

AFRICAN WORKER CONSCIOUSNESS:
ORIGINS AND ASPECTS TO 1953

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'We are now, it seems, to have a native newspaper-reading community. Such would appear from the practice of the batches of boys assembling outside the Argus Company's premises to read the police news of the daily issue posted up. Amongst the boys is always one who can read sufficient English to interpret the Magistrate's Court, and as he announces the result of "no pass" and "desertion" cases, his audience is highly interested and deeply concerned with their neighbours who are sent gaolwards for a holiday ... it shows boys are susceptible to their surroundings and cognisant of the institutions which exist in their midst.' (1)

The generally appalling conditions which were characteristic of Southern Rhodesian mine compounds for over twenty years from at least the late 1890s often literally meant that 'for an African mineworker, the choice of employer or employment centre was ... a life-and-death decision.' (2) For black workers, then, sheer survival was in many cases dependent on an intelligence system concerning labour conditions on the various mines. Associated with this basic 'consciousness of survival' was an equally acute perception of differing wage levels, not only within Southern Rhodesia itself, but throughout the Southern African regional economy.

Until recently, however, academic observers of Southern Rhodesian labour history were unanimously of the opinion that African worker consciousness first began to manifest itself primarily in the 1920s. These interpretations, which assumed that the consciousness of African labourers 'should be assessed largely through the presence or absence of associations and organizations which manifestly articulate worker interests', have now been systematically exploded by van Onselen's thorough analysis

of black responses and strategies in the Southern Rhodesian mining industry between 1900 and 1933.

The basic and enduring features gave rise to and shaped the general expression of African worker consciousness; the predominant position of the Rand within the southern African regional economy and the repressive system of labour control and mobilisation operated by mine managements and the state. As regards the first feature van Onselen has explained that

'in the southern African regional economic system there were, for a complex variety of reasons, successive zones of low and high wages. Broadly described, there were zones of low wages in the northern areas of (Southern) Rhodesia and South Africa - i.e. at those points where there was an influx of immigrant labour. To the south of these zones, there were areas of higher wages - i.e. closer to the major employment centres of the respective national economies of Rhodesia and South Africa. Crudely put, the low wages of Mashonaland gave way to the higher wages of Matabeleland while the low wages of the Northern Transvaal gave way to the higher wages of the Witwatersrand. The behaviour of the labour migrant can only be understood against this broad economic background.' (3)

Black worker consciousness or concern to maximise wages was therefore expressed in a persistent southwards movement of labour towards the highest-paying employment centres.

Although Southern Rhodesian mines were favourably situated geographically to take advantage of this flow of labour from the northern peripheries of the regional economic system towards the Rand, their limited profitability and concomitant low wages and poor working conditions made them generally unpopular with migrant labourers. These workers, where distances were too great to allow a direct journey to South Africa, sought short-term employment on Southern Rhodesian mines in order to accumulate sufficient

savings to continue southwards. They would then desert 'from Mashonaland mines ... make their way south to the Matabeleland mines, where the process would repeat itself as workers left for the Witwatersrand.' (2) Such desertion, itself an effective form of worker combination, (2) was a device used by Africans, apart from its other functions, to combat the provisions of the Masters and Servants Act of 1901 and the Pass Law of 1902 which together attempted to divert migrants to Southern Rhodesian mines and, once there, to control and hold them for the duration of their contracts.

