The scheme, which applied only to white employees, the black employees at Iscor at this time having no pension or similar fund at all, allowed for the payment of pensions from age 60 years. To qualify for a pension, white employees had to have ten years completed service between the ages of 20 years and 60 years at Iscor and all back service, even from prior to commencement of the fund, was taken into consideration for determining pension benefits. The pension was made payable on attaining the age of 60 years, even though the person to whom it was payable was no longer in the service of Iscor. The amount of the annual pension, half of which was paid monthly, was £1 for each year of service, plus 1% of all pensionable income during the whole period of service between the ages of 20 years and 60 years.<sup>33</sup>

Although the fund was not a provident one and no payments were made on the death of an employee before the age of 60 years, a disability pension could, under certain conditions, be paid to employees who, having completed ten years service were, through sickness or other disability, retired before the age of 60 years. Provision was also made that on the death of a pensioner, payment to his dependants of the amount of his pension would be continued for a period of 6 months. The purpose of the fund therefore was that of an old age pension fund, and as employees were not required to contribute there to, Iscor urged them to make adequate provision for themselves by means of insurance or otherwise, to

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<sup>33</sup> Iscor Pension Fund Archives, Pretoria, Iscor Pension Fund Trust Deed and Regulations, 17 June 1939 and Iscor Pension Fund Regulations, 17 June 1939.

supplement the pensions they received from Iscor. In order to assist in this way, arrangements were made with the South African Mutual Life Insurance Company for a group scheme which proved to be very successful, and is still in existence today.<sup>34</sup>

The next phase in the development of the Iscor Pension Fund took place in 1950. The dynamic policy of the Van der Bijl era continued unbroken under Dr. Meyer and was, if anything, intensified, with particular attention being devoted to the maintenance of good staff relationships. One far reaching new project which was implemented was the contributory pension scheme, amplifying the earlier one entirely financed by Iscor. In January 1950 the new principle was accepted, together with the provision of income for widows and orphans, but it was not until 18 October 1950, that the draft regulations were ready. Prepared in full collaboration with the executive of the various white trade unions, they carried the full approval of these bodies.<sup>35</sup> All white employees, both male and female, in the service immediately prior to and on the 1 January 1951 and who were under the age of 60 years on that date, became contributory members unless they elected in writing not to become members on or before 31 December 1950.

Personnel who did not become members would qualify only for the benefits which were prescribed in the regulations of the existing non-contributory scheme and Death Benefit Fund. It was, however, pointed out to employees that the contributory scheme had many very satisfactory features including the fact that members would be permitted to cede their rights to gratuities under the new contributory scheme as collateral security for home ownership scheme loans and

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> E. Rosenthal, The History of Iscor, p 712.

would thus be saved the expense of providing at least a portion of the collateral security required by the Iscor Housing Utility Company.<sup>36</sup>

Benefits, pensions and gratuities were payable under the following conditions:-

- i) On retirement at normal pensionable age of 60 years.
- ii) On voluntary retirement after age 55 years, with a reduced pension.

In respect of members retiring at age 60, pension was based on the final average income and was calculated at the rate of 1/8 of the average for each year of the period of continuous service, and gratuities were based on the final average income and were calculated at the rate of 5% of the average for each year of the period of continuous service.

The final average income would normally mean the average annual pensionable income during the last 5 years of a members's continuous service. A member therefore having not less than 10 years continuous service could retire from the service on or after attaining age 55 years, in which case he would be entitled to a pension and gratuity equal to that calculated above, reduced by 5% for each year of uncompleted service to the pensionable age of 60 years. Should a pensioner die within 6 years of his retirement the pension would be paid to his dependants for the remainder of the 6 years in question. Should a pensioner die and not leave a dependant, the amount by which the total contributions of the deceased pensioner exceeded the total pension paid out was paid to his estate. A male member retiring on or after age 55 could forego the whole or part of his gratuity in order to secure

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<sup>36</sup> Iscor Pension Fund Archives, Pretoria, Confidential Notice, The South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corp. Ltd., dated 1950-11-24 and issued by the Personnel Manager.

an annuity to his widow after his death. Should a member die in the service leaving no dependants the deceased members own contributions were paid to his estate.

Where a member became permanently incapable of efficiently discharging his duties because of infirmity of mind or body, due to no fault of his own, he could be retired from the service in which event, if he had had at least 10 years continuous pensionable service, he would be granted a retiring benefit calculated in terms of his continuous service up to the actual date of retirement. If he had had less than 10 years pensionable service, he would receive a gratuity equal to twice the contributions paid by him to the fund, plus 6% of his final average income, for each year of his period of continuous service prior to 1 January 1951. The employer paid the cost of any medical advice required. If a member retired before pensionable age through no fault of his own he was granted a gratuity equal to twice the contributions paid by him to the fund, and 6% of his final average income for each year of his period of continuous service prior to 1 January 1951.

If a member resigned voluntarily from the service before having attained pensionable age, or left the service for any reason besides those otherwise provided for, he was entitled to a gratuity equal to the sum of the contributions paid by him to the fund, plus two percent of such contributions for each complete year in excess of two years for which he had paid contributions and if he had had at least 10 years continuous service, he would be eligible for any pension and benefits which had accrued in respect of him prior to 1 January 1951, in terms of the non-contributory pension scheme. This was irrespective of his length of service prior to 1 January 1951 and a pension certificate was issued therefore.

Unless the Trustees in their discretion decided otherwise, the gratuity referred to above would not be paid to the member until the expiry of 2 years after leaving the service. Interest was added to such gratuity from the time the member left the service until the gratuity was paid.

If, after 1<sup>st</sup> January 1951, the pensionable income of a member was reduced, he could, in order to maintain the higher rate of retirement benefits, elect, with the consent of his employer, to contribute to the fund on the basis of his higher pensionable income immediately prior to such reduction. A pension or annuity granted in terms of the regulations would normally be payable monthly in arrears. Employees becoming members of the contributory pension scheme surrendered the lesser benefits to which he would have become entitled under the non-contributory pension scheme and the Death Benefit Fund. Subject to the provisions of the Income Tax Act in force from time to time a member's contributions were allowed as a deduction for Income Tax purposes, and in addition gratuities payable in terms of the regulations were not taxable in the hands of the recipient.<sup>37</sup>

Although the pension scheme was only applicable to white employees, Iscor did in the years 1944 to 1945 look into the possibility of instituting a deferred payment scheme for Basutoland blacks employed at Iscor's mine at Thabazimbi.<sup>38</sup> The Acting Director of Black Labour, T.M. Brink, pointed out that in terms of section

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<sup>37</sup> Iscor Pension Fund Archives, Pretoria, Confidential Memorandum, Iscor Pension Fund, New Contributory Pension Scheme, 13 October 1950.

<sup>38</sup> SAB, Volume 10025 Ref. 521/408/H, NTS, Deferred Payment Scheme for Basutoland Natives employed at the Corporations Mine at Thabazimbi, Memorandum dated 2 December 1944.

