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THE "LABOR ARISTOCRACY" DEBATE IN AFRICA:
THE COPPERBELT CASE, 1924-1967

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Scholars of the working class in both developed and less developed countries have long recognized that certain members of the working class sometimes behave in ways that subvert the best interests of the class as a whole. In order to explain this behavior, scholars have turned to the concept of a labor aristocracy. First developed by Marx and Engels to explain English labor's lack of revolutionary zeal in the mid-nineteenth century, this concept asserts that certain relatively privileged workers are more interested in maintaining their advantageous position in the workforce than in improving the conditions of the working class as a whole. Engels initially identified artisans in the great trade unions as the aristocrats of labor, but later added trade union leaders and even the entire British workforce to his list.¹ During WWI, Lenin expanded the definition to include all secure waged laborers in the imperialist metropolises.² Since then, scholars have quibbled over structural identity,³ but all agree that labor aristocrats share certain characteristics: they are better paid, better trusted and generally regarded as more "respectable" and politically moderate than the mass of the proletariat. Indeed, they often identify more closely with the aspirations and values of the middle class, keeping aloof from proletarian life and concerns.⁴

In Africa, both Marxist and liberal scholars have used the labor aristocracy thesis to explain the frequent lack of revolutionary and even trade union consciousness among African workers.⁵ Frantz Fanon dismisses all African wage laborers as a pampered lot, incapable of revolutionary action.⁶ Less sweeping in their judgment, Giovanni Arrighi and John Saul conclude that the skilled and semi-skilled African workers and clerks hired by international corporations in Africa, what they call the "proletariat proper," have been co-opted and are a conservative force in both African politics and industrial relations.⁷ Liberal social scientists arrive at similar conclusions, claiming that the power structure in Africa has undercut opportunities for urban workers to initiate revolutionary action, even in the

unlikely event that they exhibited the capacity and willingness to do so.⁸ All of these scholars see fully proletarianized African workers as a relatively privileged group, socially and politically allied with other urban elites, with self-interested and conservative unions more interested in maintaining the status quo than in revolutionary change or even national development.

More recently, some scholars have challenged the relevance of the labor aristocracy thesis for most wage workers in Africa. They point out that the high cost of urban living, remittances to relatives in the country, and extended family obligations have minimized the differential between urban and rural living standards. As a result, the social gap between urban workers and the urban and rural poor has proven largely illusory. Most workers identify with the poor and their unions have often played a leading role in the struggle against social and economic inequality. For example, Richard Jeffries found a quite exceptional level of militancy and radical political consciousness among Ghanaian railway workers. Both he and Adrian Peace regard workers as the probable political elite of the urban masses, while Richard Sandbrook and Jack Arn emphasize the important leadership potential of African workers in populist politics.¹⁰

However, a number of scholars still contend that certain elite African workers fit the labor aristocracy model, especially highly skilled artisans, clerical workers and trade union leaders. Koning's recent work on the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation reveals reformist rather than revolutionary consciousness among the skilled gold miners. While emphasizing worker populism, Jeffries admits that the most skilled Ghanaian railway workers "tend still to hold bourgeois aspirations for themselves."¹¹ Peace and Gavin Williams identify some skilled wage laborers in East and Central Africa, trade union leaders and clerical workers, and highly skilled West African industrial workers as potential labor aristocrats.¹² In an important review article, Peter Waterman supports this contention, insisting that economically privileged workers in Africa are allied with urban elites, are politically conservative, often oppose the interests of less privileged workers and the masses, and "provide a significant obstacle to the further development of the continent."¹³

These two conflicting approaches to the labor aristocracy debate raise important questions for labor historians in Africa. Which, if any, are correct? The Zambian mineworkers are an interesting test case because theorists from both schools cite them as supporting evidence. The copper miners have been one of the few groups of workers with significantly higher living standards than the urban poor and the peasantry, and they played little apparent part in the struggle for independence. Eliot Berg cites this behavior as evidence of mineworker conservatism. Despite evidence that the miners perceived and disliked the corporatist collusion of union leadership, white management and the black government, Sandbrook continues to see the Zambian

miners as a militantly economic lot "whose political potential at best remains ambiguous."¹⁴ Raphael Kaplinsky even labels the African Mineworkers' Union "fundamentally reactionary."¹⁵ Those scholars supporting Waterman's argument find ample evidence among the more skilled Zambian mineworkers as well. Michael Burawoy rejects the notion of generalized conservatism among the Zambian miners, but emphasizes the gap between the daily-paid less skilled miners and their conservative Zambian supervisors. He even places union officials in the new Zambian ruling class. Robert Bates laments the uncooperative anti-development stance of all but the most senior Zambian union officials, and Douglas Anglin and Timothy Shaw repeatedly refer to aristocratic Zambian mineworkers.¹⁶ Thus, although disagreeing over the exact identity of the Zambian labor aristocracy, these scholars uniformly assert the utility of the labor aristocracy model for understanding the Zambian mineworkers.

In contrast, this paper questions both conclusions. It disputes the contention that all Zambian mineworkers were labor aristocrats during the colonial and early post-colonial period. Nor does it find that the more skilled stratum of Copperbelt miners acted consistently as labor aristocrats. Sometimes these workers led collective worker protest, while at other points, they behaved like "typical" labor aristocrats, allied with management and refused to cooperate with the mass of the workforce. This range of behavior suggests a need to look beyond the simplistic equation between class position and behavior inherent in the labor aristocracy thesis, to examine a more profound question--namely, what forces push more privileged workers towards or away from reformist aristocratic behavior? For this we must adopt a more historic approach, one that recognizes the mediating influence of ideological, social and political factors, and the specificity of social change.

