

## ANOTHER LOOK AT THE MINERWORKER

by

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Development theory as it is formulated in political science has all too frequently offered the research worker remote and abstract theoretical constructs with which to handle the political realities of a region of the world that has come to be referred to as 'developing'. Theories of 'modernization' and 'development' which have emerged from the redirection of American political scientists towards synchronic studies involving cross 'cultural' comparisons have sometimes dwelt on untested and invalid concepts divorced from their empirical referents. Their frameworks have often carried with them assumptions more appropriate to their conception of American society and to their own position in that society. For example, often embedded in such studies is the assumption that liberal democracy, as it is known in the West, is what the new nations are striving to achieve. They have looked upon the poorer parts of the world as emerging from a tribal state and assumed that a presumed set of tribal values pose as obstacles to change and 'modernization'. It may be argued that the stress on values at the expense of structural elements has been their major weakness and partly accounts for the dissonance between optimistic analyses and the unfolding realities of the newly 'independent' States.

In many ways Robert Bates's book, *Unions, Parties and Political Development*,<sup>1</sup> rids itself of such drawbacks; his book provides a particularly refreshing change in that its conclusions are preceded by a wealth of empirical data collected in the field by studying the mining community of Kitwe, the largest town of the Zambian Copperbelt, where he stayed for over a year. The study is doubly welcome because of the paucity of substantial works on urban and industrial Zambia since Independence, continuous with the prestigious studies associated with the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute.<sup>2</sup>

Social scientists, and particularly political scientists, are confronted with a series of practical problems of research technique wherever they make their studies, but in a newly independent nation many of these

<sup>1</sup> Bates, Robert H., *Unions, Parties, and Political Development*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971.

<sup>2</sup> One notable exception is a collection of short papers edited by J. Clyde Mitchell (1969).

problems present themselves in exaggerated form. Where political institutions have evolved and have been modified in accordance with the changing needs of the parental society and where such institutions are endowed with legitimacy and, in some cases, sanctity by the participants in the political processes, the social scientist may justifiably attempt to derive social, economic and political behaviour from those institutions. On the other hand, in what was, until recently, a colonial territory many of the formal political institutions, being transplants into a social structure incongruent with that of the metropolitan country, are neither continuous with the needs of the new nation nor legitimized by participants as appropriate agents in the political process. Yet, to the mystification of many, politicians speak in the democratic idiom of these transplants when justifying and explaining political behaviour determined by totally different institutions, concepts and interests. Therefore what is of interest is less the way the formal institutions constrain human behaviour than the way in which the participants in political processes operate within and between the alien structures, manipulating them for their own ends and justifying action in their idiom.

If in England the importance of these very same formal institutions as determinants of political behaviour is being questioned, so the social scientist in Zambia must be all the more acutely aware of the dissonance between formal structures and public debate on the one hand and actual political behaviour on the other. Only someone very familiar with the 'informal' politics of Zambia could give an adequate interpretation of public statements, the national Press, parliamentary debates, the responses of a politician to an interview or the results of a questionnaire. This is all the more true in the absence of a heritage of political behaviour studies and where the researcher, be he a national or an expatriate, black or white, encounters a blanket of suspicion when prying into the shady corners of political action. Such elements of mistrust, unless penetrated, can invalidate almost any study made on the basis of superficial acquaintance with actors in formal interviews. The mistrust derives not so much from the strangeness of studies of political behaviour as from the sensitivity of powerful groups to criticism and the feelings of political insecurity prevailing at all levels of Zambian society. The problems of the macro study are further compounded by the shortage of reliable empirical data and the paucity of substantial micro studies to illuminate an interpretation of society at the macro level.

In these circumstances the approach of the political anthropologist has much to commend itself. In so far as he explores the response of the mineworkers, the trade union officials and the party officials in a single

community to a particular set of Government demands, Bates does in fact adopt such a technique. By prolonged contact with the same group of people he had clearly managed to break down many of the barriers of suspicion that would obstruct the more casual observer from determining what was actually going on and how people were really behaving. Given the racial and political tensions of Copperbelt society, Bates must be congratulated for providing the reader with concrete information to cogitate upon, much of which would be unobtainable from research techniques other than direct observations over a prolonged period.

The shortcomings of a micro study revolve around the difficulty of assigning significance to its conclusions for the wider political system. The political scientist interested in a macro analysis can use existing micro studies to arrive at an informed interpretation of the wider system, or, where such studies are too few and inadequate, he can undertake his own micro study and extrapolate his findings to embrace the wider system through an informed and critical analysis of the available macro data. In arriving at a macro analysis Bates, as will become increasingly clear, does not altogether follow such a line of attack.<sup>3</sup> He makes his starting point the uncritical acceptance of management's and Government's interpretation of the wider political and economic system and in this inevitably distorted light—the partial truths of public statements and management statistics—interprets his observations at the micro level. Rather than allowing the data collected at the micro level to inform his analysis of the macro level, he forces an erroneous interpretation of the wider system on to the data collected at the micro level, giving rise to conclusions not always in consonance with that data.

Even though we are presented with a considerable amount of empirical material, it is clear that the writer felt it necessary to omit a great deal of information. Here again the social scientist faces a dilemma obviously present in any study but particularly acute in a country such as Zambia without a tradition of critical social analysis. Bates had to be careful not only to avoid getting his informants into trouble but also to avoid jeopardizing the future of the social scientist in Zambia. Since he depended on management's co-operation, he was correspondingly restricted from criticizing it if he was to be sure of publication. Nevertheless the academic has a duty to his 'profession' and cannot therefore avoid truths because others may regard them as unpleasant; he must instead try to present them in such a manner that they appear inoffensive.

<sup>3</sup> One technique of extrapolating a micro study to the macro level is illustrated in Gluckman (1960) and Mitchell (1956).

Bates avoids the issue, to the detriment of his work, by adopting a theoretical framework derived directly from the stated position of those who wield power, namely management, Government and the trade union leadership. He writes at the beginning of his book:

My concern in this study is with the ability of government to fulfill goals and regulate the behaviour of groups in order to realize objectives. As a result, government policies are adopted as the starting point of the analysis. The acceptance of the government's goal as given, and therefore seemingly as justified, is a by-product of its principal concern, and does not represent a basic value commitment. [Bates, p. 6]

Bates is concerned with the efficacy with which the Government implements its stated objectives and in so doing accepts at face value the public statements of the political leadership. As argued above, he is thus imposing a macro interpretation on the data of a micro study. It is hoped that this paper will show how such an approach distorts his portrayal of the Zambian mineworker, of Government, the dominant party, management, trade union and the relations between them; how it leads him to ignore major variables determining worker behaviour and thus to conclusions which are only partially true.

## I

Bates's primary focus is the 'failure of Zambia to reverse the private preoccupations of its workers' (p. 1), and in particular the inability of 'the union and party structures to regulate and control the behaviour of their members in the mining industry' (p. 2) in accordance with stated Government policy. This has two components. First, a Government labour policy which regards increasing consumptionist demands by the workers, increasing 'indiscipline' and strike action as detrimental to the public interest. Second, a social justice policy which regards racial discrimination and racial inequities as incompatible with the ideals of independent Zambia. In areas where they both apply, however, the two principles are inextricably opposed to one another, which is one reason for the Government's failure to carry out its stated policy to the extent it would perhaps have liked. For it is in terms of reducing inequalities between expatriate and 'local'<sup>4</sup> pay scales that the Zambian miners argued for, and received in 1966, considerable pay increases which in turn represent violations of the Government labour policy of restraint. Bates is mainly concerned with the implementation of the principle of restraint through the intermediary organization of the

<sup>4</sup> The term 'local' is used by management to refer to labour which is on local conditions of service, i.e. not expatriate conditions. In practice it means black labour.

union and the party, but, as his study amply illustrates, one compelling reason for its 'failure' is the availability of a contradictory social justice principle to justify wage increases. He argues that not only in those areas where the social justice principle does apply but also in those areas where it does not, such as over the issues of strike action, absenteeism, restriction of output, etc., the Government labour policy has failed. Before considering why the union and party structures have failed as agencies of restraint the evidence presented in chapter four to substantiate the claim must be examined. The first part of this paper will be a discussion of the views held by management, Government and workers and their relationship to actual behaviour.

*The evidence for the 'failure thesis'*

First we must take a closer look at the indices of worker behaviour which Bates uses to establish the 'failure thesis'. Taking absentee figures for two work points at Rokana mine, the Smelter and Central Shaft, Bates's source—information submitted by the mines to the Productivity seminars with Government in early 1968—show that the number of cases of absenteeism has steadily increased since 1964. However, neither his book nor his source indicates how many employees are represented at these two work points. All that is shown is the total number of employees at the mine. In actual fact Central Shaft and the Smelter represent only about a quarter of the employees at Rokana. If we were to include other work points such as Mindola Shaft, which itself represents over a quarter of Rokana employees, a slightly different picture might emerge. Bates does not, interestingly enough, refer to a comment made in his source about Mindola Shaft:

Taking Mindola Shaft as an example the number of employees disciplined for absenteeism has decreased by 16 per cent since 1964 to the end of 1967, using an annual figure . . . [Rhokana<sup>5</sup> Corporation (1969)]

The second point is that, if continued into 1968, the trend of increasing absenteeism shows a reversal<sup>6</sup> (see Table 1). Thus if 1968 figures are included the 'failure thesis' becomes less tenable.

The third point revolves around the nature of the mine management's measure of absentee levels. The figures cited are not the number of shifts lost owing to absenteeism, as is normally the measure of absenteeism, but the number of disciplinary offences under the heading of absenteeism. There are important distinctions between the two. First,

<sup>5</sup> The spelling of Rhokana was changed to Rokana in 1969.

<sup>6</sup> Rhokana Corporation, submission to Copper Industry Service Bureau, *Productivity and Discipline* (February 1968).

the number of disciplinary cases does not discriminate between absenteeism of different lengths. Thus while the number of disciplinary cases may increase, at the same time the number of days actually lost could quite easily fall if mineworkers tended to be absent for shorter rather than longer periods at a time. If, for example, there was an increase in the severity of the punishment for lengthy absenteeism, mineworkers might be tempted to reduce the number of days absent each time they decided to withdraw their labour while increasing the number of occasions on which they withdrew it. The second distinction between the disciplinary case and shifts lost owing to absenteeism revolves around management's definition of a disciplinary case. This is contingent on three factors; the supervisor who brings up the case, the offender

Table 1

Work point	NUMBER OF DISCIPLINARY CASES OF ABSENTEEISM				
	1964	1965	1966	1967	1968
Central Shaft Smelter	445	678	980	1,007	832
	228	289	418	401	286
Work strength on mine	9,414	10,331	10,764	10,653	10,689

going absent and the personnel officer or disciplinary officer recommending that the absence is inexcusable and must therefore be registered as an 'offence' or disciplinary case. It is management's definition of what is to be regarded as avoidable and unavoidable absenteeism—the absence culture<sup>7</sup>—that inevitably affects the number of disciplinary cases. If the absence culture or disciplinary code changes so the number of offences will also change. Bates in fact considers this in one of his footnotes (n. 15, pp. 239–41). He suggests that the observed increases in absenteeism may be due to less severe penalization but that this is refuted by what he discovers to be increases in severity of penalization over the period in question. However, it is equally plausible to postulate that an increase in the severity of the disciplinary code will lead to an increase in the number of cases registered as a disciplinary offence. For, given that the overall rate of absenteeism is low, as will be indicated later, what may appear avoidable to management may appear unavoidable to the worker. Thus increases in the severity of the disciplinary code would bring cases previously unchargeable under the category of chargeable offences and in this way increase the number of

<sup>7</sup> For the concept of 'absence culture' see Hill and Trist (1953).

cases recorded. To the extent that either of these interpretations of the number of 'cases' of absenteeism is correct—and Bates doesn't attempt to counter them—so the figures produced in his work do not necessarily support the 'failure thesis'.<sup>8</sup>

An examination of absentee rates at Rokana during the period under consideration, as opposed to a reliance on the number of disciplinary cases, is made difficult by the absence of reliable data. Table 2 does, however, illustrate the trend when strike figures are included. It can be seen that 1964 was an abnormal year, when Independence

Table 2

PERCENTAGE ABSENTEE RATES AT ROKANA (INCLUDING STRIKES BUT EXCLUDING SICKNESS)

1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967
3.5	2.8	9.1	3.9	0.5	4.1	8.0	4.1

Source: the figures are taken from a report compiled by the writer, *Statistical Report on Absenteeism* (January 1969), from figures submitted by the mines to the Copper Industry Service Bureau. The collection of these statistics at C.I.S.B. was discontinued in 1968.

was declared and the expectations of a new era were rife. In the following years absenteeism and strike action resumed their pre-Independence levels.

