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RESERVE (832)

SOME MYTHS ON THE AFRICAN WORKING CLASS.
THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL SCIENCE THEORY AND ITS POLITICAL FUNCTION

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Some Myths on the African Working Class. D. RosenbergThe Construction of Social Science Theory and its Political Function

This discussion paper will be concerned with the practice of theory. Theory will be taken as a social activity of man in definite social relations and an activity which can also express, account for and go beyond these relations. Theoretical production, like all social production, has a definite independence of prior or extrinsic determinations but these determinations express themselves in it. Like all production, it produces in that process, a reality distinct from its materials. Theoretical production transcends as well as reflects its own material base. Ideological production, as a distinct from theoretical-scientific production is more vulgar and often merely reflects the material base of the producer. Ideological production can also articulate the world view of a social class in which the ideologist is not organically based. Burk, an Irish intellectual, played this role for the English landed class in the 18th century. Ali Mzarui in East Africa articulates a world view for a East African bourgeoisie and is attacked by ideologists of the petit bourgeoisie in the process.¹

In locating the production of ideology it is important not to accept the subjective evaluation of those engaged in the process of production as being a social category "independent of the struggle of groups".² This is not altogether merely false consciousness. Ideological production as well as theoretical-scientific production does have an institutional continuity of its own linking together its producers from one epoch to another. In existing social formations corporate organizations such as universities strengthen and institutionalize this consciousness, and although in class society, the intellegentsia as a social category is itself bound to be stratified, its internal divisions may be 'softened' by a certain formal egalitarianism. In reality too, there has been a perpetual and multiple interaction between the stratified intellegentsia and the social categories, classes, in control of the nation state or those who struggle to control the nation state. The 'world view' of the different sections of the intellegentsia have an affinity to how close its leading sections are tied to particular fractions of its national ruling class or even to particular class fractions of

1. See J. Mohan A Whig interpretation of African Nationalism in the Journal of Modern African Studies Vol. VI No. 3 October, 1968.

2. See A. Gramsci The Modern Prime and other writings International Publishers 1957. Also Gramsci notes the differentiation inside ideological production are important.

of the petit bourgeoisie. Other sections of the intelligentsia can be tied or have an affinity to a declining ruling class. History provides many examples of these mediations. Gramsci writes of the 'vicious intelligentsia of Southern Italy' in the early twentieth century, the sons of small landowners who established the milieu of the local state bureaucracy and looked on the 'wretched southern peasantry with a mixture of fear and cupidity! Higher up the class scale it is useful to also recall Marx's references to intellectuals, scions of the ruling class, who "make the perfecting of the illusions of the class about itself their chief source of livelihood".³ At the other end of the class scale a newcomer to the intelligentsia from the working class, the peasantry or from the lower petit bourgeoisie may come into contradiction with members of the dominant class block for not accepting him as a social equal. Historically whenever the intelligentsia has had too great a class gap between its private and collective 'interests' and its ruling class its subjective psychology has been ambiguous hatred of the dominant class, even when it usually is not expressed. The specific class balance in particular social formations has to be analyzed in concrete detail with regard to this generalization. In general, however, every intelligentsia has produced both simple 'common sense' ideologies as well as highly complex and metaphysical ideologies which function to sustain ruling class hegemony.⁴ The intelligentsia only displays significant volatility when a deep crisis shakes the hegemony of the ruling class - then the specificity of the crisis allows the internal fragmentation inside the ruling class to be reflected in the intelligentsia. In this way intellectual producers in backward capitalist social formations can often act as a substitute or proxies for social forces still immature or inarticulate i.e. the new and weak working class etc. but this is not common.