African mineworkers were confronted not only with coercive legislation, but on the mines themselves were subjected to the harsh discipline of the compound system and to somewhat broader social controls manipulated jointly by the mines and the state. (4) Recognition of this second feature, the repressive control of labour, enabled van Onselen to identify a further major area of worker consciousness, found not in 'direct expression of discontent' but 'in the nooks and crannies of the day-to-day work situation.' (2) It was thus possible to draw an illuminating parallel with the techniques of resistance utilised by slaves in the southern states of North America: 'Side by side with ordinary loafing and mindless labor went deliberate wastefulness, slowdowns, feigned illnesses, self-inflicted injuries, and the well-known abuse of livestock and equipment.' (5)

Details of van Onselen's study of black worker consciousness for the period 1900 to 1933 are not, however, repeated here. Instead, what this paper hopes to demonstrate is that, in most respects, the essential features of African worker consciousness were already well-developed *before* the turn of the twentieth century. In particular, by concentrating on the first formative decade of the capitalist mining industry in Southern Rhodesia, it is possible to trace the origins and early development of that consciousness. Secondly and more briefly, given the fact that the mining industry's central profitability constraints remained essentially unaltered in the years 1934 to 1953, the natural continuation in that period of earlier patterns of worker responses is examined.

The roots of African worker consciousness and responses to the 'modern' mining industry are somewhat diffuse, but three main strands can be identified. The first and most fundamental strand of worker consciousness, in the wide sense of seeking the most lucrative sources of income, was basically an extension and adaptation of past African experiences in precolonial production and trade and appreciation of market opportunities, whether for agricultural produce or labour. Africans in what became Southern Rhodesia assessed employment opportunities on local mines and very largely rejected them in favour of the more financially rewarding occupation of peasant production for the new and expanding markets. (6)

Not all Africans, however, could effectively exercise the option of producing crops for markets. Whether because of remoteness from markets in the early colonial era or because of real limitations within 'traditional' Shona agriculture before that period, Africans also turned to wage labour. But Africans from Southern Zambezia took care, both before and after 1890, to seek out the most remunerative centre of employment. From 1870 and 1886 respectively, these were recognised to be the Kimberley and Rand mines. As early as 1873 at least one Shona was returning from Kimberley and two years later a 'party of Makalakas' were recorded as on their way home from the diamond fields, 'carrying each in great triumph the gun for which he had been working for the past year. They were full of gossip and tales from the Fields.' (8) In 1877, two white travellers described the welcome they received at a Kalanga village when they were 'recognised by one of our Kimberley mining boys, who ... rushed off to his kraal and told his three companions that their old bosses had arrived. They had been good boys and had been well paid and rewarded for their services.' (9) Ndebele labourers, too, worked at Kimberley, by 1884 as many as one hundred and twenty. (10)

The formal proclamation of colonial rule over Mashonaland in 1890 and over Matabeleland in 1893 did not stop this southwards flow of labour but rather increased it as time went on through the imposition of taxes. Early in 1894, the *Rhodesia*

Herald was of the opinion that 'many of the (Matabeleland) natives having worked in the Transvaal and Kimberley mines are practised workmen' and in the Mashonaland district of Victoria most of the tax in 1895 was paid in gold earned on the Rand and at Kimberley. In subsequent years the higher wages of the south continued to attract 'large numbers' of migrant labourers and this factor, together with awareness of the appalling working conditions on local mines, meant that 'Boys who have had years of experience in Johannesburg and Kimberley cannot be induced to go to Selukwe, preferring to go back to Johannesburg rather than risk their lives at Selukwe.' Other government officials testified to a similar awareness on the part of Africans elsewhere; for example, of the Bulalima district in 1898, it was reported that 'large numbers of the young men are away at work, chiefly on the Rand where they are offered higher wages and better treated on the whole (so they say) than at the Mines in Matabeleland.'

Both in their production of crops for new markets and in the sale of their wage labour, Africans thus displayed considerable acumen from the earliest days of capitalist development north of the Limpopo. Moreover, as the preceding sections have indicated, this strand of consciousness, the well-developed sense of economic self-interest, had lengthy historical roots.