Reports submitted by other mines to the Productivity Seminars do not all show the same trends as Rokana. For example, the number of disciplinary cases of absenteeism at Luanshya showed a decline from 1964 to 1965, a further decline in 1966 and then a rise in 1967 followed by a drop in 1968. Nchanga figures show a consistent increase in absenteeism from 1964 to 1967 but a decline in 1968. The invariable increase in 1967 which provides the most positive evidence for the 'failure thesis' is followed by an equally invariable drop in 1968. The increase of 1967 may be linked to the 22 per cent wage increase in 1966, testifying to the mineworkers' preference for leisure rather than work. Theorists of industrial conflict<sup>9</sup> have argued that the different forms of

<sup>8</sup> If total absenteeism remains relatively constant while the number of disciplinary offences increases, then this might suggest that the increase in disciplinary offences is directly due to the increasing severity of the disciplinary code. Table 2 lends some support to such a view in the sense that absenteeism has not increased between 1964 and 1967 in the same manner as disciplinary offences.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Hill and Trist (1955), Scott *et al.* (1963) and Baldanus (1961).

withdrawal from work must be considered as substitutes for one another and that as a consequence absenteeism cannot be examined in isolation from strike action. If one examines them in conjunction during the period under investigation even further doubt is cast on the 'failure thesis'. For 1967 is not only characterized by an increase in the number of cases of absenteeism but also by a sharp decline in the number of hours lost owing to strikes. The actual decline is shown in Table 4 and Table 2 and also illustrates that the increase in absenteeism and the decrease in strike action largely cancel one another out. Unfortunately Bates does not seem to have considered strike figures.

Apart from absenteeism there are numerous other offences punishable under the mine disciplinary code, such as failure to obey instructions, sleeping on duty, coming to work drunk, etc. Bates is mainly

Table 3

NUMBER OF CASES OF 'REFUSAL TO OBEY INSTRUCTIONS' AT  
NCHANGA MINE

1964	1965	1966	1967	1968
1,149	974	879	1,110	1,090

Source: *Productivity and Discipline*.

concerned with resistance to supervisory authority, as this is also a pre-eminent focus of Government concern. Much of what was said in general terms about absenteeism applies equally to other cases where the disciplinary code is infringed. Thus the Productivity Seminars show steady increases in failure and refusal to obey instructions between 1964 and 1967 at the Central Shaft and Smelter work points of Rokana. Again Mindola Shaft is not referred to and the 1968 figures are not presented. Luanshya figures are also cited to support the view of increasing indiscipline—in 1964 there were 374 offences under this heading and in 1967 590. At Nchanga, for which the figures are not given in the book, the number of offences under the heading 'refusal to obey instructions' were as shown in Table 3.

In critically examining Bates's data and looking more closely at his source it is not intended to validate a 'success thesis' but rather to show that the evidence presented is inadequate to substantiate a 'failure thesis'. The data used were assembled quickly for the Productivity Seminars and, looked at carefully, do not show any consistent trends. As will become even more apparent later, its presentation embraces a number of deep-seated management assumptions about the worker—

that he is disinclined to work, lazy, prone to 'absenteeism' and 'indiscipline'. Not only are the statistics unreliable and prejudicially presented but they do not necessarily measure what they purport to measure. The number of cases of a particular disciplinary offence is not some absolute index of 'labour indiscipline' but a measure of what management regards as 'labour indiscipline', and this will vary in accordance with a host of external influences such as the labour market, profits, pressure from Government, etc. Thus the number of cases of indiscipline will vary independently of the actual industrial behaviour of the mine-worker.

At no time are management assumptions so apparent as when the issue is productivity. Figures supplied by Rokana for the Productivity Conferences and included in Bate's work show underground operations declining in productivity since 1964. Productivity of the worker is very difficult to measure under any circumstances and management, in submitting its figures, quite rightly focusses on those operations, such as drilling and lashing, which are least likely to have been affected by changes in technology, environment or working conditions and which are most likely to relate directly to worker effort. Though there has been no study of drilling operations, there has been a participant study of hand lashing at Rokana during the first four months of 1970.<sup>10</sup> The figures, reproduced from the Productivity Seminars, show a decline in the number of tons lashed—the process of shovelling broken ore into a wheelbarrow and removing it to a 'tip' at a distance from the 'end'—and this, Bates concludes, is further evidence that worker commitment has fallen and indiscipline increased. Our study points to different conclusions. Tons lashed per shift would have been substantially greater if management did less to hinder effective work performance, by providing the necessary equipment in good working order, by preparing the working areas either before or soon after the lashers arrive and by ensuring that the workers were paid equitably on the basis of the effort they exerted.

Thus, for example, wheelbarrows in poor working order not only led to difficulties in carrying the ore but also to fights between workers for the better barrows, which in turn wasted time and reduced interest and commitment to the tough job. Lashers might wait as long as two hours before the section boss (first line supervisor) would come and inspect and water down the ends before lashing could begin. At other times the water or cooling system would break down, bringing operations to a standstill. Remuneration for the lasher was composed of a basic wage plus a bonus received on completion of an end—that is,

<sup>10</sup> This will form the subject of a forthcoming report of the University of Zambia Sociological Association.

when all the ore at one end is removed—and determined by the size of the end and the distance to the 'tip'. Section bosses were often unable to calculate the bonuses to be awarded to the different lashers and sometimes the size of the end as reflected on the payment sheet was smaller than its actual size. At the beginning of each shift the ends were allocated by the section boss to the workers in such a manner that in the judgement of the section boss the ends could be completed before the end of the shift, seven and a half hours later. However, as often as not the ends could not be finished in time simply because they were just too 'big', and so the workers were compelled to complete the ends in overtime under threat of a disciplinary charge. Under such circumstances the workers usually did not receive any overtime payment but only the small bonus when they completed the end. In this manner section bosses, themselves worried about the consequences if their men failed to come up to the expectations of management, might compel lashers to remain underground for as long as twelve hours (without any food) and sometimes even longer.

Management naturally denies that this ever occurs. As far as management is concerned, targets are handed down from organizational level to organizational level, and it is not particularly concerned about the section boss who finds himself confronted with impossible targets and recalcitrant lashers. The combination of all the above grievances gives rise not only to declining productivity but also to wildcat strikes, which to the worker appear the only way of drawing management's attention to his problem.<sup>11</sup>

It is assumed by management, Government, the trade union leadership and also by Bates that a decline in productivity is caused by a lazy worker and that the onus for low productivity should be placed on his shoulders.<sup>12</sup> Our studies, not only of lashing but of two surface work points also, go a long way towards invalidating such assumptions and casting some of the blame for low productivity in the direction of management. Since there is no comparative study of lashers done in 1964, which might show a more efficient and responsible management in control, one cannot directly infer that management has been responsible for declining productivity. Evidence to be presented later in this paper suggests that the expatriate's commitment to Zambia and his job may have led to a management less concerned about long term or labour problems.

<sup>11</sup> The most recent series of wildcat strikes by lashers were at Rokana on 15–26 January 1970.

<sup>12</sup> A similar attack on the assumption implicit in the concept of 'restriction of output'—namely the assumption that the worker, and not management, is to blame for a decline in output—is to be found in Lupton (1963).

Though Bates contends that strike action has increased since Independence, his evidence is inadequate. The only support he can muster for this view is a count which compares the number of strikes in the 1950–63 period with the number in the 1964–8 period. Yet the two periods are not strictly comparable. Prior to Independence the union leadership was under no pressure from an incipient black elite to refrain from strike action and during those years when the union had 'unbridled' authority over its workers strikes were very much less frequent but at the same time official, well organized, often mine-wide,

Table 4

## COPPERBELT STRIKES SINCE 1964: LOCAL EMPLOYEES

Year	No. of employees* (Local)	Shifts lost	No. of strikes	No. of strikes per 100,000 employees	Shifts lost per 1,000 employees
1964	39,203	26,864	39	100	686
1965	39,677	4,223	28	71	106
1966	41,951	624,548	18	43	14,900
1967	43,513	603	12	28	14
1968	43,198	18,241	26	60	422
1969	43,500	3,381	25	58	78

\* The 1964 figure refers to employees as at 31 December; 1965–9 figures to average strength.

Source: these figures were culled from the C.I.S.B. strike diaries. Figures for the years 1964–6 may not be completely accurate, but since 1967 C.I.S.B. has maintained an accurate count of strikes.

and lasted much longer than at present. Since 1964 the union leadership, from Bates' own evidence, has exercised great restraint, if not outright opposition to strikes, and consequently work stoppages are confined to unofficial walk-outs or wildcat strikes which are short-lived and involve relatively few men. Though they are more frequent in occurrence, each has only a marginal effect on time lost. An increase in the incidence of strikes may be taken to illustrate the success which the union leadership has had in denying support to striking workers. An examination of time lost, as opposed to the incidence of strikes, would offer the reader a more balanced picture. Data of this kind for the pre-Independence period are not available from management records, but reverting to the period which Bates adopts for all his other indices of worker behaviour, the figures in Table 4 can be culled from

management records for the copper mines. Table 4, while not invalidating the 'failure thesis', at the same time offers no confirmation of any consistent pattern. Two strikes in 1966 may be regarded as in some ways exceptional. The first was a response of the mineworkers to the unsatisfactory deals the union leadership had made with the companies in 1964 and 1966. The second revolved around the dissolution of the mines' pension scheme and its replacement by the less remunerative National Provident Fund. As already suggested, the low strike figure for 1967 may possibly be attributed to the exceptionally high 22 per cent pay increase of the previous year and should be considered in conjunction with the uniform increases recorded for disciplinary cases in the same year (1967).

From the foregoing re-examination of the available data serious doubts must be cast upon the validity of the 'failure thesis'. The base and final years of the period in question (1964 and 1967) were both abnormal in a way that makes the 'failure thesis' slightly more plausible. 1964 was the year of Independence, when the workers' expectations were high for a new era of high rewards, and were reflected in a high commitment to work, while 1967 was characterized by a uniform increase in the number of disciplinary offences as recorded by personnel departments. Since the assessment ignores strike figures, the discrepancy between 1964 and 1967 suggested by the data gives a distorted and unreal picture of rising 'indiscipline'. If 1963—for which, unfortunately, there are few figures—and 1968 had been included, a very different interpretation would have been equally tenable. Or if time lost in strike action had been included in the overall assessment of 'indiscipline', as in Table 4, then again the available evidence would not substantiate the 'failure thesis'.