In the area of development studies great efforts have been invested in the codification, production and manipulation of statistical data. Such conspicuous abundance of cross-national statistical data has had a euphoric effect on social science technicians. So much so, that we are invited to believe that this era of data will do for social science what the development of the microscope did for medicine.⁵

3. K. Marx The German Ideology Moscow pages 39-40.

4. The political function of nationalism, in both its 'left' and 'right' variants as ideological formation establishes a objective class alliance between the petit bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie in Africa. This has not yet been subject to scientific analysis. It does allow the articulation of contradictions while suppressing them. A good analysis of left nationalism is T. Nairn. The left against Europe Penguin 1973.

5. D. Lerner Comparative analysis of processes of modernization in H. Miner (ed) The City in Modern Life Pall Mall London 1967 p.22.

At the same time the realities that this continuing statistical 'discovery' of the world have uncovered have driven other social science technicians to apocalyptic despair. We are, it appears, living dangerously on the craters of many volcanoes (nuclear, demographic, ecological etc). The world's resources are being 'consumed too fast and the world's population is expanding too 'explosively' to allow for any further growth' etc. This is not to deny that there is no such 'problem' or that the prospects of famine are imaginery but the tendency exists to deny that these problems are the symptoms of the dominant mode of production in the world today. Thus the drought in the Sahel can be seen as a act of nature, if not as a act of God, while the famine in the Sahel can be only understood in the context of the radical transformation of the traditional modes of production which has promoted the development of a highly productive system of capitalist agriculture.⁶ This is not to call for a moralist critique of this process as populism gives but for a materialist methodology which is more than a empiricist box of research methods. A populism which uses empirism to defend precapitalist modes of production against the development of capitalist relations is not superior to other ideological currents.

This increasing availability of statistical cross national data has produced a tremendous growth in the number of what are usually termed indicators of development. In a kind of positivist-empiricist orgy almost every available statistical item that could be used has been used to support generalisations about the political economy of peripheral capitalist societies. The apparent vagueness, looseness and elusiveness of these concepts of 'development' and 'underdevelopment' which form the social literature encourages attempts to operationalise these ideological concepts by embodying them with various statistical and quantitative content. The content can be liberal radical as well as liberal conservative in its political thrust.⁷

Migrant labour

Traditionally studies of labour migration have adopted the perspective

6. C. Meillassoux is the Sahel Famine good business in the Review of African Political Economy No. 1 1974.

7. See H. Bernstein Underdevelopment and Development Penguin 1973 for a liberalradical example. Bernstein has permitted the republication of this in 1976 while writing a newforward disclaiming the collection. A dilemma of academic radicalism perhaps.

of the individual migrant.⁸ This has involved the examination of two questions: the reasons for migration and its consequences at the level of the individual migrant or the social categories which produced the migrant. It has generally been assumed that individual migrants respond to the 'push' and 'pull' factors associated with the market. Attention is also given to 'problems' of adaptation and assimilation of the newly arrived migrant worker. In each instance, migrant workers are incorrectly, conceptualized in the analytic categories of neo-classical economics. International trade theory for example argues that factor movements, migrant labour in this case, can effectively substitute for commodity trade. A very recent study, rather helplessly, can merely state that 'migration today must be seen as the major contributing factor to the ubiquitous phenomenon of urban surplus labour... it exacerbates already serious urban unemployment problems'. The conclusion that migration is caused primarily by economic factors express the banality of such studies of the migrant which conceptualize the migrant as actively maximizing his interests through a rational consideration of the various labour market opportunities available in the urban and rural sectors.⁹ This tells us very little either about the rural capitalization process or the political and economic determinants which regulate the structural system of migrant labour. Southern African social anthropology has a relatively simple model which merely sees a dual consciousness among migrants as they respond either to the 'traditional' ties of their homelands or the 'modern' attraction of the urban towns.¹⁰

The lack of dominance by industrial capital in Africa had its own specificity in determining the labour force. This specificity was ignored by such economists as Elkan who summarized his own data on Uganda by stating that the bulk of the urban force could not be considered as proletarians. He