Privileged Workers and Conservative Unions

Does Arrighi and Saul's argument hold for all Zambian copper miners during the colonial and early post-colonial period? Were they a privileged elite with no commitment to the urban and rural poor? The evidence suggests they were not. The Zambian miners suffered low wages and inferior housing until the formation of the African Mineworkers' Union (AMWU) in 1949. After that, worker living standards rose, especially for more skilled miners, but many miners continued to live in crowded, sub-standard houses no better than the worst municipal housing. In 1966, the Brown Commission investigated mine compound conditions and reported that 9,385 out of 39,492 high density houses were "below minimum standards with one habitable room and a kitchen. Most were without windows, toilets, and wash facilities." Another 12,940 miners lived in category 2 housing, with only two habitable rooms, usually without indoor plumbing.¹⁷ As turnover rates fell

and the number of dependents increased after independence, miners and their families suffered all the more. During the first ten years after independence (in 1964), real wages fell or stagnated; the real wages of unskilled miners were lower in 1975 than at independence, and the minimum real wage was lower in 1975 than it had been in 1961.¹⁸

Unlike labor aristocrats, most Zambian mineworkers neither socialized nor identified with the local elite and sub-elite against the semi-proletarianized peasantry and the peasantry proper. Some of the stabilized better paid miners joined the local elite, especially after African advancement began in the mid-1950's, but low wages, poor housing and high labor turnover separated most miners from their better paid urban compatriots and kept them tied to the rural economy. Even the higher paid miners found it difficult to become permanent urban residents, and so had to maintain rural contacts to ease retirement. Thus, government and corporate refusal to encourage a permanent urban population forced most miners, whatever their skill level, to retain¹⁹ sympathetic ties with relatives and friends in the rural areas.

In the mid-1950s the mining companies tried to isolate the black miners from the rising nationalist fervor in Northern Rhodesia, but failed and regular contact between miners and other urban Africans continued unabated. The companies hoped the more skilled miners would provide a conservative buffer and model for other miners and that improved compound services as well as stepped up policing against outsiders would convince mineworkers to cast their lot with the corporations and the Federation. Instead, antagonism over the more skilled miners' efforts to separate (with corporate support) from the black union divided the workforce, and destroyed any chance for such a rapprochement.²⁰

Although some more skilled black miners were politically conservative during the colonial period, most mineworkers supported the nationalist struggle. In fact, trade union leaders from the mines dominated the African National Congress (ANC) leadership when it started in the early 1950s. Despite corporate and state efforts to clamp down on union political activity, and general agreement that politics should not intrude in industrial disputes, most miners continued to belong to nationalist parties. When a more radical nationalist party, the United National Independence Party (UNIP), emerged in 1959 under Kenneth Kaunda's leadership, most miners joined the new party. In fact, long-time AMWU president, Lawrence Katilungu, lost his presidency by continuing to support the ANC and testifying at the pro-Federation Monckton Commission. In 1960 union members replaced him with a loyal UNIP man, John Chisata. Although occasionally embroiled with UNIP over political meddling in union affairs, the mineworkers²¹ overwhelmingly supported UNIP in the 1962 and 1963 elections. Post-independence disenchantment with UNIP (except

among top union officials until recently) was, in retrospect, less a sign of worker intransigence and economism than proof that miners understood the nationalist party's waning commitment to worker welfare and its growing alliance with corporate capital. Though never a revolutionary force, the mineworkers continue to challenge UNIP's hegemony. Witness their support for the early 1970s opposition party, the United Progressive Party, and the 1981 strike against UNIP's monopolization of local electoral candidates²²--hardly the behavior expected of labor aristocrats.

Stabilization and the Labor Aristocracy

Although the Zambian mineworkers as a whole cannot be labelled labor aristocrats, we still need to consider whether the more skilled section of the workforce qualified as a labor aristocracy during the colonial and early post-colonial period. First we must identify the existence of such a stratum on the Copperbelt. The copper industry in Central Africa was unique in the early stabilization of a section of its African labor force. This was the result of a conjuncture of factors which I have discussed in greater detail elsewhere. Suffice it to say that initially a shortage of both European and African labor in Central Africa, during a period of intense competition in the world copper market, forced the Copperbelt mining companies, Anglo American Corporation (AA) and Rhodesian Selection Trust (RST), to compete for labor with Union Minière Copper Company (UMHK) in Katanga, which had begun stabilizing African labor in 1927, and with a Zambian mine at Broken Hill which also permitted dependents at the mine. In order to attract experienced African miners, the Copperbelt companies had to follow Union Minière and Broken Hill's lead. They encouraged these miners to bring dependents, to stay in employment for longer periods, and gave them somewhat higher wages, better housing, extra food for dependents, and special welfare facilities. Despite a slight change of policy during the Depression's labor glut, recurring shortages and the growing need for experienced miners soon forced the companies back to earlier stabilization policies. This was especially true of RST's Roan Antelope mine, which needed a higher complement of skilled miners to work its more inaccessible ore.²⁴

The companies soon perceived the cost advantages of skilled and semi-skilled black labor over more expensive white labor, and became increasingly committed to stabilizing and enlarging the more skilled portion of the black workforce, both underground and on the surface. As early as 1940, the companies began pushing for African advancement--that is, the introduction of black miners into more highly skilled jobs. Technical innovations available after WWII spurred the companies on as well.²⁵ Although the war and opposition from the European Mineworkers' Union (established in 1937) stymied corporate efforts, the

establishment of the Federation in 1953 diluted the European miners' political influence, and the companies successfully pushed through African advancement agreements in 1955 and 1960. Initially the companies concentrated on placing cheaper black labor in formerly European schedule A jobs. Fragmentation of these now schedule B jobs increased the number of Africans with both productive and supervisory functions, and in 1960 this number expanded again as more schedule A positions became available.²⁶ African skill levels and stabilization increased accordingly, until by 1959, 31 percent of them were classified as semi-skilled and 4 percent were skilled, and in 1963 African labor turnover had fallen to 9.3 percent, not much higher than the rate for European labor.²⁷ The companies placed the advancees with supervisory functions (approximately 10 percent of the workforce) on monthly pay, and forced them to join the newly established Mines African Staff Association (MASA) or Mines African Police Association (MAPA).²⁸