#### *The myth of worker indolence*

We have so far observed how Bates uses management data to come to the same conclusion as management—namely that 'indiscipline' has increased since Independence. The Government, as Bates shows in his book, endorses such a view, using a number of sources, including management data. Indeed, the Government has gone even further in claiming not only that worker productivity and discipline have declined since Independence but that the Zambian worker is in some way more indolent than other workers:

Zambian workers are reluctant to obey lawful and responsible orders. They either refuse to do what they are told or they do it grudgingly, reluctantly, and half-heartedly and with poor grace . . . Zambia is not going to put up with this . . . [Bates, p. 35]

How in fact does the Zambian mineworker compare with his counterpart elsewhere in the world? There are only two indices which can be used for comparative purposes: strikes and absenteeism. If we ignore 1966 as an abnormal year contingent on the failure of Independence to bring any 'fruits' to the miner and the operation of a social justice principle to diminish inequities between expatriate and local labour pay scales, then the average number of working days lost per year in the period 1964 to 1969 per thousand employees is 261. This compares with a corresponding figure of 190 for British industry, of 240 for Japan, of 400 for Australia and a figure of 870 for the United States.<sup>13</sup> When consideration is given to the possibly greater propensity to strike action in the mining industry due to the tougher working conditions—the figure given by the Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations, 1968, for the British mining industry is 466 (p. 98)—then it could hardly be said that the Zambian miners are peculiarly more strike-prone than miners elsewhere in the world. Absence figures not only imply that the Zambian mineworker is no less committed to his job but indeed go so far as to suggest that he is more committed than workers in other countries. Thus, according to one management report, *Sickness Absence in the Mining Industry*, the average number of employees absent each day represented as absentee rate is 3.1 per cent at Rokana, 1.4 per cent at Mufulira and 1.4 per cent at Konkola in the period April 1970 to October 1970. These figures compare with 22 per cent for the British coal mines,<sup>14</sup> between 4.4 per cent and 10.7 per cent in a selection of food, chemical and engineering industries,<sup>15</sup> 12.8 per cent in Indian coal mines, 8.1 per cent in Indian gold mines, between 10.3 per cent and 27.2 per cent in Indian cotton mills and between 14.5 per cent and 16.9 per cent in Indian engineering industries.<sup>16</sup>

The standard measure of absenteeism used in these comparisons is the number of shifts lost expressed as a percentage of the total number of shifts that could have been worked. Since management decides how many shifts are expected of the worker, and since this is not taken into account in this measure of absenteeism, the index can be very misleading. A simple example will illustrate the point. If a working week is extended from five to six shifts the number of absences will almost inevitably increase, which will be registered in an increase in the absentee rate, yet at the same time attendance measured in terms of the number of shifts worked will have increased. In other words, though

<sup>13</sup> Turner (1969), table 1, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> National Coal Board Statistics Department (1968).

<sup>15</sup> Taylor (1970), p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Indian Organization of Indian Employers (1967), p. 85.

'absenteeism' will have increased, the worker will be working harder than before. Implicit in any absentee rate is an unstated norm set by management of what constitutes zero absenteeism. In the case of the copper mines this is a six-day week with twenty-one days' leave for the majority of workers and approximately four public holidays. A management or government genuinely interested in the productivity of the workers—the amount of work he is doing—would emphasize attendance rather than absence. The result of doing this for the Zambian copper miners and British coal miners is shown in Table 5. These figures also

Table 5

## ATTENDANCE FIGURES FOR COPPER MINERS AND COAL MINERS

	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967
Average daily strength (local employees)	8,110	8,843	8,834	8,914	9,061	9,696	10,925	10,904
Average percentage at work	94.7	88.0	82.7	87.4	89.6	89.4	84.7	88.9
Average no. of shifts worked per week	5.7	5.3	5.0	5.2	5.4	5.4	5.1	5.3
Coal miners*	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.2		

\* Handy (1968), p. 29.

Source: *Statistical Report on Absenteeism*.

suggest that the official views are not necessarily the correct ones. The Government belief that the Zambian mineworker is in some sense lazier than other workers may be regarded as part of a managerial ideology inherited and adopted from the racial prejudices of white management as they prevailed particularly before Independence.

A more startling expression of the manipulation of these myths can be found in the words of none other than the champion of the Zambian cultural heritage, the then Vice-President, Mr Simon Kapwepwe. Basing his attack on figures presented by management to the 1969 Productivity Seminar, Mr Kapwepwe wrote:

Absenteeism from work is another disease which has plagued Zambia. I'm informed that at one mine in 1968, 9,000 cases of unexplained absenteeism were recorded. Nearly half of the cases involved an element

of excessive drinking. It has been observed that the two days following pay day are the worst on absenteeism and the amount of liquor consumed is the highest. It can therefore be reasonably concluded that the absenteeism of our 9,000 colleagues on the Copperbelt was directly due to excessive drinking. [*Times of Zambia*, 24 March 1969]

I have been able to find no reference to drinking being the cause of half the cases of absenteeism in any of the management records, and indeed it would be almost impossible to validate such a statement. To argue that absenteeism and drinking both reach a peak immediately after pay day and that therefore absenteeism is directly due to excessive drinking is far removed from conventional logic.<sup>17</sup> Apart from such logical contortions, the use of absolute figures rather than percentages is very misleading. The 9,000 cases at one mine may sound abnormally high but when translated into the figure of less than one case per mineworker per year their significance is very much diminished. By presenting absence and disciplinary data in absolute rather than percentage terms management is assisting the Government in making erroneous interpretations and in drawing invalid conclusions about the Zambian mineworker. Bates, too, by failing to reduce his figures to percentage form is also escaping the question of whether the mineworker is more or less 'indisciplined' than mineworkers elsewhere in the world. For it is well known throughout the world that miners are heavy drinkers and that in most mining industries absence after pay day has become customary.<sup>18</sup>

Productivity as another index of worker behaviour has also been used to propagate the myth of worker indolence. We have already considered the use Bates and management have made of productivity indices to illustrate declining worker effort, and how in fact declining productivity may equally be attributed to management inefficiency rather than worker indolence. Another major defect of productivity indices as measures of worker behaviour lies in the variety of ways they may be calculated. Inevitably, different methods of calculation will give rise to different results and lead to different conclusions. This becomes increasingly true as the inputs and outputs are multiplied and extended to include diverse operations in different industries. To attempt an overall assessment of productivity in a single industry, never mind an

<sup>17</sup> It has been argued elsewhere that both absenteeism and drinking reach a peak immediately after pay day because at this time the mineworker has sufficient money to enjoy a day off and also to go drinking; that is, the *causal* link between drinking and absenteeism is weak but they vary together because they are both dependent on the availability of money. For an elaboration of this argument and a detailed statistical analysis of the causes of absenteeism in the conceptual framework of role conflict, see Burawoy *et al.* (1971).

<sup>18</sup> See Gouldner (1964), pp. 141-4, and Scott *et al.*, p. 26.



entire nation, is an almost meaningless task. This accounts for management confining its assessment of productivity in the Productivity Seminar of 1968 to single operations where both inputs and outputs were easily measurable, not dependent on other operations, and not affected by technological change nor by changes in the environment and working conditions. It also accounts for mine management being unable to arrive at an acceptable index of productivity for the whole mining industry despite the direction of all its leading minds and brains to the problem.

Hence there was much consternation, particularly in academic circles, when the International Labour Organisation representative, Professor H. Turner, of Cambridge University, England, asked to report and make recommendations to the Zambian Government on 'Incomes, Wages and Prices', declared, in a very inadequate treatment of the matter, that industrial productivity in Zambia had declined by 12 per cent in the four years since Independence.<sup>19</sup> Within the report there were suggestions that the Zambian worker was largely responsible for this drop in productivity; certainly the Government, in the wide publicity given to the report, assumed that this was the case. But the evidence from which Professor Turner or the Government derived such a conclusion was conspicuous by its absence. Apart from the issue of where the blame for the supposed decline in productivity is to be laid, two different sources have contradicted his findings that productivity has fallen. First the manpower report, *Zambian Manpower*, which was published around the same time as the Turner report, showed a 12 per cent *increase* rather than decrease in industrial productivity. Second, the University Economics Department participated in a public debate on the issue by writing a series of articles in the *Times of Zambia*<sup>20</sup> corroborating the manpower report and attacking the statistics used by Turner.

Which of the reports is correct is a question that is impossible to settle with any finality, since there is no unique index of productivity. What the debate makes clear—and here lies the significance of productivity—is the possibility of arriving at totally different conclusions by adopting different measures of productivity calculated with different sets of statistics. This is particularly important if pay increases are to be related to productivity increases; it is then in the interests of the union to choose an index and set of statistics which show an increase in worker productivity, while it is in the interests of management to produce an

<sup>19</sup> *Report of the Government of Zambia on Incomes, Wages and Prices in Zambia* (1969).

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Varsity Corner in the *Times of Zambia*, 3 and 10 April 1970, for two critical articles by James Fry of the Economics Department of the University of Zambia; also Bas de Gaay Fortman in *Varsity Corner*, 8 May 1970. For a deeper analysis see Fry (1970).

index which shows an opposite trend.<sup>21</sup> Cynics might well raise their eyebrows at the correspondence of the conclusions of the Turner report on the one hand and the Government-sponsored myth of worker indolence on the other. The existence of reputable reports, including the Government's own manpower report, pointing to contradictory conclusions and the patent inadequacy of the slim Turner report can only encourage further suspicion. As far as the Government was concerned, however, the Turner report, written by a famous professor from England, would carry with it unquestionable authenticity. The Turner report has become instrumental in the further promotion of the view that 'there is in general a lack of discipline and a lack of determination to do a fair day's work for a fair day's pay'<sup>22</sup> and that since Independence workers have become increasingly lazy. The myth of worker indolence has become part and parcel of management ideology, fuelled by mine management and foreign 'experts' for propagation by Government. The myth of indolence operates hand in glove with the tenets and assumptions of worker restraint through 'labour discipline'. For if the worker is naturally lazy and will not increase his effort voluntarily, as the myth suggests, then he must be coerced through a stricter disciplinary system to increase output. Government labour policy must therefore be seen in terms of not one but two components, namely restraint and the myth of indolence embraced by the 'failure thesis'. In propagating the myth the Government at the same time justifies stricter control and discipline over its labour. Without the myth—that is, if it were shown that productivity had increased, and that absenteeism, strike action and 'indiscipline' had diminished—the Government would find it difficult to insist on greater control and discipline from the workers. The 'failure thesis' must be regarded as an integral and essential part of the Government's labour policy and the Government has a vested interest in clinging to it even if it is empirically indefensible. Any set of figures and any interpretation given to them by Government or management to support the 'failure thesis' must therefore be scrutinized all the more carefully.

In examining the 'failure thesis' Bates merely reproduces in almost identical fashion the data, and the interpretations accorded them, which management offers to the Government. Relying almost entirely on figures provided by management for the Productivity Seminars of 1968; reproducing in his book almost table-for-table, figure-for-figure the submissions of management to Government; failing to consider

<sup>21</sup> Such manipulations of productivity indices are becoming common in British industry; see, for example, Dawe, A., 'The negotiating don', *Sunday Times*, 27 February 1972, p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> *Productivity and Discipline*, Summary of submissions by mines, p. 3.

interpretations of those figures other than that given by management and Government; and finally embracing uncritically all the assumptions embedded in the official arguments—not surprisingly he comes to the conclusion that since Independence the Government has failed to ‘restrain’ the mineworkers. His conclusions may indeed be correct, though much of the analysis presented so far must question such a view, but because of the Government’s vested interest in the ‘failure thesis’ it would not be over-stating the case to say that his method lacks rigour. To examine the objective validity of the ‘failure thesis’ and its stature as a scientific hypothesis, one must operate with statistics derived, as far as possible, independently of management and Government. To the extent that this is not possible the researcher should at least examine the available management statistics critically, searching for different interpretations and questioning the assumptions implicit in the conclusions drawn by management and Government.

Once accepted as an integral part of managerial ideology, over and above its objective validity, the myth of indolence may be looked upon as a form of ritual punishment where the worker continually countenances injunctions for his supposed sloth. In this way the Government draws attention to a set of values and norms pertaining to its definition of the development needs of Zambia. The workers are reminded that they are now working for their own people and no longer for white colonial masters, that the interests of the workers are identical with those of the Zambian people and that therefore the worker has every reason to give total commitment to increased output and improved job performance. These strategies and arguments of the Zambian Government closely resemble those of other governments under similar conditions of stress.

#### *Towards a theory of absenteeism*

The sudden and hasty entry of Britain into the second world war caught the coal industry unprepared for the urgent demand for large increases in coal production. It was clear, however, that the successful prosecution of the war depended critically on the availability of coal, just as the Zambian economy depends on the profits extracted from the copper industry. The coalition Government therefore devoted a considerable amount of time to the problems involved in boosting coal production to meet the demands of the war economy. What in fact attracted a disproportionate amount of the Government’s attention was the commitment of the mineworkers to the war effort as reflected in absenteeism. Government, Parliament and the national Press expressed an obsessive concern for what was believed to be a rising rate of absenteeism.