8. See such exceptions as C. Van Onselen's *Chibaro* Pluto Press 1975, G. Arrighi *labour supplies in historical perspective* in *Journal of Development studies* No. 3 April 1970. F. Halliday *Arabia without sultans* Pelican 1974 especially pages 418-476. J. Berger. *The Seventh Man* Pelican 1975. S. Castless and G. Kossack *Immigrant workers and class structure in Western Europe* Oxford University Press 1973. S. Castles and G. Kossack *The function of labour migration in Western Europe* in *New Left Review* No. 73 May-June 1972 and M. Burawoy *The functions and reproduction of migrant labour in American* *Journal of Sociology* vol. 81 No. 5 March 1976 and H. Wolpe *Capitalism and cheap labour power in South Africa* in *Economy and Society* Vol. 1 No. 4 Nov. 1972 See also the work of a liberal historian H. Tinker *A New system of slavery* Oxford University Press 1974.

9. See M. Todaro *Migration and economic development* Occasional Paper No. 18 IDS Nairobi 1976 See also G. Kay *Development and Underdevelopment* Macmillan 1975 for a critique.

10. See A. Epstein *Politics in a urban African Community* Manchester University Press 1969. Epstein's excellent study shows the limitations of anthropology quite clearly as does W. Watson's *Tribal Cohesion in a Money Economy* Manchester University Press 1971. ft 11 and 12 on p.5.

asserted that the unskilled migrant workers, rooted in the world of the peasantry were 'merely transit passengers in the urban sector of the economy Neither gradual wage increases nor other incentives were likely to reduce the structural instability of unskilled labour'.¹¹ While Elkan is regarded as a conservative social scientist, Leys, a radical, could argue that at the end of the 1960's 'the great majority of urban workers were still eventually migrant workers'..... 'studies of the urban adult male wage working population show that two-thirds spent at least a week and one-third a month, in their rural area each year'.¹² Leys ignores the long term stabilization and proletarianization of the urban Kenyan working class and superimposes, through his use of Rey's model of articulation a conceptualisation of the worker-peasant. His hypothesis is that for most of the urban work force the relations of production in their small holdings (however 'coloured' these might be by capitalist production relations) still predominated over those of their urban jobs.¹³ It can be argued that workers whether they are classified as migrants or stable workers can still look towards their rural home areas as providing a form of security when faced by sickness accidents, old age and unemployment etc. In the absence of any other social security attached to urban jobs workers have often no choice but to fall back, sometimes more in dreams rather than reality, on agricultural employment of some kind. Regular visits between urban and rural relatives, remittances to the village of origin and generale identification of urban workers with their home areas does not act as a barrier towards a highly specific working class consciousness. Leys and other social scientists should not therefore see a increasingly stable labour force as 'basically' peasants. They would not analyze a European worker who expects a pension to be 'basically' a relief recipient or a fondness for allotments to turn a worker into a peasant. Migrant workers who sell their labour power are unevenly proletarianized in backward capitalist societies but this unevenness is determined by the specific development of capitalist relations of production.¹⁴ The social anthropologists working

11. W. Elkan Migrants and Proletarians Oxford University Press 1960 page 124.

12. C. Leys Underdevelopment in Kenya. Heinemann 1975 page 180.

13. Ibid page 181.

14. See also G. Arrighi statement that 'wage workers still belonged to the peasantry' and that their location as migrant workers prevented the emergence of a proletarian class consciousness in G. Arrighi The Political Economy of Rhodesian Mouton 1970 p. See the denial of Arrighi's argument in C. Van Onselen's Chibaro Pluto Press 1975.

