The Dialectics of Colonial Labour Control: 
*Class Struggles in the Nigerian Coal Industry, 1914-1949*

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper is a case study of the labour movement at the Enugu Government Colliery, Nigeria from its opening in 1914 until a massacre of 21 striking miners in 1949. It focuses on the emergence of worker consciousness in a context of overlapping ethnic and class-based affiliations and its expression in acts of collective and individual protest. The workers struggled against a complex system of labour control emanating from both inside and outside the industry. Through confrontations with the state, they came to understand their own importance to the national and regional economy.

**Introduction**

Since the 1970s several studies of West African mineworkers have made important contributions to the literature on African industrial workers, a field which is dominated by studies of South African mining and manufacturing workers. The works of Jeff Crisp, Bill Freund, and James Silver have refocused studies of the African mineworker by looking at miners in predominantly agro-export economies dominated by peasant producers. Their work, coming in the post-independence decade, has incorporated many of the theoretical perspectives that characterize the “New International Labour Studies” which take a radical perspective on labour in peripheral economies.

This paper is a case study of the labour movement at the Enugu Government Colliery, Nigeria from its opening in 1914 until a massacre of 21 striking miners in 1949. It chronicles the history of a small but important group of colonial workers within the theoretical framework of the dialectic of labour control and resistance. It focuses on the emergence of worker consciousness in a context of overlapping ethnic and class-based affiliations and its expression in acts of collective and individual protest. Worker protest evolves despite an
elaborate system of labour control in which pre-colonial social relations are projected into the workplace of a colonial industry.

The introduction of the paper reviews the empirical and theoretical contributions of Anglophone West African labour studies and situates the case study within an evolving specialization, the "new international labour studies".

The new labour studies represent a continuation and refinement of the radical labour literature of the earlier decades which was dominated by European Marxists and orthodox Communists. The radical literature of the 1950s, the decolonization decade, collapsed workers' interests into the multi-class nationalist movement. For example, Jack Woodis' (1961) work focused on the conflict between workers and colonial capital but left unexplored questions of class formation and the unique characteristics of the African working class. The significance of the earlier radical labour studies lay in the fact that they founded a tradition of radical scholarship among Western intellectuals.

Unlike their predecessors, most of the new radicals are not linked to left parties and consequently are more likely to develop analysis divorced from policy implications. The "new international labour studies" is a multi-disciplinary specialization which conceptualizes the working class as a social force rather than the one-dimensional "employees" of conventional labour studies. The impact of methodological and theoretical dimensions of Marxism is significant; most of the literature assumes a contradiction between labour and capital (Cohen, 1980). The use of class analysis contrasts with the "Africanist" perspective of the early independence period and reflects the emergence of radical intellectuals some of whom are linked with the social movements. A body of African radical thought is emerging through the contribution of activist intellectuals such as Frantz Fanon (1967) and Amilcar Cabral (1969), who exemplify Marx's praxis, and academics such as Segun Osoba (1969) and Claude Ake (1978).

The historical context of the new studies explains many of its concerns and methodological approaches. It arose amidst the political currents of the first decade of African independence and represented a reaction to the limitations of the economic policies of neocolonial regimes. The new literature was influenced by a wave of strikes in the 1970s (Nigeria, 1971; Botswana, 1975; South Africa, 1971) which suggested that the African working class could be a powerful destabilizing force in neo-colonial and minority-ruled states. This encouraged a re-evaluation of the Butler and Berg thesis (1964) on the apolitical nature of African trade unions. New methodologies, such as oral history, facilitated the analytical focus on the worker perspective.