Debates and questions in the House of Commons on the coal industry often revolved around the question of absenteeism. The Government introduced an attendance bonus for miners, with the aim of reducing absenteeism, but it proved unworkable and was later abandoned. Disciplinary courts were set up specifically to deal with absenteeism, but these too proved to be less effective than had been hoped and were eventually dissolved. As far as the Government and the public were concerned, at least in the early years of the war, the miners were not pulling their weight. At the coalfields miners were confronted with the same intransigent obsession with absenteeism from management. As James Bowman—vice-chairman of the Mineworkers’ Federation of Great Britain—reported:

We found that at the collieries, instead of the whole issue of productivity being discussed, the colliery manager was simply shelving everything and making Pit Production Committees, at least in my district, a medium for discussing absenteeism and absenteeism only and it is because of that that Pit Committees fell out of use in my district. Some districts have even arranged to impose penalties by way of fines. [Arnot, (1961), p. 316]

Yet despite the incessant publicity given to the problem, particularly in the early years of the war, a White Paper entitled *Coal* published in 1942 came out with a ‘startling’ refutation of the ‘absentee myth’, which would have been apparent to anyone who had examined the available statistics.

As regards absenteeism, there has been some tendency in recent discussions to exaggerate the gain in production which might be secured by checking absenteeism and by additional effort on the part of the men. It is doubtful whether in fact avoidable absenteeism is greater in the mines than in other industries. While the absenteeism percentage has risen substantially during the war, there has also been a steady rise in the number of shifts worked per wage earner; and in the last week for which statistics are available the number of shifts worked was 5.66, the highest on record. Charges of excessive absenteeism cannot be sustained against the great majority of the miners.

While, however, the average figures are not unsatisfactory there is undoubtedly some avoidable absenteeism, and it is important that every possible step should be taken to reduce this to a minimum. [*Coal*, Cmnd. 6364 (1942), p. 4]

The working week had been extended to include a greater number of shifts, to the point where absenteeism was bound to increase, yet the miners were at the same time putting in a greater amount of effort when measured in terms of shifts worked. The Government White Paper refuted the myth of absenteeism in much the same sense as the

Government of Zambia manpower report and the University of Zambia Economics Department refuted the myth of declining productivity. In each case productivity and absenteeism were measured in different ways to give different results. The governments tended to use the measure which substantiated the myth of indolence.

Soviet Russia provides an equally interesting use of absenteeism as a form of ritual punishment. Iron discipline was made the central theme in Soviet labour policy, just as it has been in Zambian labour policy, and absenteeism was singled out from all the other tenets of labour discipline for particularly repressive treatment. In 1920, for example, a governmental decree ordered:

Absentees must forfeit pay and work off absence in overtime or on holidays, on pain of imprisonment in a concentration camp; moreover, those absent for more than three days in one month must be tried in the Workers' Disciplinary Courts for sabotage. [Conquest (1967), pp. 96-7]

The drive for industrialization in the late 'twenties led to a renewed offensive against labour 'indiscipline' and in particular absenteeism. Stalin told Leningrad party members:

It is necessary to conduct a campaign to put a stop to absenteeism at the mills and factories, to raise the productivity of labour and to strengthen labour discipline in our enterprises. Tens and hundreds of thousands of man-days are lost to industry owing to absenteeism . . . [Conquest, p. 99]<sup>23</sup>

Despite stringent sanctions imposed against absentees, absenteeism was still 5.96 days per man in 1931 and 1932. In 1932 the Government, therefore, adopted even more tyrannical measures:

Henceforward for even one day's non-appearance for work without good reason the worker could be dismissed, deprived of his right to use ration cards issued to him as a worker in a particular factory, and evicted from any housing allotted to him by the enterprise. The NKT (People's Commissariat of Labour) soon afterwards explained that the evictions must be carried out 'instantly', without regard to the worker's lack of other accommodation, 'at any time of the year' and without 'provision of transport facilities'. Absenteeism fell immediately to 0.93 days per man in 1933, to 0.67 in 1934 and 0.76 in 1935. [Conquest, p. 99]

The years of the second world war saw only increasing penalties and a more stringent definition of absenteeism to include anything over twenty minutes' lateness. The eighteenth party conference in 1941 found this to have

. . . 'considerably improved the state of labour discipline in enterprises'. Nevertheless, the conference declared, absenteeism and wilful departure

<sup>23</sup> Cf comments made by the Vice-President of Zambia cited p. 252 above.

'have still not nearly ceased in many factories . . . It is essential to eliminate absenteeism completely . . . [Conquest, pp. 105-6]

Absenteeism remained a criminal offence until ten years after the end of the second world war. The *Rules of Internal Labour Order* currently in force (1967)

prescribe that any violation of labour discipline entails a disciplinary penalty. These are (a) reproof, (b) reprimand, (c) severe reprimand, (d) transfer to other, lower-paid work for up to three months [and (e) dismissal]. Absenteeism, defined as absence from work for a whole day without good reason, is specifically mentioned as an offence to be covered by these penalties. [Conquest, pp. 113-14]

The system bears a remarkable resemblance to its counterpart on the Zambian copper mines, where the disciplinary penalties are (a) warning, (b) severe warning, (c) final warning, (d) comprehensive final warning, (e) discharge, and, as miners are all occupying company housing, consequent loss of accommodation. The working of the system is also similar to the Soviet pattern, except that the Soviet management might award stiffer penalties for the same violations of the code and can refer cases to a Comrades' Court.

In the minds of a managerial or ruling class absenteeism represents lost output and reflects worker indolence. (The actual relationship between absenteeism on the one hand and production and indolence on the other is by no means clear. This is well illustrated by Gouldner,<sup>24</sup> when he compares the relationship between absenteeism and effort above and below ground in a gypsum mine. There the miners underground were very much more prone to absenteeism than the surface workers but were also much the harder workers. The extra effort they put into their job compensated for their absenteeism.) The connotations of absenteeism to the manager justify in his eyes the disciplinary action taken against it. In taking such action management is enforcing a set of norms and values which stress the importance of production, hard work and labour discipline. Why has management chosen absenteeism as the focus of 'labour indiscipline'? There are four main reasons why absenteeism best suits the needs of management as an index of worker commitment, apart from its conventional association with lost output. First, absenteeism is quantifiable so as to give the impression of a precise and objective index of worker indolence. But although, like productivity, absenteeism can be measured quantitatively, there is no unique formula for measuring either of them. Different formulae give

<sup>24</sup> Gouldner (1964), chapter VIII. The following refers to coal mining in England: 'The habit of working hard and then "playing" for a day or two is long standing in the pits' (Scott *et al.*, 1963, p. 26).

rise to different indices and therefore imply different conclusions. Thus, as we have already seen in the context of the British coal industry, different ways of measuring absenteeism lead to contradictory conclusions. Management or Government is then in a position to use that index which corresponds to its own preconceived notions and interests. Though not uniquely defined, absenteeism is nevertheless a well defined form of behaviour. A man is either present or absent from work and there is no dispute about it. Lastly, absenteeism is a form of individual behaviour, and responsibility may be attributed to a specific individual, unlike productivity indices, which usually derive from collective behaviour. The last two factors facilitate the penalization of the worker on the part of management and the introduction of repressive laws against absenteeism. It is for these reasons that absenteeism has figured so prominently in management thinking.

But is there a special set of circumstances which encourages management or the Government to focus on absenteeism as an index of worker behaviour? Management tends to show greater interest in this area when it does not have confidence in its employees and regards them as inherently lazy and opposed to work. In such circumstances the worker must be 'disciplined' and punitive sanctions against absenteeism provide a convenient way not only of reducing the level of absenteeism but also of drawing attention to the puritan values of hard work and discipline. Thus white management has always regarded black labour with suspicion and mistrust; black workers will work only if compelled; they do not need the extra cash because they can always go back to their villages and eke out a subsistence existence from the land. Both the early entrepreneurial classes of England and the Russian industrialists brought up in the tradition of autocratic regulation of labour first by the Tsar and then by the Communist Party favoured such a view of the workers.<sup>25</sup> Governments are likely to adopt similar conceptions of the worker when they perceive him as a threat to their existence or to their development programmes. Thus where a country is conscious of its dependence on the services of a particular section of the working class, such as the coal miners in war-time England and the copper miners in Zambia, the Government fears that the workers' loyalties may not be entirely nationalistic but that class allegiances may dictate their behaviour.<sup>26</sup> In both cases the Government sets about the propagation

<sup>25</sup> See Bendix (1963).

<sup>26</sup> It is not only the Zambian copper miners who have emphasized their own economic interests as a group of workers. There was much discussion by the British coal miners as to the extent to which they should endorse the coalition Government's war effort against Germany in 1942. See Arnot (1961), discussion of the Blackpool conference of 1940, pp. 304-5.

of the myth of worker indolence through the mass media, admonishing the worker for his supposed sloth. In the case of the Soviet Union coercive power was utilized to augment moral censure through the introduction of repressive laws against absenteeism. We may look upon moral and coercive attacks on absenteeism as part of a process of ritual punishment through which managerial expectations of worker behaviour are inculcated.

#### *Worker perspectives*

Attempts at regulating worker behaviour—ritual punishment in the name of labour discipline; the destruction, paralysis or transformation of trade unions into organs of the State; the superintending of workers both within and without industry by a party machine—have been advanced wherever they have taken place in the name of nationalist objectives. In England it was the war-time struggle against fascism; in Nazi Germany it was the pursuit of national glory,<sup>27</sup> and in Russia it was development in the name of the workers' State.<sup>28</sup> Yet it could equally be argued that the ideologies associated with each nationalist cause represented the rationalizations of the interests of a ruling class and the justification of the consolidation of power in its hands as much as the reflection of determined efforts to achieve socialist or nationalist objectives. As Deutscher, for example, has written of the 'Statification' of trade unions in the Soviet Union as promulgated in the 'new economic policy',

The new economic course was justified on grounds of expediency. But there was more to it than that. The party was now engaged in building up, on the basis of its monopoly of power, the monolithic State. [Deutscher (1950), p. 64]

To what extent may we regard the Zambian Government's attempts to regulate and control the mineworkers as evidence of a ruling class consolidating its power and to what extent may we regard such efforts as signifying the determination to achieve socialist or egalitarian objectives? One way of discovering might be to examine the changing relationship between behaviour and decisions made on the one hand and public policy on the other. In this way discrepancies between precept and practice would be highlighted. Changes in the one should be reflected in changes in the other, if public policy is more than a justification of class rule.<sup>29</sup> Public policy may also be examined for

<sup>27</sup> See Neumann (1937), (1966).

<sup>28</sup> See Deutscher (1950) and Bendix (1963).

<sup>29</sup> For a treatment of Nazi ideology along such lines see Neumann (1966) and for a treatment of Soviet ideology see Barrington Moore, Jr. (1965).

internal consistency, and for the opportunity it affords to draw upon contradictory norms on different occasions in order to pursue goals dissonant with the spirit of the policy. Ideologies should be examined as much for how they are used as for what they say.

By virtue of his blanket acceptance of public policy, Bates avoids these difficult problems. Yet at the same time discrepancies between precept and practice among the leadership may be crucial in determining the success of the Government in reversing the private preoccupations of the workers. If the workers perceive the leadership as an exploiting class resolute in the defence of its own power and wealth rather than as a disinterested nationalist 'elite' dedicated to the transformation of Zambia into a socialist and classless society, then Government policy is less likely to receive their active support.