on the copperbelt, perhaps better than others, attempted to analyze the process of the proletarianization of migrant labour. In general terms however, these researchers merely developed 'alternative models' whereby a 'tribal identity or a 'class' identity were activated in appropriate circumstances. The workers class identity was conceptualized as being merely situationally specific. The making of a stable working class was empirically recorded while the anthropological 'network' analysis rejected the proletarianization process. The partial break from static functionalism was still linked to ambiguity about indirect rule which was posed with particular sharpness by the copperbelt studies...¹⁵ It has been argued that the colonial state 'was more reluctant to acknowledge the effects of European industry than the settlers themselves' and the social anthropologists. The Rhodes Livingstones Institute first director, Godfrey Wilson argued in 1941 that the government should recognise and make provision for the permanent urbanization of African Labour.¹⁶ Applied anthropologists were pragmatic, sometimes rather more so than the personnel of the colonial state. In 1937 the governor of Northern Rhodesia was willing to approve the permanent settlement of a small number of African workers on the Copperbelt provided the majority were repatriated to their home villages at regular intervals, By 1937 the repatriation of workers every two years was an accepted goal of the government. The governors overriding concern was the integrity of Indirect Rule, not the requirements of industrial development.¹⁷ The ideology of the personnel of the colonial state in Africa regarded urbanization as disruptive unless it took the form of a gradual organic evolution. This was part of a romanticized myth of rural society as the focus of the organic community. Certainly the pragmatism of the personnel of the colonial state was highly ambivalent - Africans had to be civilized but too much civilization was as bad as too little. However the colonial state could attempt to plan the labour force even if the material base of the myth of indirect rule was made more fragile. In Uganda in the 1930's colonial capitalism considered it 'uneconomic to invest more than a minimum in the health and physical welfare of migrant groups of unskilled workers' although the governor's position was that he was 'anxious to

15. See R. Brown Anthropology and colonial rule in T. Asad Anthropology and the colonial encounter Ithaca Press 1973.

16. See J. Lee Colonial development and good government Oxford University Press 1967 page 89.

17. See E. Berger Labour Pace and Colonial rule Oxford University Press 1974 page 35.

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create a permanent labouring class in order to deal with the (then) seriously uneven supply of labour and unstable wages¹⁸. However, when in 1938 the colonial state in Uganda published a report that recommended a stable labour force, colonial capitalism argued against it on the grounds that wages would have to be raised three or four times above the then current level.¹⁸ We find that echoing the sentiments of a past colonial capitalism, Elkan, after trying rather too hard to prove that the Nairobi working class were still migrants in the late 1960's ends his paper with the telling question "... and who is wanting a proletariat anyhow?"¹⁹ The present stage of the development of capitalism in Africa and the development of light industries require a labour force of sufficient skills, discipline and which is no longer forced to rotate. Elkan's question is thus answered by the tempo of capitalist development itself. The ideological mythology of the 'laws of the labour market' of the earlier period of colonial capitalism formulated by such economists as Lewis²⁰ were broken not merely by academic criticism but by the laws of Capitalist development in Africa.²¹ Migrant labour in Africa today coexists with a relatively large and settled class of workers.²²

The organization of migrant labour can be found to be defined in the work of empirical social anthropologists and marxist social scientists. The definition of both stems from a certain attempt to analyze the articulation between those areas of Africa which functioned as labour reserves and those areas in which both industrial and merchant capital helped to create and develop the relations of production into which the labour reserves were inserted. Thus Van Velsen's title of a early essay 'labour migration as a positive factor in the continuity of Tonga Tribal society is suggestive.²³ Wolpe goes further and suggests that the labour reserves internally in South Africa can be characterized as a precapitalist mode of production which is subordinated to the capitalist mode of production. The supply of African migrant labour power, at a wage below its costs of reproduction is a function

18. See P. Gutkind The emergent African Proletariate McGill University 1973 page 29.

19. See W. Elkan Is a Proletariate Emerging in Nairobi Economic Development and cultural change vol 24 No. 4 July 1976.

20. See A. Lew Is Economic development with unlimited supplies of labour in the Manchester School May 1954 Vol 22.

21. See S. Amin Underdevelopment and dependence in Black Africa in Journal of Modern African Studies December 1972. Amin's attempts a partial periodization of capitalist development but it is unsatisfactory as the relations between merchant and industrial capital are not clarified.