In the early and mid-1960's, the companies carried out the second phase of their production reorganization. This time they concentrated on removing the supervisory aspects of jobs that formerly included both supervisory and productive functions. European miners with combined functions were either upgraded to supervisory positions or phased out through short-term expatriate contracts. Management eliminated the wage ladder connecting European and African jobs established in 1962 and Africans in schedule A jobs, whether Zambian or not, were placed on local conditions which, while guaranteeing job security, reduced wages and advancement opportunities. Supervisory jobs expanded further up the white dominated end of the job ladder. Thus although African staff employees, now organized in the Mines Local Staff Association (MLSA) and the Zambian Police Association (ZPA) continued to perform supervisory work, by the mid-1960s their benefits²⁹ and advancement opportunities had been significantly reduced.

Labor Aristocrats?

Now that we have established the existence of a stratum of stabilized experienced black labor on the Copperbelt, we can ask the question--did these miners behave like labor aristocrats? Before 1953, for the most part, we have to answer "No." Although not highly organized, the leadership that did emerge during the 1935 strike consisted primarily of longer service miners, especially clerks. Two important bases of strike leadership and organization, Watch Tower and the Mbeni dance society, catered to urbanized, educated Africans.³⁰ More skilled miners, especially those working underground, dominated the leadership of the much better organized 1940 strike. Resentment surfaced towards some compound clerks, undoubtedly aggravated by the large number of Malawian clerks, but most of the stabilized miners, including the

clerks, not only supported the strike, but also advocated broadly based collective labor action. During the war years, some of the more skilled African workers, first boss boys and later clerks, managed to obtain worker representation for themselves, ignored other miners, and concentrated on improving their own position. But this strategy failed, and after the war these miners changed tactics and spearheaded the drive for unionization; the success of the African Mineworkers' Union in 1949 owed much to their leadership and support.

After 1953, the more skilled underground and surface workers began to act more like labor aristocrats. The enforced break from the union drove a wedge between staff and daily-paid miners that grew steadily throughout the colonial period. And yet, in 1960 staff miners joined the union to fight for a unitary wage-scale, in 1963 they allied with UNIP and tried to establish a new union, in 1966 they once again joined in a massive strike against management and the government, and in 1967, African staff and police associations ignored company objections and joined the African union to establish the Mineworkers' Union of Zambia (MUZ).

The Class Struggle and Worker Behavior

How can we explain this behavior? It is tempting to simply adopt an empiricist stance, insist that every case is unique, and reject the relevance of theory all together. Clearly this case proves the limitations of a purely structural approach to labor history. Class position cannot, by itself, explain the more skilled miners' behavior.

At the same time, structure has some relevance. The Copper-belt case reveals a tendency for the working class to divide internally along occupational lines. As we have seen, those miners with some supervisory functions, particularly clerks, often rejected broadly based collective action in favor of limited negotiations with management. This occurred despite the fact that at other points these miners called for class solidarity, joined in collective action, and declared their commitment to the class struggle.

It seems that while working and living on the mines generally facilitated identification among the black mineworkers, life on the mines also clarified the divisions between miners performing primarily supervisory functions and purely productive laborers. On the level of consumption, the mass of the mine workforce could see that supervisory workers received better housing, pay and rations. Management also designed much of the welfare and recreational activities for these workers and their families. In their work place, African supervisors wielded authority over less experienced black miners, enjoyed better working conditions, and had regular contact with European miners in order to coordinate production. While difficult to evaluate, it is instructive that

divisions within the black workforce deepened in the 1950s when the companies sharply increased differential rewards to supervisory miners, and that these divisions lessened in the mid-1960s when the companies reduced the opportunities and rewards available to these miners.³¹

Another potential sore-point between supervisory and daily paid miners centered around the supervisors' superior bargaining power with management. Experienced black workers were more difficult to replace than unskilled laborers. The companies had not only invested time and money training them, but they also faced a general shortage of experienced miners in Central Africa, and so were reluctant to let such workers go. The supervisory miners also had more access to European miners and management because of the need to coordinate production. This was particularly true of those African supervisors who worked in the compound offices, hospitals, welfare facilities, and other non-manual occupations. And it was these miners who most consistently separated themselves off from other black miners, and were most frequently viewed with suspicion by the rest of the workforce. Thus, the more skilled black miners, both underground and especially on the surface, had more leverage in the class struggle--a fact which could easily lead to resentment and hostility from less fortunate mineworkers.³¹

Although this tendency towards division along occupational lines is important, as we have said above, structural class position alone cannot explain worker behavior. It is the contention of this paper that elite worker behavior is best understood by examining the struggle between labor and capital in concrete historic circumstances. Only then can we understand the options which workers had, or believed they had, in the class struggle, and the behavior that followed.

Obviously, one key ingredient in this struggle was the slow but steady development of class identity, collective worker protest and organization among the black mineworkers. The tradition of protests, the lessons learned from European union and government labor officers, and the experience of organizing both collective action and an effective trade union influenced worker attitudes and behavior.

Corporate labor strategy also shaped the struggle between labor and capital on the Copperbelt. Of course, this strategy did not occur in a vacuum. Managerial policies were affected by the techniques of copper production, the economy of Northern Rhodesia, as well as the larger world economy. Competition with other copper producers in the volatile metals market always constrained managerial behavior, as did pressure from both European and African mineworkers.