15 of Act No. 15 of 1911, his formal approval of the deductions from the wages of the black labourers was required before the scheme could come into operation.<sup>39</sup> J.E.K. Tucker, Iscor's Secretary, replied to this directive from the Department of Native Affairs by pointing out that the idea for such a scheme had originally arisen as a result of a request received by Iscor from the Basutoland Government to investigate the possibility of establishing such a scheme. Further, it was pointed out that the scheme itself would have no advantage to Iscor and had been drawn up solely in an attempt to meet the request of the Basutoland Government in this regard. It had also been set up on very simple lines so as to reduce to a minimum the administrative burden which would be placed on Iscor in its operation.<sup>40</sup>

The Director of Native Labour though held full that it was a standing rule that before formal approval could be given in terms of section 15 of Act No. 15 of 1911, for any company or organisation to operate a deferred payment scheme in respect of its black labourers, a security bond equal to the largest amount of deffered pay it was estimated would be in the hands of the company at any time over a period of 12 months, had to be lodged with the Director. The result was that Iscor would have to lodge a bond for £500 before they would be permitted to

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<sup>39</sup> SAB, Volume 10025 Ref. 521/408/H, NTS, Letter from Acting Director of Native Labour, T.M. Brink, to the Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria re: Deferred Pay Basutoland Recruited Natives dated 23 February 1945 ref. 82/319/27.

<sup>40</sup> SAB, Volume 10025 Ref. 521/408/H, NTS, Letter from J.E.K. Tucker, Secretary, to Secretary for Native Affairs, Department of Native Affairs, Re: Deferred Pay Basutoland Recruited Labour dated 27 March 1945.

implement the scheme.<sup>41</sup> The eventual outcome of this state of affairs was that Iscor declined to pay the £500 and the scheme therefore never came into operation.

Although the black employees did not participate in the Iscor pension fund, it was decided in 1953 that gratuities would be paid on retirement to those who had had more than 10 years service and a scheme was likewise introduced for payments during periods of illness.<sup>42</sup> Thus, to a certain extent, some arrangements were arrived at to provide black labourers with some form of social security on their retirement or absence from work due to illness, but were nowhere nearly as substantial as those provided to white employees.

In 1953 an important change was made to the pension scheme when the retirement age for all white male employees was raised to 63 years, while that of women remained at 60. Along with this went other benefits, including an option to retire earlier (nobody was allowed to remain on the staff beyond their 63<sup>rd</sup> birthday without special approval from Head Office).<sup>43</sup> Shortly afterwards, on 1 July 1954 the cost of living allowance, together with the basic earnings, plus holiday leave bonus was included in the pensionable salary. This made a huge difference at the end of the day to pension payouts.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> SAB, Volume 10025 Ref. 521/408/H, NTS, Letter from Director of Native Labour to the Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, Re: Deferred Pay Basutoland Recruited Natives, dated 18 April 1945.

<sup>42</sup> Steel in South Africa 1928 - 1953, p 112.

<sup>43</sup> Iscor Annual Reports, address by Dr. F. Meyer, Chairman of the Corporation at the 26<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Meeting of Shareholders at Pretoria on Wednesday 23 November 1955.

<sup>44</sup> Iscor News Vol. 20 No. 1, January 1955, The Iscor Pension Fund, by Q.S. Castricum, Secretary Iscor Pension Fund, p 31.

Non-European staff had to wait until 1955, when a pension fund was finally established for them, the Iscor Retirement Fund (note that they did not become members of the white Iscor pension fund), with subsidies also being paid by Iscor.<sup>45</sup>

It has been shown in this chapter that virtually from its inception Iscor had set about taking care of its white employees' financial and medical needs both during their employment years and afterwards. To further assist white employees and their families in case of unexpected loss of income due to disability or death of the employee, Iscor made arrangements for a group insurance scheme with the South African Mutual Life Assurance Society (The Old Mutual) to cater for the requirements of white Iscor employees at specially reduced premiums.<sup>46</sup> So successful did these three benefit schemes prove to be, that they are to this day still in force at Iscor and very much in the same form as when first introduced. Today the Pension Fund, Medical Benefit Fund and Group Life Insurance Scheme are compulsory for all white Iscor employees.

Although it was only very late in the history of the corporation that Iscor really began to look to retirement and medical benefits for black Iscorians and their families, these benefits were available to white Iscor employees virtually from the start of production at Pretoria Works in 1934. The question which arises here is what was the reason for this differentiation between the two racial groups when it came to the establishment of basic benefits by Iscor? No doubt, this was not a phenomenon unique to Iscor, although this does not excuse them for discriminating

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<sup>45</sup> E. Rosenthal, The History of Iscor, p 713.

<sup>46</sup> Iscor News Vol. 3 No. 9, September 1938, Notice, Group Insurance Scheme, J.E.K. Tucker, Secretary, p 596.



against black employees. Certainly, the blacks had medical benefits should they be injured or became ill while in the employ of Iscor, but what about their families? For them, unlike the white employees there was no assistance in the line of health care. Clearly financial interests played a role here, as in both retirement and medical benefit funds, Iscor was forced to invest a fair amount of capital in setting up such a fund as well as in administering it. Obviously with Iscor being a para-statal at that stage, it was important for the government of the day to be seen to be doing all that it could for white employees. By providing employment to whites and ensuring their health and comfort during old age, the government would have hoped for votes in return at election time. The answer to the question therefore is possibly a twofold one in the end, with financial as well as political interests playing a role in determining who qualified for what benefits. As will be seen in the following chapter, this did not only apply to medical and retirement benefits, but to the erection and use of recreation facilities as well.

## CHAPTER 6 - SPORT AND RECREATION

In South Africa, as elsewhere in the world, organised sport has developed around and within social life. For the white minority in the three areas of facilities, education and social context, modern sport has had a relatively uninterrupted history of growth. Modern sports quickly generated their own histories and buried themselves deeply in the social consciousness and habits of the white minority. This continuity, however, cannot be found in the history of black sport. Whereas the white clubs, schools and the communities which they served were several generations old, many of the sports facilities created by black sportsmen and women over time have been physically alienated while very few have received the constant injection of new resources in the course of time that is required to generate competitive skills which is so necessary to allow clubs to achieve high standards at all levels. It should be remembered, that in South Africa the high density of excellent facilities available to whites, the high competitive standards achieved by white sportsmen and women and above all the great love for sport which is a feature of South African society as a whole, helped make blacks extremely conscious of their lack of opportunities. South Africa was the only country in the world that by means of legislation denied equality of opportunity to its citizens on the grounds of race and was unique in applying this ideology in the field of sport.

Amongst the working class of blacks, grouped mainly around the mining areas, organised sport emerged later and was encouraged by the mining houses and churches. The mines on the Witwatersrand as well as the larger state employers promoted soccer and cricket teams while providing some facilities for use by their employees. As it was, from at least the 1930s, black sports associations began "squatting" on land which they required as sports grounds on which they could

play soccer, rugby, golf and other sports which could be played on rough terrain. Any formal facilities which they may have had, were usually provided by the municipalities and or employees.<sup>1</sup>

The Iscor Recreation and Social Club was formed in 1935 when 35 employees of Iscor under the guidance of Max Thial convened a meeting to elect a committee whose duty it would be to draw up a constitution for the club. This move was supported by Dr. Van der Bijl, who was also elected the first President of the club. He would later play a leading role in the development of sport and recreation facilities at Iscor as he saw these two aspects as being essential for the social and physical development of the worker.