In our experience the attitudes of the mineworkers express considerable uniformity.<sup>30</sup> The following was a casual comment made while the semi-skilled informant was working with a student participant observer:

I do not know what is happening with our Government. During the Colonial days we were getting a Copper Bonus and now this has been abolished and the Mining Companies say that it has absorbed the bonus into our salaries but we see no difference. Then recently we have been cheated that there has been a 5 per cent increase. We tried to complain to management but it only said, 'Your Government has a 51 per cent share and we only have 49 per cent, therefore if you want to complain then go to the Union.' Then we went to the Union and they said, 'If you are tired of the job go home and cultivate the land.' All this is annoying us and so we intend to withdraw our membership of the union. All the unionists are Government supporters and I suspect that the mine management gives them money to cover up its evils in dealing with our genuine complaints. [Pandawa and Simusokwe (1971), Report No. 10, p. 53]

The following are comments typical of unskilled or semi-skilled workers who were in industrial employment before Independence:

Treatment after Independence improved but other conditions remain as they were previously. Nationalization has not made any difference. In fact work has become harder than we expected. The present management is better only in that we are treated well at work; there is no bullying now. Shouts of 'You, Kaffir, work' or kicking you in the buttocks has stopped. The pay scales have fallen because the Companies have brought in new scales and grades, and when we complain the Company says our Government has taken all the money in the 51 per cent and that we should complain to the Government. We ought to be getting more now

<sup>30</sup> The material presented in the following discussion of worker perspectives is from studies undertaken by university students and personnel officers with which the writer was associated.

because production is high and we work harder than previously. [Pandawa and Simusokwe (1971), Report No. 15, p. 6]

Independence and Nationalization have not changed anything. In fact things are just as they were. Moreover we work harder than we used to do in the Federal days. Pay Scales are very low. The Union and the Companies together with Government have brought in pay groups which have cut all the scales and acting allowances. Things are going down and down. We should be getting more money because we are producing more copper. [Simusokwe (1971), Report No. 13, p. 5]

Though we have not been able to quantify worker perspectives, an examination of the interviews and comments made by miners at work lead to the conclusions that the mineworkers may, though in rather less sophisticated terms, perceive the union leadership, white management and black Government as three pillars of a corporate 'power elite' determined to exploit and sap the workers of their energy in the pursuit of increased profits to be used as much for their own private benefit as for the development of the country. It is not just that the miner feels 'poverty-stricken' in comparison with the expatriate, as Bates stresses, but also that he feels inadequately treated by his own Government, which is dependent on the miners to deliver and process the copper to maintain the country's economy. The miner is not impressed when he is censured for his sloth and unpatriotic feelings, when he is exhorted to work harder, not to go on strike and to drink less beer by politicians who appear to thrive on the proceeds of the miner's labour. Increased efforts from the workers are demanded not in the name of self-interest but in the name of the national interest—the obligations the mineworker has to his brothers and sisters 'poverty-stricken' in the villages. Yet the mineworkers have not seen any significant rural development (except the expansion of the educational system) or any dramatic improvements in the welfare of their kinsmen in the villages or even in the towns. Their perspectives are coloured by the emergence of a small black elite competing for higher standard of living in an attempt to emulate the whites.

In underlining the importance of black-white conflict, which is, of course, a persistent source of tension on the Copperbelt, Bates ignores the importance of conflict or competition between black and black. He argues that since conflicts between labour and management take place across a racial dimension, African workers' thinking on labour issues becomes organized around racial categories, and divisions within the African community are inhibited by racial solidarity.

These patterns of thought generate tremendous social pressures to prevent people from taking a position on labour matters which diverges from that of the majority of the black community. [Bates, p. 116]

Resistance to the formation of the Mines African Staff Association during the early 'fifties is cited as evidence of strong racial unity, whereas it could equally well be cited as evidence of class interests developing within the black community. That the Staff Association was formed and recognized points to the strength of class interests overriding racial solidarity. Conflicts between the poorer-paid workers and the better-paid supervisor and clerks are common phenomena in other industries in a non-racial context and are best looked at in terms of disparate class interests. When personnel officers are branded as stooges of management or 'sell-outs' the mineworker is attacking the personnel officer for his unconcern about the worker through the powerful idiom of race. The personnel officer is portrayed as a renegade, betraying the interests of his racial group in favour of the economic class to which he now belongs.

The management is good but the black people who have taken over from the expatriates are very bad. Once they have been given a big house in town they are happy and forget about the workers. People like the personnel officers are just useless for employees. [Tembo (1970), p. 13]

A similar class antagonism is voiced against the union leadership, which derives its wealth from the workers' subscriptions, compulsorily deducted each month from the mineworker's pay packet by management.

I subscribe to the union but I don't want to be a member. They are just thieves. The union people have a bar in town where they get drunk. They buy themselves nice cars, but they do nothing about our latrines. [Tembo, p. 15]

Asked if he knew who the branch chairman was, one replied,

He is a fat man who moves in a green Zephyr. I don't know him because I just see him move in a car. [Burawoy (1970), p. 38]

These are examples of class antagonisms within the black community. There are also occasional instances of class interests cutting across racial boundaries, as when, for example, both local and expatriate shift bosses went on strike in protest against the action of a black security officer who intervened after an expatriate shift boss had exercised his right to go to the front of a queue.<sup>31</sup>

Where others might see the operation of both class and colour, Bates sees only colour. This is particularly so when he considers the 'reference group' behaviour of the mineworkers.

<sup>31</sup> The strike took place at Nchanga on 2 and 3 September 1968. This must be regarded as exceptional, since between 1968 and 1970 there have been no other strikes by expatriates, apart from artisans, and there are still very few black artisans.

Because the government perceives the mineworkers as one of the wealthiest groups in the country, it feels justified in asking them to sacrifice for the sake of less fortunate citizens in the other sectors of the national economy. But, because they perceive themselves in relation to the European miners, the mineworkers feel poverty-stricken and they are unwilling to acknowledge this obligation. [Bates, p. 85]

Though there is much evidence to suggest that those Africans who have the most direct contact with the expatriates, and specifically those who have recently advanced into 'expatriate' positions, are acutely sensitive to racial inequities, there is less evidence that the mass of African unskilled and semi-skilled workers consider their own wealth in relation to the wealth of the expatriates. Their representatives, who are more than likely to be working at levels which involve direct contact with whites, may well present the mineworkers' interests in a racial idiom and thus appeal to the social justice principle in the Government policy as a justification for furthering the interests of the membership. However, the mineworkers themselves would appear to express as much resentment towards the better-paid Zambians who ostentatiously flaunt their wealth as they do towards the white, who tends to save and therefore conceal his wealth. An earlier study of Copperbelt life concluded that African mineworkers adopt a European way of life as the basis of a prestige system upon which African society is stratified. In assuming a European life-style he is not so much interested in comparing himself with the European as establishing his position within a stratified urban African society.

The European way of life has now become so much a part and parcel of life in the urban areas that the Europeans themselves have faded from the foreground. *Kalela* Dancers do not seek vicarious participation in the upper levels of European society but vicarious participation in the upper levels of African society, from which, by their lack of qualification, they are excluded. [Mitchell (1956), p. 15]

Confining the analysis of differentiation and conflict on the mines to a racial dimension is not only an over-simplification but also an endorsement of the Government's portrayal of Zambia as a classless society. Announcing the nationalization of the mining industry in 1969, President Kaunda stated:

However, the fact of the matter is there is now no distinction between employer and employee, as is often the case in capitalist economies . . . I have said that class consciousness is one of the biggest dangers in Zambia. Workers can themselves be a source of force in the creation of classes. By trying to group themselves together and distinguish themselves from the rest of society in pursuit of what they may believe to be their own interests

as workers, they provoke response from the rest of their own interests in turn. For Zambia, it is ridiculous for workers now in the light of these reforms to feel that they are a distinct class pursuing distinct interests. No, the interests of factory workers, road and other manual workers, the teachers, the civil servants, the police, the armed forces, any type of workers, indeed politicians, are all identical. [Kuanda (1969), pp. 45-6]

Given the perspectives of the workers as illustrated earlier, one can appreciate the President's concern about the possibilities of a rising class-consciousness. Yet the mineworkers are not alone in defining their position in the social structure in terms of class. The tenets of labour discipline, the myth of worker indolence and indeed the very denial of the existence of classes can be interpreted as the armaments of a class conscious ruling elite determined to obstruct the workers' pursuit of what they perceive to be their own interests. The Government has adopted many of the racial prejudices which buttressed and justified white colonial rule. Behind many Government statements on the ruled classes of Zambia are references to racial prejudices: that Zambians are particularly lazy, will only respect and respond to tough discipline, that they lack initiative and responsibility and must therefore be closely supervised, controlled and disciplined.<sup>32</sup> Such views were also disarmingly current among the 'black elite' on the mines, such as the senior personnel officers. Those who espouse such views usually regard themselves as exceptions to the rule; their success is testimony to their difference—they have escaped the 'bondage of blackness'. Just as the subservience of Soviet workers to State capitalism is justified in the name of 'Marxism', so the domination of black by black is carried out in the name of 'racial subordination'. A managerial ideology based on the white stereotype of the black is no less useful to a black ruling class than it is to a white ruling class.

Though racial antagonisms and disparities do loom high in the perspectives of the mineworkers, there nevertheless exist side by side equally significant feelings of class consciousness. Failure to take cognisance of both sets of perspectives in assessing industrial behaviour can only lead to conclusions of partial validity. But simply to acknowledge the operations of both class and colour as distinct forms of social differentiation is also inadequate, as is a contextual analysis where each 'structural situation' is treated as an analytically separate case. If there is to be theoretical development in this area then we must delve more

<sup>32</sup> One interesting reaction to this came from the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Zambia in his address at the second graduation ceremony, 6 June 1970, where he spoke of the 'insufficient decolonization of the mind' in referring to the reverence the Government accords to expatriate personnel and overseas institutions of higher learning and the low esteem in which local institutions and personnel are held.

deeply into the interaction between class and colour as they affect and reflect social change in the general rather than the specific case.

## II

Franz Neumann has delineated five spheres in which capitalism may exercise dominion over the worker: the business concern where the employee actually works; the undertaking where economic decisions are taken; the labour market; the commodity market and through the State. All these, with the possible exceptions of the commodity market, influence industrial behaviour, as reflected in such indices as absenteeism, strikes and productivity. Bates is primarily concerned with the machinery of the State as it affects industrial behaviour, yet before one can draw any causal link between the two due attention must be accorded to the other variables for ways in which they may inhibit or promote change in any direction. The second part of this paper is therefore a discussion of the local and expatriate labour markets, the industrial organizations and finally a consideration of the State, as they affect absenteeism, strikes, productivity, etc.

### *The labour market*

The mineworkers represent a labour elite—the average income of a mineworker is approximately twice the national average for 'local' employees. The high margin of profit on copper sales at existing prices has meant stability in employment and job security for the employee. Though over a third of the houses at Rokana are still 'sub-standard'—over-crowded, poorly ventilated and unhealthy concrete boxes—nevertheless each employee is assured a roof over his head and free hospitalization facilities for himself and his family. Almost every aspect of the benefits accruing from employment in the mining industry is superior to other industries. The mineworker prizes his job to a corresponding degree.

At the same time there is a large pool of labour, already employed in other industries, self-employed or unemployed, only too eager to join the mines. Indeed, so great is the demand for employment on the mines that management is able to restrict recruitment to those who have completed lower primary education. With the increasing availability of school leavers the uneducated 42 per cent of mineworkers at Rokana<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Figures for educational levels of Rokana employees were supplied by the Central Training Division, Nchanga Consolidated Copper Mines Ltd, and refer to the situation in September 1969.

realize that, once dismissed from Rokana, their chances of getting employment elsewhere with equivalent pay are exceedingly slim.

In view of the ample supply of labour and the high demand for employment with the mines, the commitment of the mineworkers to the mines is very high, as is reflected in the low annual turnover figure of 5.3 per cent and an average length of service of 9.4 years.<sup>34</sup> As a result of the high commitment to the mines as an employer, management has been able to impose a strict disciplinary system on its workers. In this endeavour the mines have been very successful in controlling what they would define as 'absenteeism' and other 'disciplinary offences'. For the employee, acknowledging the efficient implementation of the disciplinary system, realizes that as a persistent offender he will not remain long with the mines.