The class struggle was also influenced by the nature of the colonial state. Following recent work by Berman and Lonsdale, we see the colonial state as a special form of the twentieth-century capitalist state. It must ensure the reproduction and

accumulation of capital, while also maintaining political reproduction, i.e., the pattern of class domination and subordination in the state. This necessitates not only intervention in class struggles, but also involvement in a range of ideological activities to justify the existing system. It also demands a certain level of autonomy in order to maintain the illusion of concern for the social order as a whole. This is all the more complicated because the colonial state had to provide for accumulation and legitimation for two different modes of production. As a result, the colonial state had to restructure the pre-capitalist mode of production to fit the new colonial economy so that it facilitated the transfer of surplus to the metropole while maintaining order at home. Similar problems bedeviled the early post-colonial state, though now with a concern to keep more capital in the country. Both situations demanded complex social engineering, often necessitating the use of force as well as persuasion. Thus, the state was a central actor in both colonial and early post-colonial class struggles.³²

Labor and Capital on the Copper Mines

Let us now look at the interaction between labor and capital on the copper mines during the colonial and early post-colonial period to see how the various factors mentioned above shaped the behavior of the more skilled Copperbelt miners.

In the early years of the mines, management did not believe Africans could organize collective labor protests. Their main concern was to create a disciplined organized low-cost labor force. In order to do this, they used more experienced African miners both to improve production and to train the large numbers of unskilled recruits. The compound managers worried that unduly obvious privileges for experienced workers would create dissension within the black workforce, and therefore impair labor efficiency. As a result, management did everything possible to minimize differences between short and long-term labor (generally unskilled and more skilled labor), while still providing enough rewards to attract and maintain a stabilized sector of the black workforce.

While discouraging division along occupational lines, the companies tried to inhibit worker solidarity by emphasizing ethnic differences among the miners. In order to buttress ethnic institutions, they established tribal representatives (TRs) in the mine compounds. First started at Roan in 1936, the system spread to other mines after the 1940 strike. Each ethnic group with over 25 persons elected a representative, and larger groups had one representative per 25 persons. The compound managers only listened to domestic problems after a tribal representative had failed to solve them, thus encouraging miners to solve their personal disputes within traditional institutions. The companies also encouraged chiefs and other traditional dignitaries to visit

the mine compounds, both to reinforce the tribal representatives' authority and to emphasize the temporary nature of African life in the towns.

In the 1930s, the Northern Rhodesian Government for the most part gave the companies a free hand on the mines. The government was desperately short of funds during the Depression, and colonial officials continued to limit expenditures long after normal economic activity had resumed. Most of the colony's revenue came from the mines, and the need for revenue fostered a sympathetic view of company policies among most colonial officials. The government passed South African-style labor laws, such as the labor registration and masters and servants acts,³⁴ to help supply the mines with sufficient controllable labor. Legislation regulating urban Africans also reinforced the temporary nature of African urban residence and the importance of the traditional power structure. The interests of white settlers and white labor did not as yet conflict with this policy.³⁵

As we have seen, corporate attempts to limit divisions within the African workforce along occupational lines worked better than planned. The more experienced miners spearheaded strikes in both 1935 and 1940. They ignored the tribal representatives, and called for workers to unite against management. In 1940, the strike leaders made it quite clear that they understood the identity of interests between themselves and the rest of the workforce. Citing the recent successful European strike, African strike leaders called for a similar unity among black workers, and promised success as long as everyone "just refused to work and said what they wanted." Despite their higher skill level, the leaders called for a pay raise and better working and living conditions for everyone.³⁶

In response to the 1940 strike, the companies began to consider advancing some of the more skilled African miners into previously white dominated jobs in hopes of both saving money and stemming elite worker dissatisfaction and possible collective protest; but government officials could not accept such a plan. The European mineworkers had become an important voting block in the legislature, too important to endanger by supporting African advancement. At the same time, the Colonial Office pressed the Northern Rhodesian Government into establishing an African labor department. This was part of an empire-wide development--labor departments were springing up in various parts of British Africa with the clear intention of reducing tension between capital and labor, and therefore maintaining the economic prosperity of the empire.³⁷

As a result, African advancement plans were stymied. The war stopped opportunities for large-scale worker protest, and the boss boys decided to negotiate with management on their own. They complained to the labor officers, and in the year 1942 the labor department convinced the companies to establish boss boys' committees to represent these miners. The boss boys initially

agreed to limit representation to their occupational group alone. Perhaps they might have abandoned more broadly based collective action if management had offered them special concessions, but management refused, claiming that significant improvements in pay and work could only come with African advancement. Disgruntled with management's failure to offer them special consideration, the boss boy committees began to demand worker representation for all black miners. Clerks associations sprang up at several mines, but soon succumbed to the demand for African unionization. Some of the boss boys and clerks, in desperation, joined the European union and tried to establish junior African branches in order to gain some representation against management. The possibility of a multi-racial union frightened the colonial government and, to a lesser extent, the companies, and precipitated the African union. With the aid of a colonial office trade union organizer, William Comrie, the more skilled miners set about establishing a union, providing most of the early leadership and a disproportionate percentage of the membership. They used their influence to draw miners to union meetings, to reassure the doubtful, and to press forward claims for improved conditions at work and in the compounds.³⁸

Initially the companies responded to the African union by pressing government and labor officials to contain the union's demands. The labor officers had to walk a fine line between their paternalistic concerns for African labor and the need to maintain high profits for government treasuries. Although sometimes aggravated by managerial and state pressure, and determined to teach the rudiments of collective bargaining to the miners, the labor officers agreed to emphasize the need to keep worker demands within reason--that is within the wishes of management. More important in this period of emerging African nationalism, the labor officers agreed to teach union leaders that politics should be kept out of union affairs.³⁹ They maintained the fiction that politics had nothing to do with the class struggle, and thus disseminated an ideology designed to undercut the development of political class consciousness among the miners.