Before looking at the development of sport and recreation at Iscor though, it is important to attempt to determine what is meant by these two concepts, sport and recreation. The Oxford Dictionary defines sport as a game or competitive activity, especially an outdoor one, involving physical exertion,<sup>2</sup> while recreation is defined as the process or means of refreshing or entertaining oneself by way of a pleasurable activity.<sup>3</sup>

In South Africa competitive sport is seen as being a community activity which means that in many instances the community accepts a given responsibility with regard to the supply of sports facilities. At the same time sport and recreation is

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<sup>1</sup> W.J. Baker and J.A. Mangen (Eds) Sport in Africa, Essays in Social History, Africana Publishing Company, New York, 1987, pp 231-236.

<sup>2</sup> R.E. Allen, (Ed), The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1990, p 1 117.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p 1 004.

seen as forming an important component of a persons culture and is viewed as being a valuable source of cultural education. For this reason it is felt by many people that structures should be put in place to control and regulate these activities.<sup>4</sup> This is exactly what happened at Iscor.

Where organised sport is perceived as affecting the individual competitor as well as the local community, recreation, in contrast thereto, is seen as being more intimate and local in nature. It is perceived as something that a person does voluntarily during his leisure, so as to satisfy one or other desire which the participant may have. Enjoyment of the activity is seen as being basic to the experience, but the values of recreation which give it depth and fullness of meaning include the maintenance and improvement of physical and psychic well-being, the growth and development of personality and the easing of social adjustments.<sup>5</sup>

Because of its importance in the building of a single social fabric, recreation is more than a personal responsibility. The average individual, therefore, acting on his own, cannot hope to provide adequately for all his recreational needs or even to protect his interests in the face of the influences, represented by rapid urban growth. It is society's responsibility therefore, through its institutions, to act so as to protect the remaining recreational resources. As our cities continue to grow there is an increasingly important basic human need to be provided with physical,

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<sup>4</sup> G.J.L. Scholtz, Sport en Rekreasie is nie dieselfde nie, Woord en Daad, Vol. 24, Januarie 1984, p 14.

<sup>5</sup> G.J.L. Scholtz, Sport en Rekreasie Voorsiening deur Provinsiale en Plaaslike Owerhede: Enkele Bevindinge en Aanbevelings van die R.G.N. - Sportondersoek, Park Administration, Vol. 36(1), January 1983, p 47.

mental and spiritual benefits by way of leisure and recreation. Where leisure is well utilised in constructive recreation, it forms the basis for the self-fulfilment and life enrichment of the individual, strengthening the social stability of human settlements, both urban and rural, through both the family and the community. By providing opportunities for the pursuit of leisure and recreation in human settlements this improves the quality of life, and the provision of open space and facilities for leisure should therefore be a concern of high priority.<sup>6</sup>

It was, no doubt, with all the above in mind that the Iscor Recreation and Social Club received its first impetus in 1935 when the Municipality of Pretoria agreed to set aside 10 morgan on the Old Race Course to be utilised as sport and recreation facilities and for which a nominal annual rent of £5 was charged for a period of 50 years. To this Iscor itself added the substantial amount of £35 000 for layout and buildings in June 1937, followed by a further loan of £15 000 on 30 March 1938, repayable over 30 years.<sup>7</sup>

The question of an Iscor Club had from time to time been discussed by employees at their informal gatherings and it took concrete form on 19 February 1935 when Max Thial convened a meeting at Polleys Hotel in Pretoria where it was decided to elect a temporary committee whose duty it would be to draw up a constitution for the club, which was to be read and discussed at the First Annual General Meeting of the Iscor Recreation and Social Club to be held at the Imperial Hotel on 13 March 1935.

The committee drew up the constitution which was laid upon the table at the First

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p 47.

<sup>7</sup> E. Rosenthal, The History of Iscor, pp 590-591.

Annual General Meeting. After discussions on almost all the points, it was agreed to accept the constitution with certain amendments. The membership clause of the constitution stated, that all white employees of Iscor were to be members. The word "all" however, caused a difference of opinion, as a large number of employees felt that membership should be on a voluntary basis. After a Special General Meeting held on 18 July 1935 the management committee decided to withdraw the word "all" and accept membership on a voluntary basis. Lists were circulated through the works for all interested persons to sign and in the end between 1200-1300 signatures were received.<sup>8</sup> The committee now approached the City Council for land and this request was granted.

While plans were proceeding for the formation of the sport and recreation facilities at Pretoria, the Iscor iron ore mine at Thabazimbi already had a well established recreation club. This club provided the inhabitants of the small mining village with a good cross section of sport and recreation facilities. All these facilities were well supported and made a sound contribution to the happiness of the community. It was hoped that the same would be the case in Pretoria.<sup>9</sup>

The importance of the creation and establishment of these sport and recreation clubs was the fact that sport creates the great lesson for team work, co-operation and co-ordination and that this spirit is essential to success, not only in sport, but also in executing one's daily work. Uncovering the real relationship between work

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<sup>8</sup> Iscor News Vol. 1 No. 1, January 1936, The Iscor Recreation and Social Club and all about it by CBN pp 19-20.

<sup>9</sup> Iscor News Vol. 1 No. 1, January 1936, Thabazimbi Notes by "Justinus", p 29.

and leisure is absolutely essential in understanding what is meant by working class cultures.<sup>10</sup>

Article 3 of the revised statute of the club clearly set out that the *'aim of the club is to build a spirit of interaction and to maintain and encourage friendly interaction between employees of the corporation.'*<sup>11</sup>

It was not the intention of management that life at Iscor should be all work and no play. Management's desire was to create a balance in life at Iscor with the ultimate goal being a contented staff. Management therefore sought to create an opportunity for the establishment of organised sport with this goal in mind. Iscor management strongly believed that a healthy body goes a long way towards creating a happy and contented mind and they now had all the necessary facilities to engender the physical and mental well-being which was so desirable.<sup>12</sup>

Authorities sometimes attempt to force the worker into acceptable activities, particularly team sports. More central to sport though and its relationship to culture is the concept of leisure. Leisure entails more than "free time", it requires time that is truly free from the constraints imposed by factory, mine owners, etc. It is for this reason that in certain areas it is considered ridiculous to suggest that culture can be associated with all aspects of life except those activities undertaken during their leisure time. In fact, it is usually during these periods that individuals and groups are most likely to expose their true social selves. Sporting activities,

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<sup>10</sup> H. Cantelon and R. Hollands, (Eds), Leisure, Sport and Working-class Cultures: Theory and History, Garamond Press, Toronto, Ontario, 1988, p 18.

<sup>11</sup> Iscor News Vol. 1 No. 9, September 1936, 'n Boodskap aan Iscor Sportmense, p 420.