With high profit margins, and wages representing a small proportion of production costs—Bates suggests a figure of 15 per cent (Scott, p. 23, quotes the corresponding figure for British coal mines in 1957 as 63.7 per cent)—the mines have never claimed to be unable to pay their African labour force more. Indeed, the mineworkers have been awarded a number of increases since the formation of the African trade union in 1948, but in exchange management has increased its control over the workers while they are at work. One way in which it has accomplished this is through the effective, but since Independence fair, implementation of a severe disciplinary code. Levels of remuneration, higher than in other industries, have in fact led to a well 'disciplined' black labour force and not one characterized by 'indiscipline', as both management and Government have tended to assume.

In examining any failure of the mineworkers to live up to expectations of enhanced productivity one would do well to look at the expatriate labour force and management. Whereas the 'local' labour market places the black labourer in a weak bargaining position *vis-à-vis* management, the condition of the expatriate labour market places the white in a strong bargaining position *vis-à-vis* management. Though the salaries offered to expatriates are high relative to Zambian incomes, they are not so competitive on the world market from which expatriates are recruited. The expatriate salaries are higher than those received in the home country but even when allowances, inducements and all fringe benefits are included they are not always sufficiently attractive to compensate for what are seen to be the drawbacks attendant on working in an independent African State such as Zambia. The mining companies have complained on a number of occasions about the difficulty of recruiting adequately qualified expatriate labour under the present conditions of service controlled by Government. The discrepancy

<sup>34</sup> *Mining Year Book of Zambia* (1969), tables 14 and 17.

between the supply and demand of expatriate labour places the expatriate in a strong position to resist attempts by management to regulate his behaviour. The expatriate is able to flout disciplinary procedures in a way that would be impossible for the Zambian.

At the same time the very nature of contract labour—its three-year time limit—means that commitment to the mines and the job is as weak as the contract is short. Unable to make a career in the mining industry, and with promotion prospects limited, the expatriate is not motivated to impress his supervisor with his ability or inclination to hard work. Lastly the invariable racial affinity between the expatriate and his boss, notwithstanding serious schisms within the white community, does enable him to apply social pressure for the relaxation of regulations and restrictions over his behaviour. The Zambian is not able to apply such pressures to white management.

These factors cannot but lead to a relatively uncommitted expatriate labour force whose dedication and effort are well below potential, whose absenteeism and general indiscipline, though unrecorded, may well be much higher than the Zambian worker's. Any decline in productivity could as well be attributed to the expatriate as to the Zambian mineworker.

#### *The industrial organization*

Earlier we spoke of the disciplinary system as being one way in which management had succeeded in controlling the industrial behaviour of its black employees. A further means of regulating industrial behaviour is through the structure of the organization. As far as the organization of mining industries is concerned, the Copperbelt is unusual in that it is based on an intensive division of labour co-ordinated and controlled by close supervision and a strict disciplinary code. The weak bargaining position of migrant labour in a colonial system of domination made a tight system of control possible in the first place, and since then it has been justified by reference to the need to cope with unexpected and dangerous situations. Only a well trained and disciplined labour force could respond promptly to the commands of the white supervisor, who has to contend with the uncertainties inherent in mining. The first generation of black miners were relatively unaccustomed to industrial work and discipline, and management would trust them with only the minutest tasks which did not allow any room for initiative or discretion and therefore prevented accidents. Work operations were co-ordinated through supervisory regulation, and were carried out under pain of severe and often arbitrary discipline. Since such a system was introduced the labour force has matured: many employees are second-



generation miners and educational levels have advanced steadily.<sup>35</sup> The original justification of an intensive division of labour no longer holds.

Despite the development of the labour force in many areas, management has intensified rather than relaxed the division of labour, close supervision and the disciplinary code. Ironically, Zambianization has been the reason for the intensification. For Zambianization has moved ahead in unison with the further fragmentation of jobs and the introduction of new levels of supervision as well as an increase of numbers in the old levels.<sup>36</sup> The continuing division of labour necessitates a co-ordination and control of operations based on close supervision and a strict disciplinary system. The old arbitrary system of discipline has now been replaced by a fairer but equally severe system. The contradiction between the maturation of the labour force and the fossilization of a system of industrial organization based on an intensive division of labour has inevitably promoted frustrations amongst those workers who are not content with a job which leaves little room for initiative and responsibility. For others the job becomes a mechanical process devoid of meaning except as a source of income. The system inevitably discourages any interest in efficiency or productivity.

There are essentially two forms of mining organization and they are, by virtue of the technology involved, extreme forms. The more usual form is typified by the 'single place' tradition of the British coal mines. There mining operations were carried out by self-selected work groups sharing a common pay note. Management had no direct control over the workers except through the pay system. The group was 'autonomous' and the management agent, the 'deputy', provided a service and ensured safety. He did not regulate the work process. When mechanization was introduced at the coal face the 'single place' tradition gave way to a system known as 'long wall' mining. In its conventional form this introduced a division of labour, requiring an outsider or supervisor to co-ordinate and regulate the work process. In practice the system proved unworkable.

Long wall systems, because of their greater degree of differentiation, require much more integration than single place systems; but the con-

<sup>35</sup> Forty-one per cent of local employees' fathers had spent their entire life in the village; 25 per cent had been employed in non-mining industry but had retired to the village; 18 per cent had been employed by the mines and retired to the village, while 16 per cent had made town their home (11 per cent had or were still employed on the mines, and 5 per cent in a non-mining industry). Of those employees under 26 years old (17 per cent of the population), 47 per cent had fathers who had made their homes in town [Burawoy (1970), pp. 12, 15].

<sup>36</sup> For statistical evidence of such processes see Burawoy (1971), p. 54.

ventional pattern of organization has broken up the traditional, self-regulating cycle group into a number of segregated single task groups each bound within its own concerns. These groups depend entirely on external control in order to carry out the indivisible primary task of completing the cycle. The existing pattern of management through the wages system can only partially supply this control. *Full control would require either a degree of coercion which would be both impracticable and unacceptable or a degree of self-regulation which implies a different organizational pattern.* [Trist, Higgin, Murray and Pollock (1963), pp. 66-7. Italics mine]

The study shows that, despite mechanization, the autonomous self-regulating group controlled by the wages system is still the most effective form of mining organization.

The industrial organization of the Zambian copper mines inevitably comes under the category 'degree of coercion which would be both impracticable and unacceptable'. A change to a form of organization which embraces the principles of the single place system would imply a total reversal of present trends and policy. To introduce works councils or worker participation in management as proposed by the Zambian Government contributes little or nothing in this direction and remains peripheral so long as there is no fundamental change in organizational principle. What this means in concrete terms is job enlargement rather than job fragmentation, the delegation of more responsibility and autonomy to the lower levels of the organization, all of which ultimately rest on a greater confidence in the Zambian worker, which in turn will not be achieved until the myth of worker indolence is dispelled within management and Government circles.

The rigidity of the organizational pattern as it is now constituted does not permit any significant changes in the level of productivity—it only ensures that production maintains a steady course, with no dramatic decline or increase. The industrial organization must be regarded as a significant constraint preventing the workers from responding more favourably to Independence.

*The operation of the State through the union and party (United National Independence Party—UNIP)*

We now come to a central theme in Dr Bates's work—the capacity of the mineworkers' union and the party to act as 'output' structures, that is, organizations instrumental in regulating the mineworkers' industrial behaviour in accordance with Government labour policy. This involves the functional transformation of the union, hitherto an input organization giving expression to the interests of the mineworkers as workers, and a similar change in emphasis of the function of the party. Though

neither party nor union is seen to be particularly successful as an output structure, there is evidence to suggest that the party has been more effective in containing the demands of the mineworkers. This Bates attributes first to the inclination of the branch leadership of the union—which is where the power in the union organization tends to reside—to see the mineworkers' interests as their own, while the inclination of the regional party officials is to see themselves more as agents of Government policy. Second, the party officials have been more militant in championing the workers' interests in conformity with the social justice principle, and the success achieved in this area and their general militant anti-management posture accords them greater legitimacy in enforcing constraint at times of strike. In the eyes of the mineworkers themselves the party is very powerful and militant, while the branch leadership is weak and as often as not sides with management. Yet paradoxically when it comes to the election of the branch leadership the workers resist attempts to displace the incumbent leadership with party officials. This, Bates contends, is because the mineworkers do not believe that the party officials have adequate experience of industrial relations to perform the role of union officials effectively.

Bates's analysis does not contain any reference to the use of coercive power by the Government or the party to regulate the behaviour of the mineworkers. Since 1968 (when he left the field), at least, force and fear must be considered as elements in determining behaviour outside the work point and in the township. At times of strikes it has been usual to find District Governors and Regional Secretaries touring the mine townships with an entourage of party supporters, demanding an immediate return to work. The Government has used its authority to remove union leaders likely to attach more importance to the interests of the workers than to what it conceives to be the interests of the nation. One such person was Abel Musonda, at the time of his removal president of the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions and branch chairman at Luanshya mine. In the branch elections of 1970 Musonda received some 20 per cent of the possible votes at Luanshya, while at Rokana, for example, the branch chairman secured only 3 per cent of the votes. Following the branch elections, Musonda stood for the position of president of the Mineworkers' Union against the incumbent president but stormed out of the congress, claiming that the elections had been rigged. Soon after he was forced to accept a position as District Governor and resign from his union posts.

More recently a 'rebel' group of mineworkers, many from the old Staff Association, threatened strike action in protest against the union's betrayal of the mineworkers by signing a productivity deal which included a new job evaluation scheme downgrading a number of jobs,

the stopping of payments for the first two days of sickness and the deferment of pay increments to mineworkers with a poor disciplinary record. When the strike appeared imminent the Government intervened and put the leaders under restriction. There was no strike. Though the geographical concentration of mineworkers into specific mine townships conduces to worker solidarity it also makes the mining community peculiarly vulnerable to intimidation. Where necessary, local party politicians have brought in supporters from the other municipal townships to impress Government and party policy on the mineworker.

If the coercive power of the Government is a significant factor, how then is it that the mineworkers have been able to resist a take-over of the union by party officials? As Bates writes, the main reason is 'the government's conviction that the union and mineworkers are immensely powerful' (p. 49). Lessons learnt before Independence, some of which are outlined in chapter seven, have served to make the Government all too conscious of the potential strength of the union. To use force or any undemocratic procedure to instate party officials against the will of the mineworkers might precipitate an economically disastrous retaliatory strike.

The mineworkers, however, are all too conscious of the coercive potential of the party. Experience at times of local and national elections or in the suppression or harassment of supporters of opposition parties leads to an awareness of the coercive power of the party. However, Bates explicitly denies that fear of a Government and party take-over accounts for the reluctance of the mineworkers to elect party officials to the branch leadership of the union:

In their campaigns against the union, the party leaders emphasized their dedication to the fulfilment, not the curtailment, of the workers' demands. On the part of the workers, the rejection of UNIP's campaign was therefore not an act of resistance to the government or its policies. Rather, it was a selection among competing claimants to expertise as representatives of their interests as mine employees. So long as the union leaders were UNIP, the workers were satisfied as to their political loyalty. And once satisfied that all claimants were loyal, they selected those whom they felt were most knowledgeable in industrial matters. [Bates, p. 165]

If indeed the capacity to represent the interests of the mineworkers and to influence policy in their favour is the criterion of assessment, and the miners believed in the sincerity of the local party officials' campaign, then the latter's direct access to Government would make them the more attractive candidates for branch leadership. Their supposed inexperience in industrial relations would be made up for by their greater power and influence with Government, which the officials could use to

represent the interests of the mineworkers. In practice the mineworkers realize that, once elected, the UNIP officials will forget about their election pledges and turn into Government agents resolute in containing the workers' demands. The identification of party and Government in the eyes of the mineworker, and the knowledge that mobility for the party official is through the party, encourage the belief amongst the miners that UNIP officials elected to lead the union would be UNIP officials first and union officials only second. A branch leadership composed of UNIP officials would be an open invitation to the suppression of the mineworkers' interests as mineworkers.