The second strand of consciousness, though, did not draw on the African past in the same direct manner; it was rather a consequence of the imposition and implementation of colonial rule, which, as Rosa Luxemburg has explained, was the struggle against natural economy:

'The principal methods in this struggle are political force (revolution, war), oppressive taxation by the state, and cheap goods; they are partly applied simultaneously, and partly they succeed and complement one another. In Europe, force assumed revolutionary forms in the fight against feudalism: ... in the non-European countries ... it assumed the forms of colonial policy ... In detail, capital in

its struggle against societies with a natural economy pursues (amongst others) the following ends: (1) To gain immediate possession of important sources of productive forces such as land ... minerals ... (2) To "liberate" labour power and to coerce it into service.' (11)

Although colonial rule was uneven in its impact on Southern Rhodesia during the decade 1890-1900, the speed and crudity of primitive accumulation in this period was sufficient to produce the African rising by 1896-7. Large-scale expropriations of cattle, the exaction of 'fines', the imposition of taxes, the levying of forced labour and the progressive alienation of land were all mechanisms used by white settlers to disrupt the indigenous economy (12) and at the same time induced in Africans what can be termed the 'consciousness of the colonised'. (13) The brutality and 'openness' characteristic of primitive accumulation in Southern Rhodesia left Africans in little doubt as to their new status; in the words of Fanon:

'In the (metropolitan) capitalist countries a multitude of moral teachers, counsellors and "bewilderers" separate the exploited from those in power. In the colonial countries, on the contrary, the policeman and the soldier, by their immediate presence and their frequent and direct action maintain contact with the native and advise him by means of rifle-butts and napalm not to budge. It is obvious here that the agents of government speak the language of pure force. The intermediary does not lighten the oppression nor seek to hide the domination.' (14)

As far as the mines were concerned, the 'language of pure force' was employed almost from their inception. Neither wages nor working conditions were sufficiently attractive to bring forth labour in the required numbers and within three months of the arrival of the 'pioneer column' in Mashonaland the B.S.A. Company Administrator was complaining that 'the mining community both on the Mazoe and Umfuli are suffering from the scarcity and bad quality of the local labour'. The way in which

labour power was 'liberated' and 'coerced into service' was candidly explained by a mining commissioner in 1892: 'The natives here seem much more willing to work this year than they were last (year) the chastisement meted out to other kraals of which they are certain to have heard, has no doubt greatly tended to make them better in this respect'. Such measures, of course, could prove counter-productive and a year later it was reported of the same district that 'there is considerable difficulty in getting boys for the small number of prospectors in the district. Some of the Kraals refused either to trade or furnish boys. I think this is in a great measure due to bad treatment received previously.'

The unwillingness of local Africans to work on Mashonaland mines led the *Rhodesia Herald*, in a somewhat confused editorial in 1893, to suggest that 'it is quite possible that artificial means will have to be employed to hasten the natural influx of native miners ... In these days *laissez faire* has to all intents and purposes become an exploded doctrine, and Government regulations and restrictions are found to answer as well or better than the haphazard outcomes of Darwinian struggles.' Insofar as the attempts of isolated mining commissioners and individuals to force Africans to work can be regarded as 'haphazard struggles', the B.S.A. Company heeded the *Herald's* advice and, with the establishment of the Native Department in 1894, forced labour became more widely and systematically practised. But Native Department 'regulation' of the labour market did not entirely supersede the activities of other interested parties. The Tebekwe Mine, for instance, employed a number of Zulu workers who were issued with company rifles and were 'in the habit of raiding the District for Boys and looting on their own account.'

While it is impossible to calculate the number of Africans who were forced to work on Southern Rhodesian mines, it is clear that forced labour was singularly unpopular, was an important cause of the 1896-7 risings and perhaps more than any other single factor, contributed to black consciousness regarding their exploitable and vulnerable colonial status. According

to one study of the African risings, the British Army in the Selukwe District in 1896 heard the cry, 'anything is preferable to working in the mines' and Africans themselves later explained the 'the cause of the rebellion was labour recruiting ... When the white people started the place which they call Selukwe the police used to come to our kraals... and when they recruited us they used to beat us.' (15) Certainly Africans seized the opportunity afforded by the risings to destroy mine buildings and property at one mine damage to machinery alone amounted to about one thousand pounds' - and to kill foreign miners.