<sup>12</sup> Iscor News Vol. 1 No. 9, September 1936, Sport - Iscor Recreation and Social Club, p 430.

therefore, should be seen as holding no cultural meaning but should rather be seen as symbolising deeper relationships and meaning.<sup>13</sup>

By 1937 development of the Iscor club was underway and the corporation had undertaken to provide members with club premises and playing fields. Club membership now numbered 1 234 with sports such as athletics, association football, baseball, cricket, tennis, rugby, inter-departmental soccer, a male voice choir, rifle club and golf being catered for.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time management had decided that it had now become necessary to provide recreation grounds for Iscor's black employees. However, suitable land first had to be obtained close to the compound. Iscor now approached the City Council in order to lease the necessary land on which the facilities could be erected.<sup>15</sup> In reply to their request the City Council agreed to lease to Iscor a portion of the industrial land lying immediately to the north of the corporation's compound, which measured 300 m by 200 m, for the nominal rental of £1 per annum. This to be subject to the Council's pleasure and could only be utilised for the purpose of erecting recreation facilities for black employees of Iscor.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> H. Cantelon and R. Hollands, (Eds), Leisure, Sport and Working-class Cultures: Theory and History, pp 67-68.

<sup>14</sup> Iscor News Vol. 1 No. 9, September 1936, New Suggested lay-out of Iscor Play Grounds, p 423.

<sup>15</sup> TAB, Volume 3/4/1096 Ref. 89/10, MPA, Letter from the Secretary South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corp. Ltd., to Town Clerk, City Council of Pretoria, dated 14 May 1937, Re.: Application to lease Recreation Ground for Native Employees.

<sup>16</sup> TAB, Volume 3/4/1096 Ref. 89/10, MPA, Letter from the Deputy Town Clerk to Mr. Bloemsa, Re: Application South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corp. to Lease Recreation Ground for Native Employees dated 11 August 1937.



Iscor now set about providing for the recreational and cultural needs of its black employees. Playing fields for sport, arenas for black war dances, as well as a wide range of sports equipment were provided. At the same time halls were built for film shows, night classes and religious services. Inter-centre sports competitions between black workers were also arranged.<sup>17</sup>

It is interesting to note though that although we may have very clear ideas about the significance of what we choose to call sport in a particular context, we don't know what sport is as a human phenomenon. In some societies sport has been compared with ritual, and it has been asked to what extent games, athletic contests, sports and dramas can be viewed as secular rituals?<sup>18</sup>

Several kinds of behaviour and action that would seem to come under the general heading of sport in modern industrial societies were not present in traditional African societies. It should not be forgotten though that sport, except for hunting, fighting, wrestling and dancing were unknown to blacks in pre-colonial Africa. Sport as we know it today was introduced into Africa by the settlers.<sup>19</sup> As many of the blacks housed in the Iscor compounds came from tribal areas or neighbouring states where organised western sport was totally unknown, the introduction of this kind of organised sport into their daily life, especially as a means of leisure, must have seemed to them to be a strange phenomenon.

It was by these means that Iscor provided for the recreation, sporting and other social needs of all employees but especially the white employees. By providing

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<sup>17</sup> Steel in South Africa, 1928-1953, p 114.

<sup>18</sup> W.J. Baker and J.A. Mangan, (Eds) Sport in Africa, Essays in Social History, p 5.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p 16.

for the construction of sports grounds and a club house on grounds obtained on favourable lease hold terms from the Pretoria City Council, management laid the ground work for the provision of what they hoped would be a healthy and relaxed work force. Thus it was that in October 1938 the new club house and sports grounds at Pretoria West, provided by Iscor for the white workers, was officially opened.<sup>20</sup>

On Christmas day 1937 the first “sports meeting” for the black employees was held and was considered by all to be a huge success. In the afternoon war dances were held and judging was done by selected members of the various tribes competing. This event was finally won by the Zulus.<sup>21</sup> Whether there was political motive in dividing the teams up into the various tribal groups, it is not possible to say, but it would certainly have made for more cohesion and control on the part of the competitors if all members of a dance group came from one tribe.

Participation in the dancing competitions in these early years was probably more prestigious to the black employees than competing in the organised “white” sporting events. Dance was seen by blacks as an appropriate sport for conduct in warfare. During their military training the young men learned war dances in which new figures were continually being created. Their purpose was to portray the changing fortunes and uncertain outcome of battle and final victory. This is similar to the role of golf in modern business (note that with the planning of Vanderbijl Park, provision was made for the laying down of an 18 hole golf

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<sup>20</sup> Iscor Annual Reports, Address by Dr. H.J. van der Bijl, Chairman of the Corporation, at the 10<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Meeting of Shareholders at Pretoria on 27 October 1939, p 4.

<sup>21</sup> Iscor News Vol. 3 No. 1, January 1938, Iscor Native Compound Xmas Sports, by G.R. Westermann, Compound Manager, p 60.

course), and of organised sport at school where the purpose of sport and officer cadet training are often hard to separate and where the cadet instructor and the sports coach are often the same person.<sup>22</sup>

Sport can therefore very definitely be seen as a form of social and political control. Sport instills discipline in the individual, helps with social integration, develops social co-operation and creates team awareness. The question could be posed though as to whether this holds good for both team and individual sports? The answer here could be no, as sportsmen who engage in individual sports often prefer not to have the responsibility of competing in team events. They tend to be individualistic in their outlook on life.

In comparison to the sporting and recreational facilities provided for the white employees, those provided for the black employees were a lot less comprehensive but this was the norm given the fact that blacks at that time were not viewed as forming part of the social community of the country. It was felt by government, as well as the vast majority of white South Africans, that blacks and whites should not be permitted to compete on equal footing, not even in sport.

Sport in South Africa has, through the decades, been distinctively politicised to a degree rare in Africa or in other societies. The laws and ideologies of apartheid and the long tradition of social segregation in South Africa are largely responsible for this. Instituted originally to preserve white control in the political and economic spheres they had, by gradual extension, come to define in political terms the circumstances under which men and women could compete or participate in

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<sup>22</sup>W.J. Baker and J.A. Mangan, Sport in Africa, Essays in Social History, p 17.

sport with each other or to which extent they could engage in other social activities. The general rule was that interracial relations were discouraged, or were even made illegal except under specific and defined circumstances.<sup>23</sup>

This monopoly of the white minority covered every aspect of social life, from sport to the economy. A plethora of laws governed the access of black South Africans to housing, transport, education, sports facilities, toilets, hospitals and playing fields. In one way or another, each of these laws hindered black sports men and women from interacting with South Africans from a different racial category. Thus it was that blacks could not use white facilities nor could they shower or change in the same rooms as other racial groups nor could they travel far from their area of residence without special permission.<sup>24</sup> Iscor, therefore, was merely abiding by the rules of the game as laid down by the government and white conventions in providing separate, if somewhat inferior facilities for its black workers, to those provided for the white employees.