Additionally, the new labour studies reflect the influence of dependency theory which has dominated the debates on development following the Cuban Revolution. Finally, there was the emergence of armed struggle as a strategy to wipe out the last vestiges of colonial rule in the Portuguese colonies and Southern Africa, a development that injected a radical discourse into the decolonization movement.
In the mid-seventies several collections appeared. Richard Sandbrook and Robin Cohen edited *The Development of an African Working Class* (1975), which contained several examples of the new, radical literature. Subsequently Cohen, Peter Gutkind and Jean Copans edited a collection of historical studies, *African Labour History* (1975) which emphasized the importance of history for contemporary labour studies. Several journals became outlets for the new literature. Two are based in universities: Peter Waterman's *Newsletter of International Labour Studies*, from the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague and *Labour, Capital and Society*, of McGill University's Centre for Developing-Area Studies, Montreal. The third, the *Review of African Political Economy*, in addition to articles on labour, usually has an important bibliography, "Radical Africana".

In 1976, Charles van Onselen made an important theoretical contribution in his historical study "Worker Consciousness in Black Miners: Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1920", a section of his doctoral thesis later published as *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933* (1976). Van Onselen's work gave a new dimension to our understanding of the complex ways in which mineworkers attempted to manouvre within a labour coercive economy.

The discussion of workers' protest moved beyond the boundaries of trade unions to focus on the less obvious expressions of workers' resistance. Cohen refined the theme of the subtle forms of resistance in "Hidden Forms of Labour Protest in Africa" (1976). These studies demonstrated many of the characteristics of the "New International Labour Studies". The locus of study had shifted from the worker in unions, or as a "problem" within an industrial relations format, to an analysis of the political potential of the working class creating the radical transformation needed to break the ties of dependency. While informed by the studies of the European working class, they recognized the specificity of African workers especially the persistence of their ties with the rural economy and their continued access to the land. The new labour specialists were therefore implicitly activist. While their foreign nationality limited their participation in social movements fighting for radical change, many saw their role as using their craft "to help bring about the creation of a tradition of analysis of working class struggle" (Cohen, Gutkind and Copans, 1978:26). The focus pushed the analysis to a more intimate familiarity with African labour.

This study fits within this new direction in West African labour studies and focuses on an important though numerically small group of West African workers, the Enugu coal miners of Eastern Nigeria. While they never exceeded 7,000 in number, the Enugu coal miners were a key group within the West African working class because the coal industry was the major energy source for the region's railways. The railway's role in the export of cash crops to the coast, and the inaccessibility of alternative, though chemically superior coal resources from Western Europe, gave these miners a disproportionate regional importance. The study surveys the history of the coal miners within the dialec-
tic of labour control and labour resistance. It draws on and challenges similar studies concerned with the intersection of ethnicity and class, the development of consciousness and the collective action of workers at various points in the development of the colonial political economy. This theoretical perspective permits new insights into the complex composition and behaviour of colonial industrial workers in export economies dominated by peasant exports. As most African economies remain predominantly agro-export oriented even in the post-colonial period, the study looks at a more typical African working class. This class often retains its ties with the rural economy and is a growing but nonetheless minority social class. The study suggests important parallels with the historiography of South African mineworkers.

West African Labour Studies: Theoretical and Empirical Dimensions

Anglophone West Africa is a heterogeneous group of states with similar economies but contrasting historical formation. Nigeria, Ghana and the Gambia were formally colonized by Great Britain in the late 19th century; Liberia and Sierra Leone were founded as part of the abolitionist impulse of the 19th century.

The working class was created relatively early as part of the commercial transformation of the region. The first groups of workers were in infrastructural projects—head porterage, railroads, road and port construction that "opened" the economy. Forced labour, identical to that in settler colonies of Southern Africa, interlaced with colonial conquest, formed the nucleus of the working class. In some areas, as Liberia, where land was ceded to expatriate plantations, peasants became an agro-proletariat producing rubber.

Despite certain historic divergences, Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia and Sierra Leone had similar economic and class structures under colonialism. The small size of the West African working class is a reflection of the peasant base of the agro-export economy. Each had a small mining sector within a predominantly agro-export economy. Only Nigeria developed a large industrial sector but as a capital intensive enclave it neither stimulated auxiliary industries nor did it stimulate a large working class. The industrialization model adopted after World War II and subsequent independence was import substitution which similarly discouraged the growth of a large working class. No West African state has a proletariat comparable to that of Southern Africa.

