

## CHAPTER NINE

## CONCLUSION: THE COLOUR OF CLASS

Throughout this paper one theme has persisted: the interaction of race and class as conceptually distinct categorizations of Zambian society. In the determination of relations between groups the analysis has tended to attach prior importance to class. At the same time it is apparent that a simple two-class model comprising the categories of worker and owner of means of production is inadequate for a treatment of changes occurring over the last four decades. Rather it is necessary to consider a multiplicity of interest groups or classes whose relations to one another have been largely governed by their position *vis-à-vis* the means of production. I have argued that the persistence of the colonial 'economic base', with the copper mining industry retaining a central role, has limited changes in the social structure. On the other hand, whereas relations between groups or classes may not have altered significantly over this period, the idiom in which these relations are expressed, the channels through which conflict and co-operation take place, the recruitment to and consequently the membership of different groups, have all changed significantly. Such changes have in turn modified the social structure but only within limits defined by the 'economic base'.

Prior to Independence it was possible to focus on four major groups whose relationships with one another were defined by their relationships to the means of production, in this case the mining industry. The colonial and federal governments performed administrative and coercive roles to maintain law and order and to develop the necessary infrastructure to exploit the country's mineral resources. Thus the Government developed transport routes, imposed taxes to force villagers to enter wage employment in the towns, established a police force, etc. The mining companies controlled and owned the means of production and tried to maximize profit within constraints defined by the Government and at least two other interest groups, viz. white employees who performed skilled and managerial functions and black semi-skilled and unskilled labour. The relationships between these groups were at no time simple, being largely determined by a complex set of relations to the means of production. Thus, despite differences over such issues as labour policy, distribution of profit, etc., stemming from their different roles, in general the Companies and the Government tended to co-operate in the extraction of 'surplus value' from the labour of both white and black. This inevitably precipitated conflict between white labour

and the companies and between black labour and the companies, of which strike action was one manifestation. Hostility between white and black labour, though cast in the idiom of race, in fact derived from a discrepancy in power largely determined by the different labour markets for skilled and unskilled workers. So long as unskilled black labour was in plentiful supply, not organized into a Union and without political power, while skilled and managerial labour was in correspondingly short supply, access to all but semi-skilled and unskilled labour could be controlled by and restricted to whites. When the companies threatened to advance blacks into jobs 'reserved' for white, they encountered determined resistance from the white trade union. At other times the white trade union would come to the assistance of the companies by performing semi-skilled and unskilled tasks during strikes by the African workers.

In the years after the Second World War the power discrepancy between black and white labour was to diminish, albeit slowly. Access to an external 'court of appeal'—the British Government—led in 1948 to the formation of an African trade union which was recognized by the mining companies. Fearing competition from organized cheap black labour, the leadership of the white trade union tried to incorporate the black trade union into its own organization. Racial animosities and the policy of the British Government prevented such a development, and the African trade union moved from strength to strength, eventually at the expense of white labour.

Though race figures prominently in this analysis as the idiom of conflict and co-operation, none the less the basis for interaction derives from the conflicting and coincident class interests of the various groups. Relations between groups similarly placed with respect to the means of production, as described above, occurs again and again in both American and British labour history. In these countries skilled workers—craftsmen or artisans—sought to protect their privileged position as a labour aristocracy by establishing unions to restrict entry to their occupations. Wherever possible, criteria such as colour, language, immigrant status or education were used as criteria for exclusion from the occupation. The principle of preservation of privilege through the restriction of labour supply is as much a characteristic of 'Anglo-American' labour history as it is of Southern African labour history. As unskilled labourers became increasingly powerful through the changing conditions of the labour market, the extension of franchise and the formation of strong unions, so the 'craft' unions had to relinquish some of their privilege and were frequently absorbed into industrial unions alongside unskilled workers. Similar developments have taken place in Zambia as the black worker gained power.<sup>1</sup>