On Wednesday 30 March 1938, Dr. van der Bijl, Chairman of Iscor, laid the foundation stone of the Iscor Recreation and Social Club club house. Mr. J. Dommissie, Chairman of the Recreation Club, pointed out that from the beginning of Iscor's existence it had been the Board's intention to provide facilities for the various sports which it was hoped would help to keep a good staff together. It was further stated that it was the intention of Iscor to encourage each and every white employee to sign up as a member of the club.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p 229.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p 230.

Dr. van der Bijl in delivering his speech at the stone laying ceremony declared that the fundamental spirit of co-operation and goodwill which had been evinced and which was so necessary for the success of any undertaking, could only be maintained by a healthy and contented staff, who had learned not only to work together, but also to play together. The club house, therefore, was a guarantee of the Board's view of the importance of sport as a means toward establishing a real feeling of goodwill, friendliness and esprit de corps amongst all sections of the works. It was Iscor's desire that their employees should be proud of the institution to which they belong as employees and to be just as proud of their achievements on the sports field. The sports fields of the club would afford an opportunity to members from all sections to meet in an atmosphere divorced from the more serious part of their work. It was hoped that friendships would be established which would create harmony on the sports fields as well as in the relationship of the members.<sup>25</sup>

The vision fostered by Iscor's management was commendable. What they neglected to consider, however, was the fact that with the working classes entry into the area of team sport, the traditional values of working class culture would be threatened and ideological boundaries would be created, beyond which it would be nearly impossible to go. New forms of leisure activities therefore impacted on cultural groups. Team sports usually reflected the forms used by the middle classes, namely bureaucratic organisations with a clearly delineated authority structure and rules of fair play which were determined by the middle classes.<sup>26</sup> One wonders therefore, how management could have envisaged semi-skilled and

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<sup>25</sup> Iscor News Vol. 3 No. 4, April 1938, Iscor's Club House Foundation Stone Laid, Ceremony at Sports Grounds, Dr. van der Bijl's speech, p 249.

<sup>26</sup> H. Cantelon and R. Hollands, (Eds), Leisure, Sport and Working-class Cultures: Theory and History, pp 70-72.

unskilled workers socialising on and off the sportsfield with middle and senior management? What usually happens in a situation of this nature is that the various classes gravitate towards different sports groups which tend to favour the cultural background of the participants. This was confirmed by both L.J.R. Nunez and P. Fairman during an interview, as being true of the way groups behaved at the Iscor club. An example of this would be that management would tend to participate in sports such as cricket and tennis, while the working classes would tend to gravitate towards sports such as boxing, wrestling and darts. According to Nunez and Fairman delineation on language grounds between the various sports with for example the English speaking workers tending to opt for sports such as soccer, while the Afrikaans speaking employees tended rather to play rugby was a reality at Iscor.

A further aspect of leisure activities which characterise working class culture is the fact that one normally finds a range of male-dominated cultural forms, for example the working class men's club and the pigeon fanciers' club. There is sometimes also a strong commercial base to leisure experience by way of the cinema, boxing, wrestling, dancing and the bar, all of which were present at Iscor's sport and recreation facilities at the various centres. One of the main characteristics of such activities even at Iscor, was the dominance of the male,<sup>27</sup> where the men viewed the club as a place for drinking and partying after work and over weekends and where women were not welcome. It would appear reasonable therefore that, with its increasing popularity amongst the working class, organised team sport would

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p 47; Oral evidence provided by L.J.R. Nunez and P. Fairman.

be seen as a vehicle for the replication of labour power and the transformation of the working class. Sport was therefore seen by management as a means to propagate the basic values of the middle class.<sup>28</sup>

On Saturday 22 October 1938 the Iscor Recreation Club was officially opened by Dr. van der Bijl and the opening ceremony was attended by about 1 000 people. Dommissie, Chairman of the Recreation Club, in his address stated that in a large undertaking such as Iscor, it was essential that the recreation and social needs of the employees should be well catered for. Here on the playing fields and in the social intercourse provided by these premises, would no doubt be cultivated a spirit of sportsmanship and camaraderie which it was hoped would form a strong bond between all the employees of Iscor.<sup>29</sup> Although this was the ideal, the reality was that management and the workers did not interact on the sports fields or at the club. Where the workers tended to live in Iscor's houses provided for in Pretoria West, and frequented the Iscor Club, management and skilled Iscor personnel tended to live in Pretoria's upmarket eastern suburbs, and joined elite private clubs. Thus the hoped for interaction rarely, if ever, took place.

Dr. van der Bijl, in his address to the guests, stated that it had always been his intention that together with the work which had to be carried out by the employees of the steel industry there should grow up an organisation which would provide adequately for that recreational and social side of life which was so essential in a well balanced industrial community. The club sports facilities which had now been made available to the employees included eight tennis courts and pavilion, two

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<sup>28</sup> H. Cantelon and R. Hollands, (Eds), Leisure, Sport and Working-class Cultures: Theory and History, p 73.

<sup>29</sup> Iscor News Vol. 3 No. 11, November 1938, Iscor's Clubhouse Opened, p 728.

bowling greens and pavilion, two rugby fields, two soccer fields and provision therein for hockey and cricket with a turf pitch. The club house itself comprised a lounge, library, reading room, kitchen, dining room, bar, a main hall which could seat 700, swimming pool, dressing rooms, entrance hall, secretary's offices, a flat and cloak rooms.<sup>30</sup>

Friendship and goodwill amongst employees were considered to be essential qualities in any industry and this side of human life was seen as being a necessary balancing complement to the more serious side which in the case of Iscorians manifested itself within the gates of Iscor's works. This side of life, it was hoped, would also discern and bring to light the qualities of leadership which are often born of a better understanding of human nature. Those who succeeded best in acquiring this understanding of human nature would naturally in time be afforded opportunities for developing their qualities of leadership in the management of sections of the club or as team captains.

It was hoped that when members of the Board and the principle executives competed in sport on the same basis as other employees in the organisation, as was the case at Iscor, and recognise that they are sportsmen as well, this would result in the right spirit being manifested in various ways and would contribute very materially to a general understanding of their fellow man, and would further enhance Iscor's phenomenal achievement which had in such a relatively short time made Iscor world famous and would also imbue Iscorians with the will to succeed. This, however, was not always true at Iscor and it became acceptable to see members

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Ischor News Vol. 3 No. 11, November 1938, Iscor's Clubhouse Opened, pp 729-730.



of Iscor's management at the club only when attending official functions. The club became more and more the meeting place of the Iscor worker.<sup>31</sup>

Karel Rood, MP, when addressing a gathering the night before the opening of the club house stated that in South Africa, more so than in any other country, because of its racial situation which was formed around the language question (ie English and Afrikaans), the more people could be made to work and play together, the sooner South Africans would become a happy community realising that they are all human beings, giving their best to develop the country they live in and for the benefit of those who come after. Sport, where there is no difference between rich and poor, educated or uneducated, one religion or the other, one race or the other, would sooner or later help all to realise that a man remains a man for all that. It was therefore important that a man be judged on his merits.<sup>32</sup>

Rood, however, failed to mention the fact that his statement applied only to white Iscorians, as blacks were debarred from competing or participating in any form of sport with whites. This was made even more apparent after 1948 when the Nationalist Party of Dr. D.F. Malan came to power in South Africa under the commitment of a policy of separate development. The white minority now enjoyed complete political power in the country as well as in the sporting arena.<sup>33</sup>

Thus it was that Iscor's black and white employees remained segregated in both the workplace and on the sports field. The black employees still held their annual sports meeting in the compound, while their facilities remained under

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p 730; Oral evidence of L.J.R. Nunez and P. Fairman.