However, the political potential and economic significance of the working class is more influenced by its economic position than its relative size. Small groups of workers in industries linked to transportation (dockworkers, railway workers) the major export earner, or employed by government, have the capacity to disrupt the entire economy. Their position in the economy appears to be a major influence on their propensity to develop consciousness and to express it in a tradition of militance. The new and old literature has concentrated on these key workers.
History features prominently in the new literature in recognition of the importance of class formation, pre-trade union struggles, formal and informal resistance, responses to state strategies of labour control and intra-working class struggles. The theoretical dimensions of this literature distinguish it from the earlier empiricist studies and reflect the perceptions, concerns and abstractions of scholars operating in a given historical period.

The Historical Literature

Several themes are covered by the historical literature. In one a vigorous debate is occurring within pre-colonial labour studies over the distinctive characteristics and evolution of African slavery. Of the few studies before the 1970s Horton (1954) and Harris (1942), described slavery in "stateless" Igbo communities in southeastern Nigeria. Both focused on their use in production rather than on their use in armies and the civil service of pre-colonial states, the dominant concern of the earlier literature. Recent research in the same area by Northrup (1976, 1981) argues the compatibility of slavery with the "legitimate" (palm export) trade on the Biafran (southeastern Nigerian) coast, debunking conventional analysis which claimed the incompatibility of the two trades.

The major compendia appeared from the late 1970s and indicated a new specialization within historical studies (Robertson and Klein, 1983; Miers and Kopytoff, 1977; Lovejoy, 1981). The gender dimension of slavery was the focus of Klein and Robertson’s Women and Slavery in Africa which linked the new interest in African women with the literature on pre-colonial labour systems. Meillassoux’s seminal essay "Female Slavery" contributed to the theoretical analysis of the role of women in biological and social reproduction.

Some of the new studies treat slavery as a dynamic institution affected by changes in the society as a whole (Lovejoy, 1983). Lovejoy is one of the proponents of the controversial slave mode of production, an outgrowth of the modes of production debate of French economic anthropologists (Lovejoy, 1981; Kilkinney, 1981).

The resilience of slavery within the colonial capitalist economy has led Afigbo (1977) to investigate the protracted nature of emancipation which lasted through the 1930s in southeastern Nigeria. My own research (Brown, 1985a,b) documents the slaves’ struggle to define "freedom" while being transformed into industrial workers through forced labour in the Enugu government Colliery. These slavery studies raise many of the themes in new American slavery studies (Foner, 1983) and promise to expand the dimensions of comparative slavery studies in the future.

Precolonial labour history should feature more case studies in slavery research that explore resistance and the link between slavery and early colonial forms of labour organization and control. Similarly, more research is needed into other forms of labour organization and control before the European conquest.
While labour studies of the colonial period are better developed than those of the precolonial period, they have only a marginal influence on the administrative and elite-centred perspective of conventional histories of the colonial experience. Unlike Southern Africa, West African social history has not emerged as a major specialization.

Most studies focus on the pivotal workers—dock and port workers, railway workers, miners and urban service workers (Waterman, 1978; Hopkins, 1966; Oyemakinde, 1974; Mason, 1978). Studies of the agro-proletariat are relatively few considering the importance of plantations and capitalist farms in some West African countries (Berry, 1975).

Coercion, used to create "free labour" for colonial capital, is explored for the Gold Coast by Thomas (1973), for Northern Nigeria by Mason (1978) and Freund (1981) and for Nigeria as a whole by Ofonogoro (1981). But much remains to be discovered about the nature of village-wide and individual/informal resistance and its impact on state policy and worker consciousness. For example, a study of resistance to Firestone's land seizures and forced labour policies in Liberia would be an important contribution to the studies of the creation of the agro-proletariat.