Forced labour in particular and the mining industry in general were thus perceived as the symbol and the cause of the African's colonised position; indeed, B.S.A. Company officials bluntly informed African leaders that 'they might as well understand once and for all that this is a white man's country and that the white man's object was to get the gold out of the ground'. Conversely, where they were able to exercise the option of choice, Africans were unwilling to assist Europeans in the attainment of their 'object'. At the turn of the century, at least one observer thought that labour scarcity was partly due to this broad 'consciousness of the colonised':

'The grown up people look upon the discovery of gold as the cause of the loss of their country to themselves. They are unwilling to co-operate in the development of what they consider their great misfortune. No doubt this impression tells also on the young men.'

Shona insurgents, too, specifically objected to white exploitation of the country's gold. Two European prospectors whose camp was surrounded by followers of the 'rebel' Mapondera, later recalled the demands and remarks flung at them: 'Who gave us permission to come up and wash gold and sink pits? The gold was theirs; the district was theirs; they did not want anyone in the country sinking shafts "Magodi". Curses on the English at

Finally, these two strands of African consciousness, a sense of economic self-interest and an awareness of their colonised status, were combined and refined as worker consciousness through immediate experiences of labour conditions on Southern Rhodesian mines. This consciousness found expression in desertions, understanding of wage levels and employment opportunities and even in explicit combination where management provocation was sufficiently great. The latter manifestations were rare, however, because black workers rapidly experienced harsh discipline on the mines and in an era when co-operation between the state and the mining industry to procure and control labour was brutally clear, workers swiftly appreciated that discontent was best expressed in less obvious ways.

After only one year of capitalist mining development, employers were complaining of three features which both reflected black worker consciousness and which, to greater or lesser degrees, were to remain constant factors in subsequent mine labour history. For example, in the Manica region in 1891, companies complained about the scarcity of labour, the frequency of desertions once Africans were 'induced' to work and the low productivity or 'loafing' of labourers. Although some contemporaries attributed these features to African 'discomfiture of hard work', others realised that 'the majority of the best boys' simply preferred the more remunerative occupation of working as 'bearers to and from the Coast'. Elsewhere, desertion was already a widespread device for registering resistance to forced labour and poor working conditions; in the Umfuli district, nearly all' Shona labourers deserted 'after two or three days work'. In the Victoria district, African manipulation of the labour market was so effective that the local mining commissioner pressed for the introduction of a pass law as early as 1892:

'Numerous complaints have been made to me by diggers and others about the difficulty they have in keeping the natives in their employ. They will work for one month and then just as they have learnt to strike a drill and are becoming useful, will leave without notice and engage themselves to another person, either

because they get more pay, or because they like the position of the new mining (?) camp, or for some other reasons ... (In addition) a Contractor who has undertaken to do certain work within a specified time, finds it absolutely necessary that he should have good boys who are up to their work, and he will have a kaffir in his employ whose duty it is to go from mine to mine and find out the boys who are the best (drill) strikers, and the most useful in other ways and he will induce them to run away from the master they are working for, by promises of increased pay etc.' (16)

So widespread was black worker consciousness that it elicited a degree of grudging recognition from B.S.A. Company officials and contemporary newspapers who sometimes abandoned ideology (the inherently 'lazy native' concept) in favour of pointing to the consequences of poor working conditions. In 1893, an over-enthusiastic settler who had suggested 'drastic measures to obtain native labour for the mines', was reminded by an administrative official that 'much of the difficulty experienced in getting natives to work is due to their white employers declining to pay the wages due. I cannot consent to your firing upon any kraal for the purpose of getting labourers.' A local newspaper was also of the opinion that much of the labour shortage was due to employers 'who after engaging a boy, let his period of service nearly expire, and then either cause him to run away, or drive him off, by trumped up charges, deliberate cruelty, or the refusal to pay him his money due.' The paper warned that these methods of treatment were 'rapidly communicated' to other Africans and concluded that 'ignora though willing - and half-clothed natives cannot be expected to turn out before sunrise on a cold or wet morning, and work on empty stomachs, getting more kicks than Half-pence, throughout a long weary day. One willing labourer is worth half a dozen forced ones' (17)