22. See M. Von Frey hold The Workers and the miners Unpublished manuscript 1975 for a sociological study of this coexistence in Tanzania and E. Collins Migrants labour in British agriculture in the 19th century in Economic History Review Vol. XXIX No. 1 February 1976 for England.

23. See Van Velsen's essay in A Southall edited Social Change in Modern Africa Oxford University Press 1961.

of the existence of the precapitalist mode of production.²⁴ A tendency to argue that any process of primitive accumulation implies an articulation of capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production is now widespread in marxist social science. Bettelheim argues that in the colonies capitalism subordination of non-capitalist modes of production tended not only to dissolve them but to conserve them.²⁵ Rey's analysis is that in backward capitalist countries capitalist relations of production cannot develop without the former mode of production reproducing the labour force and raw materials used by the capitalist mode of production.²⁶ The too rapid destruction of precapitalist modes of production will impede the functioning of capital itself and in many backward capitalist countries capitalism uneven development is still at the stage where it can only widen the labour base by reinforcing pre-capitalist relations of production. The reproduction of labour migration is seen here as a 'organic' part of capitalism at a particular stage in its development rather than a conjunctural feature which acts as a functional substitute for other methods of regulating and organizing labour power.

A conjunctural model of migrant labour locates the political instance as adeterminant. The colonial state in Northern Rhodesia or the South African state represented and expressed a particular class balance. The South African gold mines have relied on two types of migrant labour. On the one hand unskilled tasks have been and continue to be carried out by African labour recruited from the rural hinterland and the surrounding territories.²⁷ On the other hand European labour, initially recruited from Britain was employed in skilled and supervisory positions. Just as craft unions in the late 19th century had a powerful monopoly of a sector of the British labour market so the white workers of South Africa formed a union to protect themselves against competition from African labour. Although mining capital wished to advance Africans into more skilled occupations their efforts were blocked as early as 1893 by the legal enforcement of the colour bar which reserved a range of jobs for European workers.²⁸ On a number of occasions,

24. See H. Wolpe Capitalism and cheap labour power in South Africa in *Economy and Society* Vol. 1 No 4 November 1972.

25. See C. Bettelheim Theoretical comments in A. Emmanuel Unequal Exchange *Monthly Review Books* 1972 pages 297-8.

26. See P. Rey *Les Alliances de classes* Maspero Paris 1973 See also B. Bradby *The destruction of natural economy in Economy and Society* Vol. 4 No. 2 May 1975 and J. Peemans *Capital accumulation in the Congo under colonialism* in P. Du'gnan and L. Ganneds *Colonialism in Africa* Vol. 4 Cambridge 1974.

27. See R. Leys *South African gold mining in the 1970's in African Affairs* Vol. 74 No 295 April 1975 S. Trapido *South Africa in a comparative study of industrialization in Journal of Development Studies* Vol. VII, 3, 1971 F. Johnstone *Class and race relations in the gold mines of South Africa* Routledge Kegan Paul 1976

28. See R. Davies *Mining capital, the state and unskilled white workers in South Africa 1901-1913 Unpublished paper 1975* however for a qualification to this.

most notably during the Rand revolt of 1922 mining capital attempted to breach the colour bar but the class alliance between a large section of the European working class and the urban and rural European petit bourgeoisie through Afrikaner nationalist politics gave the South African state a specific class balance which blocked mining capital. In the formative period of the mining industry the explanation for the differentials between the value of unskilled white and black labour power did not lie exclusively or even primarily in the political and ideological superstructure of South African society. For example during the formative period the rights to strike and form recognized unions were far from established - especially with respect to unskilled whites. The dominant determinant at this earlier point of time was economic and arose out of the particular economic effects of the subjection of African labour and the nonsubjection of European labour to the migrant labour system.