<sup>32</sup> Iscor News Vol. 3 No. 11, November 1938, The Night Before, p 734.

<sup>33</sup> W.J. Baker and J.A. Mangan, (Eds), Sport in Africa, Essays in Social History, p 230.

developed in comparison with those provided for their white counterparts. On two occasions though during 1941 the black employees distinguished themselves on the “sports” field, and gained a measure of pride for themselves. At the beginning of March 1941 Iscor was invited to enter a team of Zulus to compete in a war dance at the Caledonian Grounds in Pretoria, which took place on 2 April 1941, in aid of the Allies Fair Fund. A fine trophy was donated for the occasion by the Rotarians.

For the occasion the participants consisted of Zulus from Iscor and Shangaans from the Municipality. Owing to the size of the Municipality team, it was decided that the competitors would appear in two sections with each section being allowed to dance for 15 minutes. The judges were Linington, the Native Commissioner and Turton and Smuts, both Pass Office Officials. The entire Iscor team consisted of Zulus. The dancers in the front line were the juniors, who usually take part in festival dances, such as marriage ceremonies and were not supposed to mix with “war dancers”, except on occasions when they “show-off” individually, or come forward to receive their share of meat, beer etc. The war dancers, that is the men sporting assegais and who must be over the age of 25 years, appear in “battle dress”. The leaders wear ostrich plumes, dyed in red soil and the “braves” who are distinguished by a leopard-skin strap around the upper arm, always take the foremost position.<sup>34</sup>

The dancers were fitted out at Iscor’s expense and the outfits remained the property of Iscor. The fact that Iscor supplied the outfits meant that the dancers

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Iscor News Vol. 6 No. 5, May 1941, Iscor Natives Stage War Dance, by G.R. Westerman, p 296.

could appear at the function properly attired. At the end of the competition Linington thanked the management of Iscor for making it possible for the competitors in the Iscor team to present themselves so well and commended the winners for their “true primitive expression of passion” which was instrumental in lending so much colour to the Zulu war dance.<sup>35</sup>

On 3 October 1941 the Zulus again distinguished themselves at a war dance staged once again at the Caledonian Grounds, this time in aid of the South African Gift and Comfort Fund. The night was ideal, the audience large and enthusiastic and the dancers were in superb form. The dancing was enhanced by the costumes which had been presented by Iscor and once again the team was entirely composed of Iscor Zulus. They were strikingly attired, with the more than 25 warriors carrying assegais and being decked out in full battle dress. During the early stages of the dance the proven warriors were in the front working up enthusiasm, gradually increasing in fury and shouting their war cry. Then, as they tired, they retreated into the back-ground and squatting on their heels kept up a running chorus while the younger element, in their decorative white lamb skins, moved forward to show off. After the company was exhausted they fell into a graceful heap and remained so for several minutes before setting off again with a perfect precision of movement.<sup>36</sup>

The whole evening was almost spoilt though by a mistake on the part of management in allowing the children to sit on the grass in front of the dancers. This spoilt the climax of the dance for the dancers, who were hampered by the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Iscor News Vol. 6 No. 11, November 1941, Native War Dance for Gifts and Comforts Fund, Iscor Natives distinguish themselves, by E.W., pp 768-769.

nearnes of the children. It also spoilt the enjoyment of the onlookers who were suddenly confronted by the spectacle of fleeing, shrieking children, as the dancers approached uncomfortably near. But despite this, the spectacle provided by the Iscor Zulu dancers was warmly received and helped to enhance their reputation as a great crowd puller at fund raising and other functions.<sup>37</sup>

During the Parliamentary sitting of 1944 J.S. Marwick, the Dominion Party MP for Pinetown, asked S.F. Waterson the Minister of Commerce and Industry whether all persons who become employees of Iscor were obliged upon doing so to become members of the Iscor social club for the duration of their employment and whether such a person was entitled to resign his membership whilst still remaining an employee of Iscor and if not why was this not permitted? Waterson replied that taking up employment at Iscor meant that you automatically become a member of the Iscor social club and that this was a condition of employment that employees of Iscor shall become and remain members of the Iscor social club and Medical Benefit Society as long as they remained in Iscor's employ. Marwick asked the Minister if he was not aware of cases of considerable hardship arising as a result of this policy due to the fact that the payment of fees were compulsory and meant that the lower paid worker had to pay club fees which could rather be used for the purchase of essentials. To this Waterson replied that he was not.<sup>38</sup> This compulsory requirement for Iscorians to become members of the Iscor social clubs has been a bone of contention amongst white Iscor workers through the years, especially in later years amongst those skilled employees and management

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Union of South Africa - Debates of the House of Assembly, Vol. 48, (6 March to 14 April 1944), Reported and Printed for the House of Assembly by the Unie - Volkspers Beperk, Parliamentary Printers, Cape Town, 1944, col. 2859-2860.

members who lived in the eastern suburbs of Pretoria and found that they had no use for membership of the Iscor Club. At the mine centrums though, this has never been a problem, as social life in these towns has always revolved around the Iscor clubs, whether the town inhabitants are employees of Iscor or not. Often their only form of sport and recreation is provided for by Iscor and this still holds true today.

On Monday 6 October 1947 the first fair and sports day ever held by the employees of Iscor took place at the Pretoria Club and Iscorians showed their appreciation of efforts made on their behalf by the club committee by turning out in their thousands. The main object of the day was to promote the fraternisation of Iscorians on their own club grounds. With this in mind inter-departmental events were held, but the highlight of the day once again was the war dance carried out by the blacks from the Iscor compound. The day had been organised for Iscorians, but the most gratifying sight it was felt at the end of the day, was the evident enjoyment and zest displayed by the children who by all indications thoroughly enjoyed the outing.<sup>39</sup>

On 29 August 1945 yet another chapter was opened in Iscor's drive to provide sporting and recreational facilities for all its white employees when the Iscor Recreation and Social Club, Vanderbijl Park, was opened by Dr. van der Bijl.<sup>40</sup> This was expanded further with the opening of the Emfuleni Golf and Country Club at Vanderbijl Park four years later. Dr. Meyer, now Chairman of Iscor, speaking at the opening ceremony said that this function was further proof of the

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<sup>39</sup> Iscor News Vol. 12 No. 11, November 1947, The Arbor Day Fair at Iscor Club, p 975.