This is not to say that the miners have very much more confidence in the incumbent union leadership, but, at the same time as labelling the union leadership stooges of management, many acknowledge that the union branch leaders have had little choice but to co-operate with management and implement officially the Government policy of restraint, to the detriment of the mineworkers' interests:

The Government has come in in a big way stamping its foot on any active trade unionist. They have all been deprived of their powers. [Burawoy (1970), p. 42]

Lack of interest in the union on the part of the membership is corroborated by a social survey conducted at Rokana in 1969 which indicated that 8 per cent of mineworkers did not know the name of their branch chairman, while only 9 per cent could mention either the name of the president or general secretary of the union at the national level. That less than three hundred votes out of a possible ten thousand were recorded for the elected branch chairman at Rokana in the 1971 elections is further testimony to the low level of interest in the union amongst the rank and file.

Bates endorses these findings when he says that the mineworkers regard the branch leaders as a 'privileged group attempting to evoke co-operation from the workers in exchange for personal benefits' (p. 124). They are also actively opposed to strikes:

Thus at the time of strikes, the union leaders actively exhort their members back to work; only by so doing can they get management to negotiate with them the members' grievances. [Bates, p. 120]

Yet one of the most interesting conclusions he draws from his study is the differing responses of branch leaders and head office leaders to the Government labour policy.

While the head office adheres to the government's formulation of the public interest, the local Branch leaders conceive of their interests as being identical with those of the mine-workers. [Bates, p. 74]

... One factor is the existence of radical leaders at the local level. [*Ibid.*, p. 203]

Evidence of 'radical' (militant may be a more appropriate term) leaders at the local level, at Rokana at any rate, is very meagre, and the only illustrations offered to the reader refer to branch leaders at Luanshya and Broken Hill before Independence. After 1966 it is unlikely that a militant branch leader would last long. At a group discussion, shop stewards made the following comments:

Long ago I remember union leaders did not get any sleep in their homes. Now the leaders just sit in their offices and organize through the telephone. The other problem is the extent of UNIP influence in MUZ. Long ago it was a workers' union; now it is a UNIP union. We have mixed up politics with trade unionism. The union was very powerful in the Federal days before it was weakened. The politicians say we must not encourage strikes because it is our country now but they forget that grievances in the industry are still there, they have not disappeared with Independence. [Field notes of the University of Zambia Sociological Association project *Determinants of Work Behaviour*]

It is difficult to see how, in the present circumstances, when a branch leader has little alternative to endorsing the Government policy of restraint and opposing strikes, he can be regarded as 'militant' or 'radical'. At best he can connive at the existence of 'militant' unofficial leaders, officially exhorting strikers to return to work while unofficially letting it be known that he sympathizes with the workers' grievances, but his position does not allow him to offer any open support. According to some witnesses, this is an important way in which shop stewards are able to reconcile the role conflict in which they now find themselves.

In the campaign for branch leadership the UNIP officials are seen as the worse of the two evils. Bates's explanation follows his understanding of Epstein's (1958) analysis of the mineworkers' vote for the abolition of the tribal representatives in 1953:

Epstein notes the mineworkers' conviction that the skills relevant to leadership in tribal affairs are not relevant to the defence of the Africans' interests as industrial workers. He recounts how the mineworkers voted overwhelmingly to abolish the institution of tribal elders<sup>37</sup> as a mediator between the companies and the labour force; and how the tribal elders, when they encroached into the field of labour relations, were subject to abuse and even assault by the mineworkers. While Epstein interprets his observations primarily as evidence of the operations of class instead of tribal social relationships in the urban social setting, he also notes that the perception of racial differences in the mining community promotes

<sup>37</sup> Bates probably means tribal representatives.

the rejection of tribal divisions and the endorsement of racial unity.  
[Bates, p. 117]

Epstein's observation of the 'operation of class' is regarded as peripheral, and yet it is the absence of this element which makes Bates's own analysis of relations between UNIP and the union unsatisfactory. It is precisely because the tribal representatives sided with management that they were rejected, just as in the event of worker-management conflict the UNIP union officials will defend management to a degree which the present leadership would not entertain. The present union leadership has been able to resist the party's intrusion in industrial affairs<sup>38</sup> on behalf of Government. Bates underplays the importance of the workers' perception of a structural conflict between themselves and a ruling class composed of white management buttressed by black political power—the party. The mineworkers will use the party when it is in their interests to do so, but only from outside. They will not countenance the absorption of their union into the party.

Bates rejects the conventional wisdom that trade unions were participants in the Independence struggle in what must be the most interesting chapter of the book. Here he traces the antagonism between the party and the union back to the early 'fifties, when the union refused to call the mineworkers out on a politically motivated strike. Epstein suggests that the mineworkers had no need of the African National Congress—a diffuse, loosely knit organization representing the diverse interests of the residents of the municipal townships. The union served the specific interests of the mineworkers more than adequately and better suited the unitary structure of the mine township.<sup>39</sup> It was not in the interest of the mineworkers to be absorbed into the party, and this must be the *central* reason for the rejection of UNIP officials in their contest for union leadership.

#### *The concept of a labour aristocracy*

Explanations of social behaviour invoked by social anthropologists have tended to stress local features specific to the community under investigation, where more general interpretations of broader significance may

<sup>38</sup> At the 1969 second National Convention on Rural Development, Incomes, Wages and Prices in Zambia, President Kaunda announced, 'My government is prepared to support the right of an employer to discipline or dismiss any employee for failure to perform his job adequately. We will not allow interference in such a case by any political party or anyone not directly connected with the industrial situation' (Kaunda, 1969, p. 14). The Government was acceding to the wishes of management and the union, who were both concerned to resist party interference in industrial matters.

<sup>39</sup> Epstein (1958), chapter 5.

be equally acceptable. Without diachronic or synchronic perspectives the reader may be encouraged to draw a false impression that the problems encountered are in some way unique. Though Bates does consider the historical background to the present antagonisms between union and party, he fails to take it into account in explaining the rejection of UNIP officials in elections to union posts. Apart from the general framework, he does not incorporate the findings of studies undertaken elsewhere, contained, for example, in summary form in Galenson's two books (1955 and 1959). Epstein goes some considerable way in broadening his analysis by introducing the notion of class, but still many of his explanations of the struggle between the African National Congress and mineworkers' union are framed in terms specific to the urban setting on the Copperbelt. Yet competitive and antagonistic relations between unions and party dominate the scene in almost every country's labour history. The struggles between union and party in the Soviet Union and the resistance of the former, albeit unsuccessful, to absorption into the monolithic State assume parallels in their origin with the Zambian case.<sup>40</sup> Interesting comparisons could be drawn between Zambia and Chile, where the present socialist government is faced with a very similar problem—that of controlling the consumptionist demands of the copper miners, who, just as in Zambia, form an elite stratum of the working class. In broadening the perspective, different types and concepts of explanation must be invoked.

The position of the mineworkers as a labour elite invites parallels with analyses of Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries based on the concept of a labour aristocracy. Engels and other thinkers of the 'disillusioned left' have invoked such a concept to account for the failure of a workers' revolution to materialize in England. The argument rests on the existence of a comparatively prosperous body of workers distinct from the lower strata, devoid of socialist aspirations and concerned only to further their own narrow economic interests. Such a view holds not only that the labour aristocracy was politically quiescent and conservative, but also that it imposed 'its conservatism on working class institutions, thereby concealing, but by no means eliminating, the underlying militancy of the mass of workers'.<sup>41</sup> There has been much debate amongst historians as to the existence of any such labour aristocracy after the rise of the 'new' unions in the last decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>42</sup> (Until then the boundaries of

<sup>40</sup> See Deutscher (1950).

<sup>41</sup> Pelling (1968), p. 56.

<sup>42</sup> For two opposed points of view see Pelling (1968), chapter 3, and Hobsbawm (1946), chapter 15. A further interesting comparison can be drawn between Zambia and the Soviet Union. Support for the revolutionary Bolshevik Party came from

craftsmen and artisans, who comprised a labour aristocracy, largely coincided with the boundaries of trade unionism.) The debate revolves around whether the rise of the new general unions for unskilled and semi-skilled workers dissolved the labour aristocracy by undermining the wage differentials and protective practices upheld by the older unions. Without entering into this debate, the concept can perhaps be usefully applied to the Zambian copper miners in the context of the black labour movement in an attempt to place their relationship to the party in broader perspective.

Bates points out that from 1961 to 1966 the lowest recorded wage paid to local workers in the mining industry was higher than the highest recorded wage in other industrial sectors. Other figures confirm this trend and show that the average income of workers on the mines has been approximately twice as high as the average for all industrial sectors ever since 1960.<sup>43</sup> The conditions of income stratification and separateness of a labour aristocracy are therefore both fulfilled. Both Bates's and Epstein's discussion of the attitudes of the mineworkers towards the African National Congress and later towards UNIP illustrates the narrow economic perspectives in which they saw their position. Their refusal to stage political strikes, the absence, in the early stages of the nationalist movement, of A.N.C. branches in the mine townships and the subsequent resistance to UNIP take-overs, are witness to the politically conservative and quiescent stand they have adopted until the present. Hobsbawm finds it significant that when in 1900 the Labour Representation Committee was set up in Britain, it was the new unions who were the first to join, while the 'labour aristocrats' saw their interests, at least initially, as lying elsewhere. In the same way, the failure of the mineworkers to join forces with other unions in promoting the political activities of the nationalist parties, particularly through political strikes and the United Trade Union Congress, suggests that the miners were more interested in pursuing their own economic interests at the expense of the nationalist struggle and the wider labour movement. To this extent they obstructed and dampened the momentum of the independence struggle, just as Engels

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the mass of unskilled workers, while support for the reformist Menshevik Party came from a labour aristocracy composed of printers, railwaymen, steel workers and other highly skilled workers who were well organized in trade unions. Interestingly, Lenin himself seems to have expected the lowest strata of the proletariat to be the least developed politically and the least likely to support a revolutionary movement. But the facts confound this belief. See, for example, Carr (1971), vol. 1, chapter 2, pp. 38-56. Yet another interesting comparison is the white labour aristocracy of South Africa: see, for example, Simons (1969).

<sup>43</sup> Bates, p. 63; also *Statistical Year Book* (1970), table 4.3, p. 43.

saw the labour aristocrats as stifling the revolutionary movement in England.

The nationalist movement and the African National Congress grew up alongside the mineworkers' union in the geographically distinct municipal townships, where a diverse set of poorer workers had taken up residence. The African National Congress began as a specifically African body for the representation of African interests. It was only when it took on a more moderate tone and managed to gain some support from Katilungu, the popular president of the mineworkers' union, that it lost its mass support to the United National Independence Party. (Once Katilungu started embroiling the mineworkers' union in political matters he was, as Bates shows, ousted from his position.) UNIP too was a representative of the mass of poorer Zambians and never managed to secure the wholehearted support of the mineworkers, who were recognized all over Central Africa as an unusually prosperous section of the Northern Rhodesian labour force. Labour histories of employees indicate that Africans would come to town in search of jobs and would achieve the goal of employment on the mines by first working in less remunerative occupations.<sup>44</sup> Once the high status accorded to mine employment had been achieved, the mineworkers would be reluctant to relinquish it. They saw their interests as being very different from the mass of poorer workers in the municipal townships. Absorption into the nationalist parties might jeopardize or diminish the secure and remunerative employment which they were determined to safeguard. Within the party the miners' interests would be one set amongst many competing for the attention of the leadership. At the same time their minority status might result in their interest being sacrificed at the altar of nationalism for the benefit of the mass of the population. So long as they remained apolitical they could concentrate their efforts in the direction of furthering their own narrow economic interests with management. So far their efforts in these directions had met with much success, and they had no reason to believe that nationalist political action would advance their interests any better, or even as well.