When capital confronts any group of workers it is primarily concerned with the amount of labour which it can extract from them and the amount which it has to pay them as wages; the difference between the two being the amount of surplus value which accrues to the capitalist. In Vol. 1 of Capital Marx refutes the notion that wage levels in capitalist society are directly related to the value of the labour performed i.e. that the wage is an equal exchange of a quantity of money for a certain quantity of labour. Similarly he refutes the notion that levels are solely determined by conditions of supply and demand. Conditions of demand and supply can only explain changes in wage levels, not the 'natural price' around which such fluctuations occur. The wage rate in capitalist society is ultimately determined by the value of labour power and its value is the value of the means of subsistence - the latter being socially and historically determined.

As Wolpe has pointed out the subordination of a pre-capitalist mode of production took the form of a conservation-dissolution effect although this formulation is theoretical ambiguous. The conservation effect allowed the production within the pre-capitalist mode of some or all of the use values necessary for the reproduction of the African labour force. This enabled mining capital to drive down, through a process of class struggle, the value of African labour power (and hence the wages) to the level of the individual migrants subsistence. As previously stated as long as the production capacity of the pre-capitalist mode was to some extent conserved, capital was able to avoid making any allowance in the wage for family subsistence. In the case of the large numbers of semi skilled and unskilled European workers their proletarianization in South Africa meant that they ceased to have any access at all to any means of production outside of capitalist relations. They were totally dependent for their subsistence upon what could be obtained within the capitalist mode of production. Mining capital could not, even if the

political determinant of the class struggle were the same, drive down the value of the labour power of European workers in South Africa to the level of the individual workers subsistence and, at the same time, ensure its reproduction. Mining capital then had to make some 'allowance' for family subsistence in the wage.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the migrant labour system was institutionalized in a number of ways which enable an extreme minimization of the labour costs of providing the 'prime necessities' of life—food and shelter to the African migrants. With the general high level of prices for wage goods due to the underdeveloped nature of the social formation, mining capital lowered costs through the operation of the compound system which supplied food and accommodation and were thus able to obtain substantial real savings.²⁹ However the crucial issue is that the reduction of the level of subsistence of individual white workers to that of individual migrants Africans would have to involve not only the elimination of the 'allowance' but the creation of compounds for large numbers of white workers. The compounds would not however have provided a long term answer to providing for the family subsistence necessary for the reproduction of the white labour force. Finally it was not possible for mining capital, though an important section of imperial capital, to dominate the South African state in the period between the world wars. Indeed mining capital came increasingly under local control: by the 1930's the local share ownership had increased from 15 to 40 per cent. Symptomatic was the formation of the Anglo-American Corporation by the South African Sir Ernest Oppenheimer in which the catalytic capital was American rather than British.³⁰ It has also been argued that the dominant contradiction between mining capital and the class interests of those who advocated a 'white labour policy' at this time, various petty bourgeoisie manufactures, traders and agriculturalists etc, was expressed in the 'white labour policy' at this time, various petty bourgeoisie manufacture, traders and agriculturalists etc, was expressed in the 'nationalist' policies of the state. Those favouring a 'white labour' policy wanted an expansion of the market created by the mining industry. On the economic level these categories had no interest in seeing an expansion of white employment on the mines, accompanied by a marked reduction in overall consumption levels. The opposition to cheap foreign labour

29. See R. Davids paper and C. Van Onselen Chibaro Pluto Press 1975 for the situation of mine labour in Rhodesia in this context.