However, plans to advance more Africans into skilled and semi-skilled jobs continued to attract management, and as we have seen, in 1955 and 1960 African advancement plans were successfully negotiated with the European union. But, once committed to advancement, the companies had to figure out how to control the advances. Fissures had been emerging within the African union along occupational lines. Rivalry between manual and non-manual supervisory miners caused hard feelings which were further inflamed when the union's Secretary-General, Simon Kaluwa, a boss boy at Rhokana, was dismissed from the union for refusing to give a paid position to a union branch leader recently dismissed for organizing an illegal political strike. The companies played on this division, and indeed institutionalized it by encouraging the

establishment of the staff association. At the same time, the Federal government had adopted a policy favoring the establishment of an African middle class, which would hopefully be loyal to the Federal idea and would therefore act as a buffer between the African masses and the white population.⁴⁰ The creation of an elite category of black miners fit into this program. As a result, the colonial government supported corporate efforts to divide the African workforce and when the African union called a series of rolling strikes to protest MASA, the government declared a State of Emergency and banished the strike leaders from the Copperbelt. The companies then forced all supervisory miners into MASA. Basking in the high copper profits of the 1950s, management also stepped up special welfare and recreational programs for these miners and systematically improved their housing and other conditions of employment. In every way possible, the companies sought to separate the supervisory miners from the rest of the black workforce.⁴¹

Company and government officials joined forces to limit the staff miners' involvement in politics as well. The labor officers and compound managers (now African personnel managers) informed both daily-paid and staff miners that they must keep politics out of the workplace. Political meetings in the compounds could only be held with management's permission, and those persons involved in illegal meetings were quickly dismissed. After a few such dismissals in 1957, daily-paid miners recognized the futility of union involvement in politics for the time being. Staff miners, who did not even have a strike clause, adopted a similarly economistic line. Staff employees in the compounds were explicitly instructed to counter political talk with corporate propaganda and were ordered to keep out of politics if they wanted to keep their job. Most staff employees, however, belonged to ANC or UNIP, although a few joined multi-racial pro-Federation parties. Whatever their political affiliation, by the late 1950s most staff miners accepted the need to keep politics out of union and association affairs.⁴²

During the next eight years, staff miners were in a beleaguered position. The violent antipathy generated by the union's fight against MASA created an atmosphere in which union members came to distrust all supervisory workers. Wives and children of staff members were ostracized in the compounds. This increased the divisions between daily-paid workers and staff men, and increasingly threw MASA members into alliance with management. Hostility on the part of MASA members towards daily-paid workers increased under this pressure. It became easier to withdraw into the special staff housing areas and club facilities provided by the companies. Staff members and their families spent more and more of their time in the compounds with each other. Those who tried to maintain friendships with union members frequently suffered distrust and disappointment, leading to even greater frustration and isolation.⁴³ Thus, increasingly staff miners on

the Copperbelt behaved like "typical" labor aristocrats--politically conservative, interested in maintaining their stratum's well-being and unwilling to engage in broadly based collective labor action.

Comforting though this behavior may be to those wanting to prove the labor aristocracy thesis, the evidence does not warrant such complacency. In the first place, although some supervisory miners readily joined MASA and split off from the union, others did not. And while the rivalry between supervisory and purely productive laborers over union leadership was undoubtedly a leading factor in the division, and those mines who joined MASA obviously felt they could negotiate better terms of employment through the association than they could get in the union, most elite miners recognized MASA as an attempt to weaken the union. Many fought against the association, and only joined it when the companies forced them to.⁴⁴ Some eligible miners even accepted demotions rather than join.

Despite estrangement between staff and daily-paid workers, the association and the African Mineworkers' Union joined forces in 1960 in an effort to create a unitary wage scale. The staff association miners recognized the color bar as a common problem for all black miners, no matter how privileged, and their willingness to join with daily-paid miners reveals a continued understanding of the need for broadly based collective labor action. The association only withdrew under extreme pressure from the companies--namely, threats plus the offer of a 14% increase in pay for accepting a separate solution.⁴⁵

By 1962, impending black rule altered the class struggle once again. Some of the staff miners recognized the fragility of their alliance with management--especially with the end of Federal support for an African middle class, and the acceptance of eventual self-rule. Although a unitary wage scale had been established in 1962, corporate pressure for major changes in the industry's manning structure and the reestablishment of a dual wage further exacerbated staff miner insecurities. Playing on these anxieties, in July 1963 some leading staff miners convinced the staff association membership to establish the United Mineworkers' Union, which would unite staff and daily-paid miners in alliance with UNIP and the United Trade Union Congress.⁴⁶ In 1963 most miners (both staff and daily-paid) were members of UNIP, but union-UNIP relations were often tense and difficult. In their effort to achieve new influence in the face of declining opportunities, the staff miners rejected labor department dictum against industrial politics and openly sought UNIP's support.⁴⁷ Utilizing UNIP speaking platforms and methods of door to door canvassing, the new union leadership campaigned aggressively for members. They called for worker unity, claiming that "we are not like the African Mineworkers' Union. We want those underground to join with the educated levels so that we can fight together. It is practically impossible today to challenge the companies and

win alone."⁴⁸ Some miners joined the fold, attracted by the possibility of UNIP's support, against management after independence.⁴⁹

The African Mineworkers' Union fought against the new union not because it opposed a single union, which it did not, but because it opposed a union which threatened its established leadership. Supported by management, which feared the new union's political connections, the African Mineworkers' Union launched a vituperative campaign against the new union. "Only fools," they claimed, "could now support leaders who had proved so treacherous in the past." To prove their dedication to the entire workforce, the union agreed to a new manning structure and local wage scale in return for a general wage increase. In return, the companies made transferring from the African Mineworkers' Union to the United Mineworkers' Union a complicated and very public procedure. Each dissident had to wait in highly visible queues, and publicly declare his desire for cancellation. The companies also refused to recognize the UMU as a legitimate employee organization. Gradually these efforts paid off, and in June of 1964 the UMU disbanded, and a new Mines Local Staff Association was recognized in March 1965, after it had reluctantly accepted the local wage scale and company rates for the new manning structure.⁵⁰