Where black mineworkers were treated decently, the labour supply was correspondingly greater, but in general the level of mine wages, especially in Mashonaland, was too low to attract 'voluntary'

labour. Even during the speculative era of 1894-6 when capital expenditure and mining development were at their most extravagant, such *largesse* as percolated downwards through the system went primarily into the hands of contractors and did not significantly affect African conditions of labour. Although the average wages of black labourers did rise noticeably in this period, (18) the increase seems to have come mainly from the richer Matabeleland mines and in any event, mining companies were not prepared to dilute their speculative profits by improving other aspects of African employment conditions.

Management cognizance of African worker consciousness in the form of desertions instead took the cheaper option of improving the control and discipline of workers on the mines themselves. There were few employers who disagreed with the sentiment that 'the only & best means (of preventing Africans desertions) is to have a proper compound on the mines & appoint a few good boys as police to look after the others'. And as in the forced mobilisation of labour, the state co-operated enthusiastically with the mining industry in this sphere. Before the risings, armed 'Native Policemen' were supplied by the B.S.A. Company to various mines in Matabeleland 'in order to prevent the native labourers deserting'. In 1898, renewed requests for this service were sympathetically considered by the Chief Native Commissioner as a means of halting Africans from utilising a particular mine as 'a sort of half-way house where they can rest and obtain food for a few days, before proceeding to the Transvaal, whither they are tempted by the promise of higher wages than are paid on these fields.' If Africans slipped past these armed guards, only to be caught later, their punishment was severe. A British visitor to the territory was 'told that if a boy will not work, or tries to run away, the usual thing is to take him to the native commissioner, and have him given twenty-five (lashes), and I found that the word "twenty-five" said in English to any of the boys was sufficient to make them grin in a sickly way - they quite understood what it meant.' (19)

Repressive mobilisation and control of black labour was further aggravated by the almost complete absence of effective communication between white employers and African workers. According to one Native Commissioner, 'the "Lingua Franca", between natives and Europeans in those early days consisted of about three words: "Ikona, lo, and voetsak"! I heard Mrs Dr. Forrester ... telling her boy to "voetsak lo kwackwacs" out of her garden (turn the ducks out) and he seemed to understand.' Less amusing and more pertinent to African working conditions on the mines was

'on another occasion the Manager of the Bonsor had told ... one of his (work) hands to measure up a lot of cords of mine fuel I had cut for them. This man had a raw boy to carry a very full pot of paint, which he used to mark each stack we measured. The boy could hardly help spilling a little owing to the rough terrain we were measuring in. The official told the boy once or twice not to "spill lo bloody paint" but at last lost his temper and hitting the boy a severe blow with his fist, knocking him over, he asked "Did I not tell ye not to spill lo bloody paint?" and, turning to me he remarked: "The b.... does not understand his own bloody language"!' (20)

Apart from the often brutal manner in which they were disciplined, black workers also discovered how dangerous it was working on Southern Rhodesian mines and consequently gave 'accident-prone' mines a wide berth. At the Inez Mine in July 1895 an explosion, caused through the carelessness of the white miner in charge of the night shift, killed two Africans and injured two others. As a result, approximately fifty labourers deserted 'and it has had a bad effect on (the) district all round'. The frequency with which accidents occurred at the Tebekwe Mine gave it 'a very bad name (and) Boys from the District would sooner work at any other mine.'