30. See M. Legassick, South Africa: capital accumulation and violence in Economy and Society Vol. 3 No. 3 August, 1974.

whether Chinese or Indian was based on the same calculations: It is also worthwhile to examine agrarian capitalism in the dominant class block. The more rapid development of the mines and manufacturing industries in the towns had sucked the pre-capitalist Reserves dry of all available migrant labour. It seemed to threaten the very existence of capitalist agriculture. A shortage of farm labour was noted from the late 1920's throughout the 1930's and into the next decade. The farm labour shortage was occurring not only with seasonal labourers but was also affecting permanent labour. The relationship between mining capital and agrarian capital is startlingly clear if the flow of african migrant workers leaving Basutoland is given. In 1933 out of a total of 51,856 migrant workers leaving Basutoland 25,803 went to the mines 15,237 to agriculture and 10,816 to miscellaneous 'employment. In 1937 out of a total of 51,723 migrant workers mining had increased its share to 33,130 those going into miscellaneous 'employment had risen to 14,433, while agricultures share had dropped dramatically to 3,782. Leaving aside the higher wages paid in industry, the depressed condition of agrarian capital meant that low as wages were in the mines they were much higher than was available to farm labourers. The consequent intensification of the class struggle of agrarian capital was against the migration of farm labour to the towns and also against mining and industrial capital-This meant a struggle to control the South African state and determined their support for the nationalist party in 1948.

The argument regarding the necessity of support from the pre-capitalist mode of production in order to sustain low wage levels for black workers is conceptually usefull only if social mechanisms within the social formation whether 'economic' or 'political' (class struggle) are operating to sustain the full reproduction of labour power as can be seen from the discussion of the white working class. The unstable equilibrium in the dominant class block between mining capital and a largely agrarian bourgeoisie in the Transval allowed the Afrikaner nationalists organized by the petit bourgeoisie, to play a decisive political role when supported by the white working class. By entering into a coalition with afrikaner nationalism in 1924 the labour party enabled the nationalist party to become the dominant political formation.³¹ Kaplan argues that the crucial role of the state in South Africa has been to re-distribute the surplus produced in the gold mining industry to other sections of capital. In the course of this struggle the relatively weak indigenous bourgeoisie supported white mine workers in their struggle against international mining capital and at the same time white workers constituted the social base on which the indigenous was able to rely in its struggle against mining capital.³² The constrast with african migrant workers is obvious.

31. H.J. and R.E. Simons Class and colour in South Africa 1850-1950 Penguin 1969.

On the copperbelt a skilled white working class was recruited from Britain, the U.S.A. and South Africa. By 1931 mining accounted for 35.1 per cent of the European work force compared with 41.1 per cent employed by the colonial state.³³ A system of migrant labour for African workers was encouraged by the colonial state. In the political economy of indirect rule african agriculture, it was argued, should be the base for a stable tribal society but as the African reserves in Northern Rhodesia had very poor soil the personnel of the colonial state supported the circulation of money earned at the mines and elsewhere to the African reserves, The attempt to raise taxes by the colonial state in the African reserves also encouraged this process. A lack of belief in the future of the copper industry by the colonial state in the 1930's, a ideological reluctance to proletarianize permanently the peasantry, the strength of the European mine workers union who attempted to block both 'poor' unqualified European workers and the creation of a skilled, stable African labour force were factors in the production of the migrant labour system in the 1930's. The support of the European railway workers union, whose leader, Welensky, was on the Legislative Council was also crucial as the European petit bourgeoisie had a relatively weak base in the colonial state in Northern Rhodesia. A Comparison with the Kantanga mines in the former Belguin Congo may be useful. In this case the Union Miniere supported by the colonial state were eager to limit labour migration in the 1930's and adopted a policy of establishing a settled african labour force at the mines. In the Congo the colonial state limited the potential power of a European skilled labour force and petit, bourgeoisie. Berger argues that in this period the limited opportunities for political pressure favoured the gradual advance of africans in semi-skilled work enabling the mining companies to insist that the 'training of africans in industrial skills was the normal duty of European employees'.³⁴ In the Congo the colonial state favoured mining capital and those industries needed by mining capital and kept down the growth of foreign traders and settlers or the development of a african petit bourgeoisie of rich peasant and traders.³⁵ The block to the potential political power of European settlers, traders and skilled workers came then from the articulation of mining capital and the colonial state. Land concessions to settlers were relatively unimportant until 1946. The policy of labour stabilization and increased productivity was linked in the Congo to a growth of disparity of working and technical conditions