The rise to power of a black political elite opened up the possibility of changing the character of the 'economic base'. Though tremendous strides have been made, faced with obstacles of dependency on external economic powers and inherited economic and educational backwardness, the mining industry remains the backbone of the economy, with diversification still in its early stages. As a result the relationship between the four groups referred to above remains much as before. The Government and mining companies continue to co-operate in the extraction of surplus value from the mineworkers. Skilled labour is still at a premium, and consequently wide wage differentials separate what are mainly expatriate jobs from the mass of black workers. Tension persists between expatriates in skilled jobs and Zambians in less skilled jobs based on the threat the latter pose to the former. However, in contrast to the colonial period, the present status and power of the expatriate prevents him from openly expressing the tension. Antagonisms between black labour and management and between white labour and management continue, but the previous channels for articulating conflict have been dissolved. In addition the idiom of such conflict has altered. Whereas previously hostility towards the ruling class was couched in terms of race, now the workers speak more as a class in opposition to another class. Similarly, as I have shown elsewhere (Burawoy, 1972), many of the attitudes of the black political elite are infused with prejudices, exhortations and assumptions typical of a ruling class. The expansion of training and educational facilities has led to changing patterns of recruitment, with Zambians moving into positions hitherto the preserve of whites. In this way the composition of groups has changed considerably over the last decade.

Before Independence stratification by race and by class tended to coincide, and the tendency to focus on race to explain behaviour diverted attention from the underlying class structure. The rise to power of a national leadership has made it more difficult to draw upon a racist ideology to de-emphasize the importance of class. In its stead other 'idea' systems have emerged which have played down and in some cases denied the existence of stratification by class.

Nationalism of which Zambianization is a special case, plays an ambiguous role. On the one hand it is a means of mobilizing the population in a concerted effort to pursue a publically acceptable goal such as raising standards of living, while on the other hand it may also serve to consolidate the *status quo* and unite society for the benefit of a particular class (Saul, 1972). It is in this light that we may view Zambianization, which is as much a policy of replacing foreign blacks by Zambian nationals as it is of substituting blacks for whites. As examples from other countries in Africa illustrate, appeals to localization often reflect a

growing tension in society and may be a response to internal dissensions—that is, an attempt to promote unity and cohesion. Nationalism and localization, though they may have many beneficial consequences, nevertheless do not, *per se*, alter the class structure of society; rather, they tend to obscure it.

Two types of 'models' of the 'new nations' have tended to blur underlying class structures. The 'political development' framework focuses on society as a whole, emphasizing 'national integration', 'mobilization', 'regulation of conflict', 'economic growth', etc. The obstacles to 'development' are to be found in 'traditional' institutions such as kinship and religion and in 'traditional' belief systems. Relatively little attention is paid to intrinsic or structural conflict between different interest groups. The concern is with increasing goods and resources rather than their distributions. Such studies tend to portray the ruling elite as dedicated to 'modernization' and the 'development' of the nation, while ignoring the pursuit of vested class interests.

A second set of studies portray the ruling class as helpless victims of a neo-colonial conspiracy in which political independence has been granted but economic control retained by the ex-colonial powers. In the case of many of the 'new nations' economic control has indeed remained, to a large extent, in foreign hands. But as Fanon (1965) has described in vivid language, the new leadership has also profited from such external control. The 'neo-colonial' argument, as a ready-made ideology, provides convincing excuses for the failings of the new leaderships—failings which, in fact, may have originated from the pursuit of vested interests of a ruling class. It redirects attention away from the class structure of society and explains internal dissension in terms of forces of external subversion.

Both models express partial truths which must be supplemented by an analysis of the class structure of the societies under consideration. It has been my purpose to point to the persistence of a colonial economic base which has set limits on change in a social structure, characterized by conflicting interests groups or classes. In addition to the forces of 'neo-colonialism' and 'underdevelopment', the vested interest of a ruling class obstructs the transformation of the economic base.

## NOTES

- 1 For a very readable account of British and American labour histories see Pelling (1960, 1963).

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