In these circumstances of dangerous working conditions, forced labour and harsh discipline, it would be occasion for comment if black labourers had *not*

possessed a well-developed worker consciousness, rather than the converse. The same conditions, however, obliged the majority of African mineworkers to utilise similar techniques of resistance to those discussed by Genovese and van Onselen. Certain techniques were in existence by 1891 and by 1898 were common enough for one government official to summarize the pattern of crime in 'his' district as 'only (those) such as desertion, disobedience, absence without leave, malingering and the like.' Abuse of mining company livestock was also a relatively safe method of registering protest; for example, 'one of 53 oxen belonging to the (Geelong Gold Mining) Company was found dead in the kraal and... on the beast being cut open and examination made it was found that a piece of rough stick about six inches long and rather pointed at both ends had been forced up its fundamental orifice and injured the intestines etc. thus causing death'. At the Red and White Rose Mine, where conditions were often appalling, African labourers staged an effective 'go-slow' which drove the mine management to frustration.

Occasionally, though, black workers reacted in even more explicit ways against exploitation. In 1895 Shona workers on a small mine refused to work following a management attempt to introduce a night shift, as such labour was not covered by the original terms of their labour agreement. A few years later, Africans at the Sable Hill Mine firmly indicated their opposition to management interference with their private possessions. In the words of the investigating Native Commissioner, the employer

'having noticed that meal etc. was being wasted went through the kit of one lot of boys and found some candles, matches, and meal which they ought not to have had in their possession. On going to a second hut, the boys came up brandishing "Kerries" and speaking very excitedly saying they had bought the things in Salisbury. Mr Bennet thinking that he had better not interfere further because he was unarmed and alone, went away.' (21)

Defiance of this nature did not go unchecked. The two 'ringleaders' were punished and the rest reprimanded by the local Native Commissioner, after which all the workers were 'paid to date and dismissed'. Desertion, too, was sometimes recognised as open combination; when reporting the large-scale desertion of Africans from mines, especially in the Hartley district, the *Rhodesia Herald* commented that 'in one instance at least ... it is not a question of the boys deserting so much as "striking"'. Some disagreement, we understand, occurred about the terms of payment and the boys are ... coming into town in a body in order to lodge certain complaints.'

By the end of the nineteenth century, then, African worker consciousness was already well-established and workers in subsequent years 'were careful to make inquiries before leaving (their homes) as to what arrangements would be made regarding medical and general treatment, also the rate of wages and the number of months they would be employed.' As the beginning of this paper noted, these later patterns of African worker responses and initiatives over the decades up to 1933 have been extensively explored elsewhere. After that date, black labourers continued to assess employment opportunities in terms of the regional economic system, and South Africa in general and the Rand in particular remained the ultimate target for most migrant workers. The only significant change was occasioned by the development of the Northern Rhodesian Copper-belt, the higher wages of which increasingly began to draw labour from Southern mines.

During the Great Depression, the closure or restricted output of many concerns and the economic collapse of the African rural areas released a flood of labourers, many of whom initially sought employment on local mines. The response of the Southern Rhodesian mining industry was to consistently lower wages, a practice which in turn ultimately did a great deal to eliminate the labour surplus. Africans in increasing numbers migrated to South Africa rather than work for any length of time for local mine wages which averaged between 17s and 20s per month in 1935. By 1937, a concerned Government estimated that over

twenty-seven thousand Africans, including migrants who had worked their way through Southern Rhodesia, were 'clandestinely' emigrating to South Africa each year. Officials in the southern part of the colony reported the 'very noticeable' development of labour routes to the Rand mines:

'Gangs of Natives are now to be met all along the border and they do not attempt to conceal the fact that they are going to the Rand, they are very ready to say that they are Portuguese Natives and give one the impression that they think because they say they are Portuguese Natives, they are free to use the road without any interference from the authorities of this Colony. Last year the few gangs I did meet disappeared into the veldt on the sight of a car with a Native Messenger in it.' (22)

Migration of this magnitude produced a labour shortage which affected the great majority of Southern Rhodesian mines. The Secretary for Mines warned that the 'labour requirements of the mines on the Rand are almost insatiable, and there appears a danger that, unless attractive conditions of employment are available in Southern Rhodesia, the higher wages paid by the Rand mines will be an irresistible magnet to native labour.' Few local mines were able to respond significantly to the Secretary's warning and as a result the labour shortage continued unabated.