33. P. Dean Colonial Social Accounting University of Cambridge Press 1973.

34. See E. Berger Labour Race and colonial role Oxford University Press 1974 page 32.

25. See J. Peemans The social and economic development of Zaire since independence African Affairs Vol. 74 No. 195 April 1975.

between large units of production linked with finance capital on the one hand and small and medium-sized enterprises on the other.³⁶

Mining capital and the colonial state on the copperbelt then were opposed throughout the 1930's to a stable semi-skilled and skilled african working class. The costs and lack of knowledge of the work potential of the labour force were important determinants in this context. Oppenheimer thought, for example, that 'african workers might suffer from progressive exhaustion after eighteen months work!³⁷ The political weight of the skilled European workers and their class allies in the Legislative Council determined that the colonial state was as hesitant to cause European political unrest as the mine managements were to incur labour troubles.'³⁸ An additional factor was that the Anglo American group of companies headed by Oppenheimer had to consider the repercussions of a conflict with the northern Rhodesian Mine Workers Union on its relations with the powerful Mine Workers Union of South Africa. In the 1950's the South African union gave frequent financial support to the northern Rhodesian European workers in their struggle against mining capital 'stimid attempts to break the colour bar on skilled job. The European mine workers were pragmatists and the category of racialists is too abstract. In the federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland they argued that africans, if promoted into European job, should get equal pay while mining capital wanted african advancement' but lower labour costs. While as late as 1953 mining capital still maintained that their policy was one of limited stabilization of the african labour force it was found for example, that at the roam antelope mine twenty five percent of the workers had served for more than five years.³⁹ The annual turnover of African labour did drop dramatically and by 1959 the average length of service in the mines was over five years. While children were often sent back to the rural areas the male labour force was protetarianized, equally it could be argued that the women who remained in the rural areas were peasantized. In conclusion in the exploration of the different trajectories of the working classes in South Africa and the

36. See Peemans argument that mining capital's improvement on health and labour conditions led to a drop in the death rate from 10.6 per cent in 1917 to 1.6 per cent in 1930 in J. Peeman's Capital accumulation in the Congo under colonialism in P. Duignan and L. Gann eds Colonialism in Africa Vol. 4 University of Cambridge 1974.

37. E. Berger Labour race and colonial rule Oxford University Press 1974 page 102.

38. E. Berger Labour race and colonial rule Oxford University Press 1974 page 70.

39. A. Epstein Politics in an urban African community Manchester University Press page 13.

copperbelt white and black it must be understood that no such thing as a clearly defined wages fund has ever existed nor any other sort of iron law of wages' determining the level of wages with the force of natural necessity. Although in the final analysis the determination of the value of the commodity of labour power is governed by 'objective' laws like every determination of any kind of commodity value, there is nonetheless something special about this particular commodity because it is largely determined by class struggle. Since this determines the distribution of the newly created value between capital and labour it likewise determines the rate of surplus value. When the political and social relationship of forces for skilled and semi skilled European workers is favourable it can succeed in the incorporation of new needs which are determined by historical and social conditions and to be satisfied by wages. The value of labour power can be raised. When the relationship of forces in the struggle with mining capital is disadvantageous to the European workers mining capital sometimes, could try to lower the value of labour power by attempting a elimination of some of the commodities which are defined as part of a normal standard of life. Thus after the Rand revolt of 1922 white miners lost their cost of living bonus. Any history of the European working class in africa which explains its trajectory by a hypothesis which locates it as a labour aristocracy from its origins ignores the labour theory of value, the specificity of class alliances in these social formations and places a unscientific content in the abstract category of racialism. Any political economy of african migrant labour which ignores the determination of skilled labour, white or black and the specificity of the class alliances of the social formation merely give a empiricist description, at a abstract level, of exploitation'.