The theoretical influences of the Southern African studies are seen in some of the studies of West African mineworkers (Brown, 1985a, b; Crisp, 1980, 1984; Freund, 1981, 1982). Western European social history which was a reference point for Southern African studies has similarly influenced West African labour specialists. The methodologies and theoretical framework of E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* has proven particularly useful in describing West African class formation (Crisp, 1980).

Colonial labour studies have examined class consciousness, the workers' relationship to the nationalist struggles, working class and state relations and expressions of resistance in the workplace and broader society (Crisp, 1984; Akpala, 1965; Brown, 1985a). Van Onselen's work (1973, 1967) expanded the dimensions of worker resistance beyond strikes and Cohen (1976) categorized the more subtle forms of resistance which was incorporated in Crisp's studies (1984) of Ghanaian gold miners.

Independence created new concerns within the field. The new nations and the metropolitan states were concerned with the potential power and ideological affinities of African workers. The political role of labour in nation building was challenged by Berg and Butler's "Trade Unions" (1964) which sparked a decade long debate which was only superceded by the "new labour studies". The General Strike, a threat to post-war colonialism, reemerged as an important weapon of working class protest in the neo-colonial context. One major example, the Nigeria General Strike of 1964, has attracted the greatest attention (Melson, 1970; Barundi and Lettieri, 1964; Oyemakinde, 1974).
The Contemporary Literature

Much of the contemporary literature has focused on the debate of the labour aristocracy thesis. Fanon (1967) opened the debate in the mid-sixties asserting that peasants were the most exploited and potentially the most revolutionary social force in neo-colonial Africa. He considered the proletariat proper to be "labour aristocrats". Giovanni Arrighi and John Saul (1968) applied Fanon's theory to East Africa and claimed that workers in multinational corporations were a skilled, stable, and relatively well-paid "labour aristocracy" who with the political elite shared in the surplus generated by the peasantry and had a stake in the status quo. On the other hand, workers in locally-owned industries were unskilled, made much lower wages, moved between wage employment and farming and were similarly exploited as the peasantry. In fact rather than being a proletariat proper they were actually a "semi-proletarianized peasantry" with limited class consciousness and commitment to wage labour, (Arrighi and Saul, 1973).

The thesis failed to appreciate the historical and regional specificity of East Africa in the 1960s and was partially a reaction to the "proletarian romanticism" of earlier radical writers (e.g. Woodis, 1961).

Critics of the thesis have tested it against the empirical data of specific case studies in West African labour. Three of the major critiques illustrate the problems in the thesis when compared with the empirical data on West African workers. Jeffries, Waterman and Peace each evaluated the thesis through analysis of specific groups of workers.

Richard Jeffries (1975) studied the behaviour of Ghanaian railway workers during a 1961 strike against the Nkrumah government and found many of the key assumptions to be overly simplistic or totally inaccurate. If political alliance were determined by wage differentials, he found that income disparity between skilled workers and the elite was far greater than that between sectors of the working class. Secondly, workers' demands exceeded the economism of a "labour aristocracy" and attacked Nkrumah's austerity policies and the generalized injustice and exploitation within the society. Further, he found that labour force commitment did not correspond with skills levels. Unskilled Ghanaian workers were as stable and alienated from the rural economy as the skilled and semi-skilled strata. Finally, far from ignoring the problems of the urban poor with whom they shared hardship and bad living conditions, they became spokesmen for their grievances.