From the Gwanda district, it was reported that 'Hammer boys and those able to operate Oliver Filters are going to the Union for employment', and at the Antelope Mine further south where 'a slight influx of labour from Gwanda District had occurred ... it (was) suspected that these Natives are merely awaiting an opportunity to cross into the Union territory.' In other parts of the colony, desertions and well-developed labour routes were equally common. One particular route frequently used by Africans from Nyasaland provides a classic example of this aspect of worker consciousness:

'At the Hippo Mine it was stated that numerous Natives from Nyasaland come by train to Umtali

and before being registered proceed to this Mine where they obtain work. After a month, having rested and earned a little money, they desert making for Johannesburg. This mine being so far away from Chipinga cannot always have these natives registered before engaging them. Apparently this mine is regarded by some Natives wishing to proceed to Johannesburg as a half way house.' (23)

African workers also gravitated towards better-paid jobs within Southern Rhodesia; secondary industry and the large base mineral producers all attracted labour from local gold mines.

This labour shortage, of varying intensity, which persisted in the Southern Rhodesian mining industry between 1936 and 1953 was clearly a result of black worker consciousness. The shortage itself, moreover, resulted in a strengthening or at least made possible a clearer expression of other aspects of African worker strategies. Because their bargaining position was improved by the scarcity of labour, those black workers who remained within the mining industry were able to utilise other techniques of resistance with comparative impunity. Employers in the Umtali district in 1938 complained of 'inefficiency, deliberate slowness, insolence and a changed attitude of lack of respect for the European (on the part of Africans), many of them are not prepared to do a fair month's work for their pay.' But the compound inspector who recorded these management grievances was sufficiently perceptive to note their relationship to employer exploitation: 'there is another side to this question and that is the morality of the employer; the employer who fails to pay wages, unjustly docks tickets, refuses to accept notice, keeps a ticket in hand to prevent desertion, and has little or no interest in housing or feeding conditions. In the Selukwe area, African workers on a mine which was remote from labour routes, took advantage of management reluctance to antagonize the precarious labour supply, by malingering. Between ten and fifteen workers reported 'sick' each day in order 'to have a rest'.

The following year, the Chief Native Commissioner criticised the prevalent policy 'of "keeping labour

sweet" by complacency towards shiftlessness and absenteeism', but conceded that 'something in the nature of group insistences on the Natives' part ... is observable.' These ran the full gamut from insistence on good food, fair wages and prompt payment' to 'a tendency towards ca'canny and careless work and frequent absentations from duty.' (24)

A junior official was even more explicit in his appraisal: 'Employers complain that labourers are very indifferent, irresponsible, and difficult to handle ... (and) have to put up with impertinence and careless work to keep their employees otherwise their business comes to a standstill.' Compound inspectors were approached by employers and asked 'to lecture the natives on disobedience. They disregard the instructions of their employers, and for peace and quiet their employers let them have their own way.' Others reported that 'natives are adopting a definitely "go-slow" policy' and concluded that the 'natives remaining in employment are well aware of the labour position and are working in a very perfunctory manner.'

Because of the general nature of Southern Rhodesia's political economy and the particular profitability constraints of the mining industry, both of which rested on cheap, exploitable black labour, explicit African worker combination was not generally tolerated for the greater part of the period under consideration. Although the post-war development of secondary industry with its need for a stable labour force did see a resurgence and expansion of earlier black trade unions like the ICU, no similar movements emerged in the closely-controlled mining industry. In 1953, when anticipating the possibility of such a development in the future, the Chamber of Mines determined the following points:

'If Natives want to start a Trade Union, the Members must have a definite qualification, such as a certain standard of education. If they have Unions, there must be safe-guards as they don't account for their funds, they spend them on agitators. A Union where every Native can join was wrong because they could

not think for themselves. They were very good at secret organisations, no one knew what they were up to at all.' (25)