Despite this conflict, the staff and daily-paid miners joined forces once again in 1966 to protest the local wage structure the mines had pushed through in 1964. The African union (renamed the Zambia Mineworkers' Union in January 1965) and the MLSA shared common complaints. Both objected to the dual wage and the big discrepancy between the lowest paid expatriates and the highest paid local employees. The staff miners also claimed that the dual wage structure placed African and European supervisory workers on different footings, thus perpetuating European superiority.⁵¹ In 1966, dissatisfaction finally exploded into collective action. Staff and daily-paid miners struck, demanding wage increases and a return to the unitary wage scale. Undaunted by UNIP's pro-worker rhetoric, the strikers accused the black Zambian government and white management of colluding to oppress them.⁵² Once again the miners were able to transcend racial divisions, identifying themselves and their opposition in class terms. Thus despite company pressures and considerable distrust, the supervisory miners joined in collective labor action with the daily-paid African miners on three occasions between 1960 and 1966. In 1967, despite corporate objections, the MLSA and the African police signalled their clear understanding of the new corporate class structure, and joined forces with the ZMU in a new African union, the Mineworkers' Union of Zambia.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen that the labor aristocracy thesis has little predictive value for understanding the behavior of the daily-paid miners on the Copperbelt. Nor has it proven useful for predicting the behavior of the upper stratum of the Copperbelt miners. Rather than behave consistently as labor aristocrats, these more skilled miners changed tactics depending on what path they felt would be most effective in their struggle with capital. While experiences in the production process, both in the mines and the compounds, encouraged the development of class consciousness and commitment to class action among elite miners, in the Copperbelt case, the form of action taken by these miners depended on the real, or perceived, options available to them in the class struggle.

These options were strongly influenced by the conjuncture of interests between capital and the colonial state in Northern Rhodesia. As usual, capital wanted to maximize profits, while both black and white labor wanted to maximize wages. The obvious solution for capital--namely, outright coercion of the workforce by the state, was clearly impossible. The state had to maintain some semblance of concern for the citizenry, particularly the white miners but also for African labor. As a result, the state played an ambivalent role, trying to make some efforts to help workers while also placating white labor. Consequently, the state effectively ignored mining capital's desire for African advancement until the Federation reduced the influence of the white miners. Then the state willingly supported corporate advancement plans in order to maximize state revenues. The companies and the colonial state now faced a common problem--how to permit African advancement without endangering the class structure. To accomplish this, they used both the carrot and the stick--rewards to the more skilled Africans who cooperated in colonial government and industry, and punishment to those who refused. The government then pointed to successful collaborators to legitimize its rhetoric about multi-racial partnership. As we have seen, the upper stratum of the mineworkers recognized this situation, and at various points cooperated in order to improve their position, thus acting like labor aristocrats.

Why then did the stabilized miners participate in both political and industrial action during the colonial period? Why weren't they simply incorporated into a multi-racial pro-Federation middle class? The answer, I believe, lies in the contradictions of the colonial state. Despite its rhetoric of partnership, the colonial class structure in Central Africa was clearly defined by race. Too many concessions to Africans threatened white dominance. Consequently, elite Africans in industry and government could never progress beyond a certain point. This fact was readily observable in the mines, as was collusion between management and the state, particularly after

the rolling strikes. The staff miners resented the failure of partnership. More than any other Africans on the mines, they could envision themselves moving up in a multi-racial power structure. When Federation failed to bring the hoped for improvements, where feasible, elite miners fought against the racially defined colonial class structure on the mines and in the political arena. Both the unitary wage-scale demand and the UMU effort attempted to alter the racial class structure in the mines, while support for UNIP reflected a desire to alter the racial class structure of the state. Thus, the nature of the colonial state limited the degree to which the more skilled stratum of the mineworkers could benefit from cooperating with capital within the colonial structure. This contradiction pushed these miners into alliances with other workers and nationalist political parties in order to defend their class interests--behavior certainly not explained by the labor aristocracy thesis.

What can we say about the political potential of the staff miners since independence? We do know that when these miners, and indeed the entire black mine workforce, realized UNIP would not support them against management, they struck in defiance of government orders, and openly accused the government and the companies of collusion. Thus, the staff association miners not only recognized their changing position in the workforce, they acted on that knowledge by combining with the daily-paid miners to fight for a better deal for themselves and the black workforce as a whole. The severe response to this strike was not only due to governmental determination to maintain high copper profits, but also signalled an awareness by government officials that both staff and daily-paid miners had the organizational potential and political consciousness necessary to create a serious resistance movement, perhaps even an opposition party. While not exhibiting any desire to fundamentally reorganize society, and certainly open to cooptation, the staff miners could not be counted on to support the status quo. Except for a few leading trade union officials, both staff and daily-paid miners soon rejected the legitimacy of the emerging distribution of power and wealth in Zambia. This attitude continues today, and in the right circumstances, I believe, could lead to a worker led popular revolt against the government. Certainly one cannot assume from past behavior that the miners, whatever their skill level, will passively accept the growing inequalities in Zambia. However, future behavior, like that in the past, will depend on the real, or perceived options of the miners in the Zambian class struggle, and must be examined in that context.