Adrian Peace's (1975, 1979) study of Nigerian workers in private and expatriate firms during the 1970 Adebo crisis in Lagos had similar findings. Workers' militance strained the political alliance between the government and private (foreign and domestic) capital by pushing government to require the private sector to grant its cost-of-living increase (the Adebo Award). Workers circumvented strike restrictions and organized wildcat actions exposing the contradiction between the political survival of the elite and its willingness to protect the interests of multinational capital. The contradiction was also seen
in the government's reliance on these firms to provide jobs for the working class and its use of anti-imperialist propaganda to explain the deprivations confronting most of the population. Peace's study indicates that the labour aristocracy thesis leads to a static analysis of the alliance between the elite and foreign capital that inhibits recognition of its fragility when a crisis shakes the political base of the neo-colonial state. Like Jeffries he found that working class political alliances and goals do not simply follow narrowly defined income differentials but are influenced by worker perceptions of their life-chances and its obstacles, the support of their struggles by other poor, the coincidence of worker demands with those of other impoverished groups and the ability of the working class to articulate and act upon issues with broad popular appeal.

Waterman's critique focused on the unskilled sector of the working class, which Saul and Arrighi called the "semi-proletarianized peasantry" employed in locally-owned firms. He found that the unskilled/migrant worker was not found in all locally-owned firms. Looking at the Lagos dockworkers (unskilled/migrant) and port workers (skilled/stable) he found that the attitudes of dockworkers were similar to the peasants' but that they rapidly developed worker consciousness. He noted a conceptual problem of "dichotomized thinking" which obscured the complexity of worker action because it polarized the proletariat into "aristocrats" and "semi-proletarianized peasants". He noted the limitations of a static application of the thesis when used to interpret the complex subjective and objective aspects of African working class existence.

Despite its weaknesses and the pessimistic political implications, which Saul (1975) subsequently recognized, the theory generated a debate which forced an analytical differentiation of the sectors of the working class and led the literature in new directions. Critics were forced to examine more closely the character and composition of the working class, situate it vis-à-vis the types of capital, locate it historically within a given society, examine its ideological formation and evaluate its subjective (consciousness) dimensions.

While the theoretical innovations of the "new labour studies" differ from the empiricism of the conventional literature, they also examine the same institutions but from a dialectical perspective. Trade unions are seen as contested and dynamic institutions which are only one of the vehicles for workers' collective action. Their potential power and radicalism are recognized by the neo-colonial state as by its colonial predecessor. Both used legal and extra-legal means to co-opt and often to repress them. The new literature differentiates between the rank and file and union bureaucracy and recognizes that workers sometimes defy union leadership when they perceive it as being co-opted by capital or the state. Smock (1961, 1969) and Silver (1978) noted a widening gap between workers and the union among Nigerian coal miners and Ghanaian gold miners. Silver found that while militant Ghanaian workers were unable to lead a struggle for socialist transformation, they could block state programs founded on their exploitation. Ananaba (1969) and Cohen
(1974) chronicle the colonial and neo-colonial Nigerian government attempts to contain trade union confederations.

The relationship between ethnicity and class has proven especially difficult to conceptualize within a radical framework. The ethnic obsession of the orthodox studies of the 1960s has perhaps contributed to the reluctance of radical scholars to factor it into their theoretical formulations. Saul (1979) and Mafeje (1971) characterize ethnicity as an ideological phenomenon. Nnoli (1980) in a study of ethnicity and politics in Nigeria, suggests that it can be incorporated within a materialist framework when examined historically and analyzed as a mechanism of elites/bourgeoisie to gain support for sectional fights to be joined so as to gain control of the state. Crisp and I note its minimal significance when it negates class interests of workers.

African mineworkers have been treated extensively in studies of industrial labour (Crisp, 1984; Freund, 1981; Thomas, 1973; Silver, 1978; Brown, 1985). Akpala (1965; 1972a, b) and Smock (1961, 1969) made pioneering studies of Nigerian coal miners but neither raised the concerns of the new literature. Of the recent historical studies, Crisp has been most theoretically innovative and has analyzed worker activism within the dialectic of labour control and labour resistance to determine its impact on consciousness. Freund's (1981) study of Nigerian tin miners explores class formation, labour control and protest, and migration but does not focus on the conditions influencing consciousness. My work falls within the framework of workers' consciousness as explored in the literature on Southern African workers (Van Onselen, 1973). I looked at the workplace and the production process as important but not exclusive sources of worker awareness and evaluated the influence of pre-capitalist social relations, specifically kinship/clan, on the evolution of class consciousness.