<sup>40</sup> Iscor News Vol. 15 No. 6, June 1950, Iscor Recreation and Social Club Vanderbijl Park, Something About Our Club by Mona Brown, p 474.

philosophy of the late Dr. van der Bijl who believed that work and play were of parallel importance.<sup>41</sup> The opening of the Golf Club was followed on 28 February 1950 with the opening of the Vanderbijl Park swimming bath, equipped with all the essentials including flood lighting.<sup>42</sup>

Thus the precept, '*mens sana in corpore sano*', is one which led Iscor to claim the treatment of the welfare of white Iscorians as equal in importance to the production of steel itself. For this reason therefore, with the establishment of the steel works came the establishment of amenities and facilities designed to cater fully for the welfare of the employees, especially the white employees. Not least of these was the building of sport and recreation clubs at each of Iscor's major centres.<sup>43</sup>

In evaluating Iscor's approach to sport and recreation the following must be kept in mind. Many of Iscor's highly skilled engineers and managers had been, especially during the early years, brought out from overseas, due to the shortage of such skills in South Africa at that time. The bulk of these employees came out from England, with its history and tradition of colonialism. No doubt their experience of public school prefectship and team captaincy led neatly and effectively into the successful practice of "indirect rule" as the art of governing and controlling black races. They had produced an English gentleman with an almost passionate conception of fair play, of protection of the weak and of playing

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<sup>41</sup> Iscor News Vol. 14 No. 4, April 1949, The Emfuleni Golf and Country Club Opened, p 236.

<sup>42</sup> Iscor News Vol. 15 No. 3, March 1950, Opening of the Vanderbijl Park Swimming Bath, p 206.

<sup>43</sup> Iscor News Vol. 17 No. 6, June 1952, Editorial, p 491.

the game. They had taught him personal initiative and resource and how to command and obey.<sup>44</sup> It was these persons who comprised the majority of the policy and decision makers at Iscor during this period of the corporation's history.

Under the creed of the interwar years, colonial and company administration seemed both to require and reflect the initiative of the quarter-back, the quick thinking of the scrum-half, the dogged determination of the forward, the decision and on occasion the courage of the lone full-back. Games, it was felt, taught a young man how to look after himself at a time when he would often find himself left to his own resources. As sports captain he would no doubt have learned above all how to lead by example, to generate co-operation without resentment and to co-ordinate rather than to command.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps it was this which Iscor's management, and especially Dr. van der Bijl, wished to achieve in the long term with their sports and recreation policy. As we have seen above, the same would not have been expected of Iscor's black workers, as they would have been expected to obey and not co-ordinate as was in line with government policy of the day, of keeping blacks subservient in the economy and social arena.<sup>46</sup>

In the light of the above, Iscor's provision of sports facilities for its black employees was far from satisfactory and also fell short of what was being provided for by the Rand mining companies as well as those in the Free State. Iscor, in line with government policy, treated its black employees as second rate citizens and provided them with the bare essentials, possibly to appease the conscience of management, but more likely to appease the needs and aspirations of their black

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<sup>44</sup> W.J. Baker and J.A. Mangan, (Eds), Sport in Africa. Essays in Social History, p 82.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p 107.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, pp 231-236.

employees. If the amount of money spent on facilities for Iscor's white employees is compared to that expended on facilities for black employees then Iscor can not be proud of the role which it played in failing to uplift its black employees in socio-political terms nor in economic terms. Iscor, therefore, merely expanded on accepted government policy in this regard.



## CHAPTER 7 - CONCLUSION

In 1928 the foundations had been laid in South Africa for the building of the country's first economically viable steel plant. As has been pointed out, the founding of Iscor was carried out for two reasons. The first, and possibly the most important, was for strategic reasons, as a country not producing its own steel is severely at risk during a crisis. This South Africa discovered during the First World War when supplies of steel became critically scarce. The South African government at this time realised that if they wished to become strategically self sufficient in military terms, they would have to be able to supply their own steel.

An integral part of the above was that in planning the establishment of this industry and in designing the works to the smallest detail, it was not to exceed a cost of production higher than the lowest to be found in Europe. If this could be attained, and considering the high cost of importing steel into Southern Africa from Europe, success would be assured. Thus it was important from the start that Iscor be designed to operate on modern lines with a low cost of production. This Iscor achieved within its first few years of operation.

With regard to the personnel for operating the works, some of the key men had to be imported due to the lack of skills in South Africa, but as this was an expensive process, care had to be taken not to import more than was absolutely necessary. To cut costs, some of the men were trained locally. Further, it was Iscor's intention to man the works with white labour with possibly a few exceptions. It was believed that this policy would yield better results in a modern highly mechanised works such as was to be found at Iscor and the estimates of production

costs were based entirely on white labour. This approach proved successful on the construction site, but proved to be too expensive once production began.<sup>1</sup>

The second reason given for the founding of Iscor was the poor white problem. The combination of rapid urbanisation and industrialisation on the one hand and serious droughts affecting agriculture on the other hand, led to an increase in the number of poor whites in the 1920s. This prompted the government to look at means of improving the lot of these people. The most effective way was by the creation of industries in strategically critical areas. Hence the founding of Iscor in 1928.

As has been pointed out, the local labour pool did not possess these skills and it therefore became necessary to import skilled white labour, but at a premium. The wages paid to these persons could not be paid to local labour as the cost would have been prohibitive. As it was, Iscor discovered quickly that it was not economically viable to rely solely on white labour and thus Iscor was forced to turn to the use of cheaper black labour. The conflict between the use of black or white labour led to much political debate and the Afrikaners especially, from whom the greatest proportion of poor whites originated, felt very strongly about blacks replacing whites in the work place.

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<sup>1</sup> H.J. van der Bijl, Notes on the Economics of the Pretoria Iron and Steel Works of the South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corporation Limited, Paper read 19 May 1932, before the Economic Society of South Africa, Johannesburg Branch, Iscor Archives.

The racial conflict at Iscor during the early years was thus mainly between the Afrikaans speaking white employees and the blacks over the increasing use of black labour at Iscor. After the NP victory in 1948, legislation was introduced to regulate black employment in the industry and to protect the “rights” of the white Afrikaners. It was felt in certain NP circles that the Afrikaner had not yet been granted their rightful place in Iscor and that opportunities in every sphere had still not been offered to them. It was further felt that under the Smuts Government Afrikaners had been denied their rightful opportunity of maximised employment in mining and industry. It was also felt that the Afrikaners language had been neglected.<sup>2</sup> In order to right these perceived injustices the NP Government after 1948 set about introducing legislation which controlled economic and social life in South Africa. In this way the threat by blacks to white dominance of industry and sport in South Africa was halted. This effectively meant that at Iscor more and more money was spent on white employees’ salaries and social, medical and retirement needs than were spent on those of the black employees.