NOTES

1. E. J. Hobsbawm, "The labour aristocracy in nineteenth-century Britain," in E. J. Hobsbawm (ed.), Labouring Men (London, 1964), ch. 15.
2. Lenin claimed that the super-profits of imperialism permitted capital to make all workers in the metropole into labor aristocrats. V. I. Lenin, Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, in Selected Works, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1967), 759-761; See also, E. J. Hobsbawm, "Lenin and the 'Aristocracy of Labour'," Marxism Today (July, 1970), 207-210.
3. Crossick identifies the artisan elite of mid-Victorian England as a labor aristocracy. Geoffrey Crossick, An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society: Kentish London 1840-1880 (London, 1978), 13; Foster focusses on the mechanism whereby the English bourgeoisie established a privileged grade within the labor force in the 1800s. John Foster, Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: Early industrial capitalism in three English towns (London, 1974), 253-54; Hobsbawm suggests that the size and character of the labor aristocracy may vary at different periods. Hobsbawm, "The labour aristocracy in nineteenth-century Britain," 297-303.
4. J. Hinton, "The Labour Aristocracy," New Left Review, XXXII (1965), 72-74; Geoffrey Crossick, "The Labour Aristocracy and its Values: a Study of Mid-Victorian Kentish London," Victorian Studies, XIX, 3 (March, 1976), 302; Gray and Hobsbawm emphasize the need to situate the labor aristocracy in a precise historical sense. Robert Q. Gray, The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh (Oxford, 1976), 4, and Hobsbawm, "The labour aristocracy in nineteenth-century Britain," 300-301.
5. Some writers, such as Jack Woddis, see workers as a revolutionary force in Africa, but this position has had few supporters in recent years. Jack Woddis, New Theories of Revolution (London, 1972), 148, 170.
6. F. Fanon, Wretched of the Earth (London, 1965), 108.
7. G. Arrighi and J. Saul, Essays on the Political Economy of Africa (New York, 1973), chaps. 1 and 2; See also, J. Saul, "The 'Labour Aristocracy' Thesis Reconsidered," in R. Sandbrook and R. Cohen (eds.), The Development of an African Working Class (Toronto, 1976), 303-316.
8. E. J. Berg and J. Butler, "Trade Unions," in James S. Coleman and Carl G. Rosberg (eds.), Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa (Berkeley, 1964); H. L. Bretton, Power and Politics in Africa (London, 1973).
9. K. Hinchliffe, "Labour Aristocracy--a Northern Nigerian Case Study," Journal of Modern African Studies, XII, 1 (1974); C. Greenhalgh, "Income Differentials in the Eastern Region of Ghana," Economic Bulletin of Ghana, 2nd series, II, 3

- (1972); Chris Allen, "Unions, Incomes and Development," in Developmental Trends in Kenya (Edinburgh, Centre of African Studies, 1972), 73.
10. R. Jeffries, Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana: the Railwaymen of Ghana (Cambridge, 1978); Adrian Peace, "The Lagos Proletariat: Labour Aristocrats or Populist Militants?," in Sandbrook and Cohen, African Working Class, 281-302; R. Sandbrook and J. Arn, The Labouring Poor and Urban Class Formation: The Case of Greater Accra (Montreal, 1977).
 11. Cited in R. Sandbrook, "The Political Potential of African Urban Workers," Canadian Journal of African Studies, 11, 3 (1977), 428; R. Jeffries, "Populist Tendencies in the Ghanaian Trade Union Movement," in Sandbrook and Cohen, African Working Class, 276.
 12. Peace, "The Lagos Proletariat"; Gavin Williams, "The Political Economy of Colonialism and Neo-Colonialism in Nigeria" (Durham University, Sociology Department, 1972, mimeo).
 13. Peter Waterman, "The 'Labour Aristocracy' in Africa: Introduction to a Debate," Development and Change, VI, 3 (July, 1975), 64.
 14. C. E. Young, "Rural-Urban Terms of Trade," African Social Research, 12 (1971), 91-94; Sandbrook, "The Political Potential of African Workers"; Berg and Butler, "Trade Unions."
 15. R. Kaplinsky, "Myths about the 'Revolutionary Proletariat' in Developing Countries," Institute of Development Studies Bulletin, 3, 4 (1971), 21.
 16. M. Burawoy, The Colour of Class on the Copper Mines (University of Zambia, Institute for African Studies, Zambian Papers No. 7, 1972), 76-79; R. H. Bates, Unions, Parties and Political Development: A Study of Mineworkers in Zambia (New Haven, 1971); D. Anglin and T. M. Shaw, Zambia's Foreign Policy: Studies in Diplomacy and Dependence (Boulder, Colorado, 1979), 384-85, 389, 390.
 17. Jane L. Parpart, Labor and Capital on the African Copperbelt (Philadelphia, 1983), chaps. 2-4; Report of the commission of Inquiry into the Mining Industry (Lusaka, 1966), 57-59. (The Brown Report).
 18. Philip Daniel, Africanisation, Nationalisation and Inequality (Cambridge, England, 1979), 156-160; Charles Perrings, "Premiss and Inference in Labour Studies: A Zambian Example," African Affairs, 81, 322 (Jan. 1982), 94-96.
 19. In the early 1950s, Mitchell discovered that 3.9% of the people he interviewed in the Luanshya government township were completely urbanized. J. Clyde Mitchell, "A Note on the Urbanization of Africans on the Copperbelt," 12 (1951); Robert H. Bates, Rural Responses to Industrialization: A Study of Village Zambia (New Haven, 1976), 58;