This statement by the major mines of the colony, while on the one hand indicative of continuing employer hostility to African labour organisation on the other was an unintended tribute to black worker consciousness. It was because of their exploitable class position that African mineworkers rapidly became so adept 'at secret organisations (in which) no one knew what they were up to at all'. The combination of state force and management control of compounds was normally sufficient to muffle or suppress explicit worker combination and so ensure that the basis of the mining industry's profitability remained fundamentally unaltered, but African workers, as this paper has demonstrated, from the inception of capitalist mining, developed a variety of often successful techniques of resistance against exploitation.

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For reasons of space the footnotes and references in this article have been substantially reduced and the numbering changed. Anyone requiring the full paper and footnotes will be provided with this on request to the Editors, S.A.L.B.

FOOTNOTES:

1. *Rhodesia Herald*, 19/10/1901.
2. C. van Onselen, 'Worker consciousness in black miners: Southern Rhodesia 1900-1920', *Journal of African History*, 1973.
3. van Onselen, 'Black Workers in Central African Industry: a critical essay on the historiography and sociology of Rhodesia', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 1975.
4. For two examples, see *Rhodesia Herald*, 7/7/1909 and *Bulawayo Chronicle*, 2/8/1930. The compound system is exhaustively discussed in van Onselen *Chibaro, African mine labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933*

- (Pluto Press, London 1976, (pt. 5))
5. E. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery* (London, 1966).
 6. For details, see Phimister, 'Peasant production and underdevelopment in Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1914', *African Affairs*, 1974.
 7. D.N. Beach, 'The Shona economy : branches of production', University of Rhodesia, Henderson Seminar No. 29, 3/7/1974.
 8. E.C. Tabler (ed), *To the Victoria Falls via Matabeleland: The Diary of Major Henry Stabb, 1875* (Cape Town, 1967).
 9. Tabler (ed), *Zambezia and Matabeleland in the Seventies* (London, 1960), See also, H. Vaughan-Williams, *A visit to Lobengula in 1889* (Pietermaritzburg, 1947).
 10. S. van der Horst, *Native Labour in South Africa* (London, 1942).
 11. R. Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (London, 1963).
 12. For examples of all these, see T.O. Ranger, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia 1896-7* (London, 1967).
 13. For elaboration, see A. Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston, 1967).
 14. F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth, 1967).
 15. Beach, 'The Rising in South Western Mashonaland, 1896-7', University of London, unpub. Ph.D. thesis.
 16. N.A.R. N 1/4/1, Mining Commissioner, Victoria, to Secretary, B.S.A. Company, 19/6/1892.
 17. *Matabeleland News and Mining Record*, 21/4/1894.
 18. Phimister, 'History of mining in Southern Rhodesia to 1953', University of Rhodesia, unpub. Ph.D. thesis, 1975.
 19. H.C. Thompson, *Rhodesia and its Government* (London, 1898) The same author noted that 'the natives have a marvellous system of communicating with each other ... (they also) sing a funny little song. It was made by an Englishman, but they have

quite adopted it, and , what is more to the purpose, they act in accordance with it - "Ikona mali, piccaninny scoff, Meningy sebenza - this nigger's off", which may be translated thus:- "No pay and little scoff, Too much work - this nigger's off"'.

20. N.A.R. H.Mss. Misc/Dr 2, William Driver reminiscences.
21. N.A.R. N 1/1/3, NC, Hartley, to CNC, 10/9/1898
22. S 235/438, Assistant NC, Nuanetsi, to NC, Chibi, 7/7/1936.
23. S 1610, Compound Inspector, Mashonaland, report for September, 1944.
24. *Report of the Secretary for Native Affairs and Chief Native Commissioner for the year 1939.*
25. Chamber of Mines of Rhodesia, private papers, Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, 20/7/1953.