On the socio-economic side Iscor did much for their white employees, investing large sums of money in housing, sport and medical facilities, as well as establishing medical and pension benefit schemes for them. There can be little doubt that white Iscorians reaped the benefits of the segregation policies of the various South African governments, and especially that of the NP Government while the black workers were viewed merely in terms of providing cheap manual

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<sup>2</sup> Union of South Africa - Debates of the House of Assembly, Vol. 69, (3 June to 30 June 1949), Reported and printed for the House of Assembly by the Unie-Volkspers Bpk., Parliamentary Printers, Cape Town, 1949, col. 7536-7538; Union of South Africa - Debates of the House of Assembly, Vol. 86, (17 May to 15 June 1954) Reported and Printed for the House of Assembly by the Unie-Volkspers Bpk., Parliamentary Printers, Cape Town, 1954, col. 5532-5535.

labour. They were only of worth to the corporation so long as they could be economically exploited. Once this failed, Iscor began to move more and more towards mechanisation at the expense of the unskilled black worker.

It was during this period of primary importance to Iscor to establish and maintain a stable, contented and loyal white work force. In order to achieve this goal, vast sums of money were expended on supplying the above facilities and securities to white employees, while the needs of the black employees with regard to housing, sports facilities, retirement benefits and medical aid for their families were overlooked. This was central to Iscor's labour policy during these years and helped regulate labour relations at the corporation. Dr. van der Bijl saw a healthy and contented work force as being indispensable to Iscor and further saw it as the duty of the corporation to provide the means to achieve and maintain this state of affairs, especially with regard to the white employees.

There can be little doubt, if all that has been discussed is taken into consideration, that this proved to be a successful policy. It can not be denied that there were occasions when worker dissatisfaction threatened to lead to labour unrest, especially during the war years, as well as there being one or two strikes during this period. On the whole though the work force at Iscor, both black and white, remained very stable during these years and especially amongst the white employees it was not unusual to find sons of Iscor employees following in their fathers' foot steps by also joining the corporation. In fact, L.J.R. Nunez mentioned in his oral evidence that it was his father's greatest wish that he should also join Iscor. The fact that he did join Iscor before his father's death was of great solace to his father on his death bed. This desire to have family members join the corporation

tended to create a feeling of being part of the “Iscor family” amongst employees, and made it very difficult for them to resign from the corporation, especially where other family members were also employed by Iscor. Whether this was also the case amongst black employees has been impossible to determine, due to the lack of a black pension fund during this period which could have allowed for employee records to be researched. It is highly unlikely though that black employees would have reacted in the same way as their white colleagues in this regard, as they were never subjected to the subtle indoctrination to which white employees and their families were, by way of bursaries, scholarships, holiday employment, social activities etc. Right from birth children of white Iscor employees were subjected to the Iscor culture and in this way were groomed to be good future Iscorians. Thus it can be said that in regard to creating a loyal and stable work force, Iscor was successful.

It is interesting to note though, that as important as these factors were to Iscor’s way of ensuring a loyal and stable work force during the period under discussion, so unimportant have they now become. With the new approach to business management, it is felt that the company should concentrate its resources only on those aspects forming part of its core business, and in Iscor’s case, this means concentrating only on mining and iron and steel production. All business not directly related to this has been curtailed, or is in the process of being so or is being investigated. Thus we find that the Iscor Club in Pretoria, for so many years a landmark in Pretoria West, closed its doors at the end of 1996,<sup>3</sup> while most of the other clubs are, where economically viable, being privatised. Iscor no longer sees it as being part of its duty to oversee employees’ leisure activities.

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<sup>3</sup> Metro, 6 December 1996, Iscor en Stadsraad praat nog oor klubgrond, reported by Willem Knoetze.

With regard to employee housing, Iscor has taken steps to sell 10 000 homes currently owned by the corporation. These homes are situated in Pretoria, Newcastle and Vanderbijlpark and are being sold by Yskor Landgoed, the property administration arm of Iscor, as part of Iscor's overall policy of realising the assets of non-core businesses. At the same time employees are being invited to buy these homes on attractive repayment terms, as part of Iscor's campaign to empower its employees by aiming to have all Iscor employees as homeowners by the year 2000. Iscor is expecting to gross R500 million from the sale of these homes, with an expected profit of around R350 million, which will go into Iscor's general investment programme, which includes projects such as Saldanha Steel.<sup>4</sup>

The whole basis upon which Iscor was built has now been altered. Where poor whitism was one of the reasons given for founding Iscor and the corporation was built up around the loyalty of its people, it being seen as one of its duties to look after the well being of its employees, this is no longer the case. Now only lip service is paid to loyalty and both employer and employee have become exploitative, with retrenchment, as a result of downsizing and restructuring, being the order of the day on Iscor's side. Employees, on the other hand, see Iscor in many instances, merely as a stepping stone to other employment opportunities outside the corporation.

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<sup>4</sup> Die Beeld, 5 December 1996, Iscor verkoop 10 000 goedkoop huise; Business Day, 28 November 1996, Iscor aim to sell 10 000 houses to employees; The Citizen, 29 November 1996, Iscor sells homes to staff, Cut rate bonds for Iscor staff; The Star, 28 November 1996, Iscor's residential arm to raise R350m, reported by Roy Cokayne.

It would appear, therefore, that all the things which Dr. Van der Bijl strived for between 1928 and 1948 and Dr. Meyer after him, and which were so successful in turning Iscor into the massive industry it became, have been lost somewhere along the way. The aspect of the importance of the people in the organisation has been lost, with economic factors becoming all important, while the social aspect of managing a work force has become neglected. It should be remembered though that the above really only applied to the relationship between Iscor and their white employees.

Thus it is that the economic and socio-political factors present in any company is the golden thread which regulates labour relations within the company. It was these factors which between 1934 and 1955 created a stable work force for Iscor, thus providing the means for her to develop from a country's dream of strategic independence in the iron and steel market, while at the same time providing employment for increasing numbers of poor whites, to the industrial giant which Iscor has become today.

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(BVE) Enemy, Custodian of Enemy Property,		
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(CPS) Director of Civilian Protective Services (1939-1947),		
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(KOG) Controller and Auditor General,		
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Iscor Steel Melting Division, Invitation to Dinner at the Metro Hotel, Pretoria, on 7 May 1938, at 8pm., to Celebrate the Production of the first 1 000 000 Tons of steel.

The Chairman and Board of Directors of Iscor, Invitation to Mr. and Mrs. L.P. Nunez to attend the Opening Ceremony of the Club House of the Iscor Recreation and Social Club at 4pm. on Saturday, 22 October 1938.

The Chairman and Committee of the Iscor Recreation and Social Club, Invitation to Mr. and Mrs. L.P. Nunez to attend a concert given by its Musical Section in the Club Hall at 8pm. on Saturday, 22 October 1938.

The Chairman and Board of Directors of Iscor, Invitation to Mr. and Mrs. L.P. Nunez to attend the Opening of the Iscor Works, Vanderbijl Park by His Excellency, the Governor-General, at Vanderbijl Park on Saturday, 4 October 1952, at 2.30pm.

Seating Ticket for the Official Opening of Iscor Works, Vanderbijl Park, Mr. and Mrs. L.P. Nunez.

South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corporation, Limited, Programme of Proceedings in Connection with the Opening of the Corporation's Iron and Steel Works at Vanderbijl Park at 2.30pm. on Saturday, 4 October 1952.