- A. L. Epstein, Politics in an Urban African Community (Manchester, 1958), chap. 1.
20. Parpart, Labor and Capital, chap. 7. In 1953 Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia joined together to establish the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland.
 21. Peter Harries-Jones, Freedom and Labour: Mobilization and Political Control on the Zambian Copperbelt (Oxford, 1975), chap. 3; Evidence to the Commission of Inquiry into Unrest on the Copperbelt, July-August, 1963 (Lusaka, 1963), 212-213, 226-227. (The Whelan Commission).
 22. T. M. Shaw and J. L. Parpart, "Contradiction and coalition: class fractions in Zambia, 1964-1984," Africa Today, 30, 3 (Third Quarter, 1983), 23-50.
 23. J. L. Parpart, "Corporate and Black Labour Strategies on the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt 1926-1933," Labour, Capital and Society, 13, 1 (1980), 55-75.
 24. Charles Perrings, Black Mineworkers in Central Africa (New York, 1979), 110-111.
 25. Charles Perrings, "A Moment in the 'Proletarianization' of the New Middle Class: race, value and the division of labour in the Copperbelt, 1946-1966," Journal of Southern African Studies, 6, 2 (April, 1980), 192-193.
 26. Elena Berger, Labour, Race, and Colonial Rule: The Copperbelt from 1924 to Independence (Oxford, 1974), 123-130.
 27. The African Mine Worker on the Copperbelt of Northern Rhodesia (RST, mimeo, 1960), 15. The Brown Report, appendix XVI, 70, 160.
 28. Supervisory workers carry out predominantly supervisory rather than manual duties. They included boss boys, who organized gangs of 10-12 African workers, clerks, and other skilled Africans.
 29. This was because the 1964 wage agreement put Zambians in schedule A jobs on local pay. Perrings, "A moment," 196-201; The Brown Report, 22, 39.
 30. Sholto Cross, "The Watch Tower Movement in South Central Africa 1908-1945" (Ph.D. Diss., Oxford University, 1973), 360-361; Terence O. Ranger, Dance and Society in Eastern Africa (London, 1975).
 31. One informant recalled that "The clerks were badly hated by the miners. The clerks were well respected by Europeans. So the people think, those people are well respected, they were very much against them." Albert Musakanya, welfare officer at Rhokana, interview in Kitwe, 22 Sept. 1976.
 32. B. Berman and J. Lonsdale, "Crises of Accumulation, Coercion and the Colonial State: The Development of the Labor Control System in Kenya, 1919-1929," Canadian Journal of African Studies 14, 1 (1980).
 33. F. Spearpoint, "The African Native and the Rhodesia Copper Mines," supplement to the Journal of the Royal African Society xxxvi, CXLIV (July, 1937), supplement 3.

34. For more detail see F. A. Johnstone, Class, Race and Gold (London, 1976).
35. Berger, Labour, Race and Colonial Rule, chaps. 3 and 4.
36. Evidence to the Commission appointed to inquire into the disturbances in the Copperbelt of Northern Rhodesia (Lusaka, 1940), 439. (The Forster Commission).
37. Berger, Labour, Race and Colonial Rule, chap. 7.
38. Parpart, Labor and Capital, chap. 5.
39. Interviews with the following labor officers: W. Stubbs, in Oxford, 25 Oct. 1976, P. J. Law, in Oxford, 26 Oct. 1976, and Sir Richard Luyt, in Cape Town, 7 Oct. 1976.
40. Berger, Labour, Race and Colonial Rule, 135-137.
41. Parpart, Labor and Capital, 140-143.
42. In 1958 the union agreed not to use its funds or organizational structure for political purposes if the companies would collect union subscriptions. This was necessary to strengthen a union greatly decimated by the State of Emergency and the rustification of its leadership. Patson Kambafwile, miner and union leader, interviewed in Mufulira, 9 September 1976.
43. Sanford Chiwila, personnel department, Rhokana, interviewed in Kitwe, 27 November 1975; Gabriel Musumbulwa, personnel department, Roan Antelope, interviewed in Luanshya, 30 August 1976.
44. By May 1954, only 279 miners out of a potential membership of 4160 belonged to MASA, and by March 1955, only 469 out of 3,535 eligible miners had joined the association. RCM/CSD/202.17, no. 1, Secretary, MASA to NRCM, 31 May 1954 and RCM/CSD/202.17, no. 2, NRCM to RST and AA, Salisbury, 16 March 1955; Lameck Chisanga claimed that the staff association was not really functioning at this time and that many of the miners who joined refused to participate because of loyalty to the union. Lameck Chisanga, interviewed in Lusaka by Carolyn Baylies, 11 January 1973.
45. John Chisata, President of AMWU 1960-64, interviewed in Mufulira, 14 September 1976; Report of the Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Mining Industry in Northern Rhodesia, (Lusaka, 1962), 8, 17. (The Morrison Report).
46. In 1959 the Trade Union Congress had split into two sections, one solely dominated by AMWU and MASA. In 1961 Chisata agreed to reunify the two sections, and the new organization was called the United Trade Union Congress (UTUC). The union fell out with the UTUC in 1963 over the issue of political control. D. Mulford, Zambia, the Politics of Independence (London, 1967), 173-174.
47. Some of the UMU leaders had been associated with the communist dominated World Federation of Trade Unions. R. Sklar, Corporate Power in an African State (Los Angeles, 1975), 110.
48. Harries-Jones, Freedom and Labour, 166-167.

49. In 1964 there were more than 2000 cancellations from the AMWU to join the new union. CISB 100:47, vol. viii, N.R.K. Davis to the general managers, 30 August 1963.
50. John Chisata, interview cited; The Northern Star, 1, 14, 31 May 1963; The Brown Report, 25-27.
51. The Brown Report, 38-39; This was well-founded because in 1966, although the vast majority of junior supervisors (section bosses) were Zambians, above this level only 9 out of 723 employees were Zambian. Republic of Zambia, The Progress of Zambianization in the Mining Industry (Lusaka, 1968), 1-3; In the early 1970s, Burawoy discovered that the companies had "thickened up on supervision" by expatriates at the senior levels while keeping Zambians out of advanced supervisory jobs. Burawoy, The Colour of Class, 27-29.
52. The Brown Report.