Since Independence little has changed. UNIP remains predominantly a people's party deriving its support from the poorer sections of the Zambian communities. Studies seem to suggest that it is very much more powerful in the squatter townships than in the mine townships.<sup>45</sup> Recruitment to the party hierarchy is from the grass roots, and privileged groups such as the mineworkers and the students are

<sup>44</sup> See the labour histories in the University of Zambia Sociological Association, Reports Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, 13, 14 and 15.

<sup>45</sup> E.g. Pandawa (1971).

largely circumvented in the recruitment process. Equally, both groups have deliberately sought to obstruct any interference by the party into their affairs, arguing that politics and trade unionism or politics and academic studies don't mix. They fear that their privileged status would be seriously undermined if they were absorbed into the party. The mineworkers suspect the emergent ruling class of exploiting its support amongst the mass of the people to control and regulate their demands for a better life.

How the poorest workers actually perceive the Government, the mineworkers, the students, etc., will not be apparent until substantial studies of such sections of society have been undertaken. Hitherto the social scientists have continually focused their efforts on the labour aristocrats—the mineworkers—as if they were the only workers in Zambia. Too little attention has been paid to the lower strata of the working class.

#### *Introducing the concept of effort*

In the first part of this paper it was shown that the 'failure thesis' was of questionable validity. In the second part we have tried to indicate that the labour market and industrial organization have operated as effective controls of industrial behaviour, while the State, through the party and union, has had some success in stemming strikes. The injunctions laid upon the mineworkers in the name of the myth of worker indolence have justified the repressive action taken to contain consumptionist demands and strike action. The question remains—under what circumstances can the State effect even greater control over the output of the worker?

We must now re-examine the meaning to be attached to absenteeism, strikes, restriction of output, etc. Management and Government look upon these phenomena as indices of 'worker indiscipline' contributing to lower output. Baldamus (1961), on the other hand, has offered an interpretation more in sympathy with the worker's perceptions. His central focus is 'effort', which is treated as any form of deprivation or 'cost' incurred by going to work. The framework then rests on the validity of two postulates, namely that variations in effort are a universal component of industrial organization and that there is an institutionalized norm relating effort intensity to wages—the value of effort or 'effort value'. Baldamus cites a number of industrial studies to make these postulates appear plausible, and our study of lashers leads to similar conclusions. Where effort intensity and wages increase or decline in parallel, effort value remains constant but its *level* changes. Thus we noted earlier that in exchange for raising wages management

imposed more stringent effort controls so as to raise the level of effort value. Where wage increases fall behind effort intensity there is a fall in the *size* of effort value, that is, the emergence of a 'wage disparity'. Attempts by the worker to reduce wage disparities by reducing effort are manifested in forms of withdrawal of labour—absenteeism and strikes—and restriction of output. In this light we may regard the low figures for absenteeism, strikes, etc., for 1964 as reflecting the willingness of the mineworkers to accept a temporary wage disparity in anticipation of its rectification in the near future by the new Zambian Government through wage increases. The Government's hopes that the mineworkers' norm of effort value might drop, now that their own black Government was in power, were dashed by the strikes of 1966, but this is not to say that the mineworkers' norm of effort value has actually increased since Independence, as is implicit in the 'failure thesis'.

Mine management has tried to increase wage disparities through the intensification of industrial controls over effort (rather than through the manipulation of human relations), while the Government has tended to do the same through moral injunctions and political controls. On the assumption that all forms of withdrawal of labour (absenteeism, strikes, labour turnover, etc.) and restriction of output are manifestations of wage disparity, then an attack on one will be successful only in so far as there is a simultaneous control of all the others. Forcing an increase in effort without a corresponding increase in pay by stemming strikes can be effective only if workers are unable to withdraw or reduce effort through absenteeism and restriction of output. This means that present political controls exercised by the Government directly or through the union and party must be operated in conjunction with equally stringent controls within industry. To the extent that a wage disparity of this kind is maintained, as it was in Russia through the combination of repressive legislation and stringent superintending of behaviour at work by the party and such 'manipulative' techniques as Stakhanovism,<sup>46</sup> so a system of forced labour is introduced.

In keeping party officials out of positions of authority within the union, the workers seek to obstruct the Government and party from gaining a monopoly over industrial and political controls. The cynicism which greeted nationalization of the mines amongst many mineworkers perhaps reflects a similar fear that the political controls hitherto operating outside the work place will now enter it, forcing increases in effort without corresponding wage increases.

If the Government does not wish or is unable to pursue a totalitarian policy of enforcing a wage disparity through the coercive powers

<sup>46</sup> Deutscher (1950), p. 109.

at its disposal, then it can encourage increased output from the worker in one of two ways: either through an increase in wages or through a reduction of effort. The trade union leadership throughout its history has almost always defined the interests of the workers in cash terms. Strikes, negotiations and agreements with management for improved conditions of service almost invariably involved wage increases. The most recent example—the productivity deal of November 1970—was an example where management, in return for wage increases, elicited greater control and ‘discipline’ of the workers and enlisted the support of the union officials in furthering such ends.<sup>47</sup> The obsession with wages possibly reflects management’s willingness to grant wage increases, since wages form such a low proportion of production costs, so long as it retained all the discretionary power in the field of working conditions and work organizations. As long as the union confined itself to wages and did not interfere with production, management was prepared to offer more to the workers. It is also true that negotiations which revolve around wages are very much easier to prosecute than ones which involve other conditions of service such as working conditions. Whether in fact the emphasis on wage increases reflects the attitude of the workers themselves is difficult to assess.<sup>48</sup>

The Government policy of wage restraint discourages the pecuniary concerns of the trade union leadership and it would be natural, in such circumstances, for the union leaders in furthering the interests of the membership to aim at better working conditions. By reducing effort in some areas, it may be increased in other areas. Deprivation incurred through the overcrowding of five, six or more people to a room in the township dwellings could be reduced if new houses were to be built, albeit at great expense, which might make it possible for the worker to come to work fitter and better prepared to incur greater effort. Shortening the working week to five days is another obvious way of intensifying effort. The management argument against such a change lies in the necessary increase in the labour force by some 20 per cent and the expense of the extra houses, which would be ‘prohibitive’. But since it would have created another four or five thousand jobs, the Government might be persuaded to subsidize such an expenditure out of its profits from copper, as a socialist measure. By reducing effort rather than increasing wages both union and management would also be acting in conformity with the Government labour policy of wage restraint.

<sup>47</sup> For an interesting comparative analysis of productivity deals in England see Cliff (1970).

<sup>48</sup> Certainly, from the research conducted by the University of Zambia Sociological Association, the mineworkers appeared as much concerned about their housing as about any other condition of service.

So far the Zambian Government and management have confined their attempts at squeezing more effort out of the worker to accusations of sloth, irresponsibility and intemperance, with authoritarian regulation within industry and political intimidation of potential strike leaders. When forced, they have given way to wage demands (in 1966 and 1970) rather than introduce totalitarian controls. Throughout, however, the emphasis has been on the stick rather than the carrot, on restraint rather than incentive.

This discussion must not blind us to the fact that, under the present distribution of responsibility within industry, management must primarily be held accountable for *productivity*. The worker sells his ‘effort’ to management, whose task it then is to transform the effort into output, giving rise to productivity. Only in a system of *genuine* worker participation in industry—not workers appointed to the board of directors but workers actually assuming a managerial responsibility for co-ordination and change on the shop floor—can the workers be held equally accountable for productivity. Given the paternalistic and at times autocratic heritage in industrial relations and the intensive division of labour, it is precisely this type of worker participation which encounters uncompromising opposition from management and unconcern and suspicion from workers.

### Conclusion

The contention that the Government has ‘failed’ to control and regulate the mineworkers can be examined only in the context of a given definition of ‘failure’. There are at least four frames of reference which could be considered. Bates, for example, has used the deterioration of ‘labour discipline’ and increasing wages as his criterion of failure. An examination of the figures for absenteeism, strikes, productivity, etc., since Independence do not substantiate his view. In the field of wages, the 22 per cent pay increase in 1966 was followed by three years of restraint, a 5 per cent pay increase in 1970 and new incremental pay scales introduced in November 1970, resulting in further increases of approximately 5 per cent a year. Since Independence the average yearly increase has been about 7 per cent, while the cost of living index has also risen by an average annual rate of about 7 per cent.<sup>49</sup> The view that the mineworkers have substantially increased their real incomes, though valid in 1967, can no longer be upheld in 1972.

The second frame of reference places the Zambian mineworker in a wider international context. The myth of worker indolence—that the Zambian mineworker is particularly ‘lazy’—is not upheld when strike

<sup>49</sup> *Statistical Year Book* (1970), table 15.3, p. 177.

figures and absentee rates are compared with similar workers in other countries.

A third frame places the mineworker in a national perspective. Has the mineworker responded better or worse than other sections of society to the call for restraint, discipline and sacrifice? Unfortunately, accurate data concerning other sections of society are not available—a factor which makes the mineworker particularly vulnerable to the potent criticism that can emerge from one-sided representation of figures and the absence of comparative data. An examination of the civil service, the political and administrative bureaucracies, particularly at the white collar level, would probably reveal that the mineworkers, and indeed the labouring community in general, have been the most prepared to co-operate and accommodate Government policy.<sup>50</sup> Yet they do so all the more grudgingly when they observe at first hand other sections of society indulging in excesses as a result of their restraint. While the Government makes appeals to the mineworkers to moderate their consumption demands and to make sacrifices for their brothers and sisters in the villages, the mineworkers themselves wonder why it is that the Government and those who come to assail them do not make any more visible efforts themselves in that direction, and why, despite continued restraint, improvements are so slow in appearing. By appearing to betray the very principles and aims it espouses the Government has lost much of the legitimacy it once had when the leaders of the country were prepared to suffer alongside their people. The mineworkers' restraint may perhaps be less a voluntary response than a compliance with management and political controls which, if violated, would jeopardize their jobs, throwing them into an already overflowing labour reservoir. The disparity in incomes between the mineworkers and other industrial employees and between the latter and the villagers has assisted the Government in eliciting co-operation from the rest of the Zambian labour force.

In the framework of Governmental and managerial ideology the failure thesis is axiomatic. It justifies ritual punishment through which allegiance to the 'national interest' is demanded, and on occasions enforced. No amount of work from the workers would convince management and Government of their commitment to work and the public interest.<sup>51</sup> So long as the workers are perceived as a threat to

<sup>50</sup> See Szeftel, 'Zambian humanism'.

<sup>51</sup> Cliff considers managerial appeals for increased output and wage restraint in the name of the 'national interest', 'high wages', 'a fair day's pay for a fair day's work', etc., as an ideological offensive on the part of those who control the means of production to protect their wealth. Not surprisingly, Cliff considers the assumptions behind such appeals to be unfounded (Cliff, 1970, chapter 10).

management and Government, so the myth of worker indolence will persist. It represents a self-contained system of thought in the light of which worker behaviour is interpreted only as reinforcing the axiom of worker indolence. The social scientist, however, should be able to perceive all the interlocking pieces from the outside and bring into relief the erroneous assumption upon which the inner logic rests.<sup>52</sup>

The main weakness in Bates's work is his adoption of a Governmental perspective, which to his credit he makes quite explicit, but which leads him to stress the Governmental definition of the 'development problem', to stress indiscipline at the expense of restraint, colour at the expense of class, political controls at the expense of industrial and market controls, problems of communication and organizational structure at the expense of conflicting interests, and moral suasion at the expense of coercive power. It is not the intention of this paper to substitute one one-sided view for another but merely to establish the importance of taking cognisance of the workers' perceptions and definitions of social systems and their actors as well as the Government's, particularly when the focus of study is worker behaviour. The synthesis of the different 'folk theories' represented within a single social system, and its projection on to a different plane of conceptualizations further removed from but directly relevant to its empirical referents, represents the task of the social scientist.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand what Bates clearly shows, by his example, is the importance of adopting a multi-disciplinary approach to political behaviour rather than confining analysis to a narrow specialism.

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<sup>52</sup> For an admirable social anthropological portrayal of thinking within a water-tight system see Evans-Pritchard (1937).

<sup>53</sup> This view is expressed more fully by Van Velsen (1967), pp. 129–49.



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