Concern with workers has led to the study of kindred classes in the urban context. Gutkind (1974), was a pioneer in studies of the urban poor and his Manpower and Unemployment Research was an important stimulus to the investigation of working class alliances with other popular sectors. The city, however, has failed to attract historical investigation despite its significance for labour studies. Cooper’s Struggle for the City (1983) explores the city as the venue for struggle—labour vs. capital and popular classes vs. the elite.

The gender dimensions of the class struggle have not attracted sufficient attention. The influence of feminist theories is seen in Sam Jackson's (1978) study of Hausa workers in which she argues that women are a separate class, a thesis which many Marxists find conceptually limited. While the link between the domestic subordination of women and their exploitation in the workplace has been featured in the literature on Asian and Latin American export industries, it has not emerged as a theme in West African studies. More studies of women workers are needed to complete our understanding of the complex character of West African labour.
What Needs to Be Done: Areas for Future Research

Given the theoretical and empirical perspectives of the new labour studies a number of issues need fuller exploration. Due to time and space constraints a cursory survey must suffice.

1. Case studies of sectors of the workforce

Given the export orientation of West African economies, workers in transport, extractive, "screwdriver" and energy industries are key to the political economy and deserve more attention. Despite their importance in Nigeria's economy, oil workers have not been studied extensively nor have clerical workers, a major category of female labour.

2. National surveys of labour history

There are sufficient case studies of labour in some states to permit a general history of labour. Despite the amount of research in Nigerian labour history, the only general history is the orthodox managerial/industrial relations study by Ananaba (1979).

3. Popular culture and the world of the worker

While receiving extensive treatment in Latin American social science, popular culture has not been used to determine how the worker responds to the work process or to the broader struggle against capital. Music, popular novels, and dance, all aspects of working class life, deserve attention. For example, in the 1945 Nigerian General Strike scabs were called "white legs" rather than "black legs" as in Europe and North America (Ajukuchukwu, 1951). In Anglophone West Africa musicians have been important in the development of popular consciousness and in the dissemination of historical information among the labouring classes. The Nigerian musician, Fela, has criticized the neo-colonial policies of the Nigerian state and contributed to the awareness of the popular classes through his references to the sources of popular deprivation and social alienation. His music is an essential source for understanding and documenting the daily travails of the popular classes in Nigeria's dense and insalubrious capital city—Lagos (Iweriebor, 1985).

4. Biographies of trade union leaders

Few trade union leaders have been the subject of scholarly monographs despite their value for insight into the ideological formation of the men and women who emerge to lead workers' struggles. Waterman has produced in microform the archives of Chief O. A. Benyioku, a Nigerian trade union leader. There are some locally published studies produced by trade union intellectuals but few are available outside the region.
5. Labour and racism

Although the racial dimension of colonial West Africa influenced the growth of the nationalist movement, the relationship between race and class has not been treated theoretically or empirically in the new literature. Because contemporary workers perceive their struggle against multinational capital in racial as well as national terms, the intersection of race and class is an important aspect of consciousness.

Class Struggle in the Enugu Government Colliery, Nigeria, 1914-49

The Enugu Colliery was a British colonial enterprise in the northern part of southeastern Nigeria, an area inhabited by various Igbo clans. The mines which opened in 1914 were exploited for the Nigerian and West African railway system and, as the only coal source in the region, had strategic value (Brown, 1985:1-6).

Underlying factors that shaped the development and direction of worker activity and resistance to managerial control had environmental, political, economic and human dimensions. The colliery developed as an appendage of the Nigerian Railway, its major consumer and only transporter.

This organic relationship between the industries tied the fate of the colliery workers to seasonal fluctuations in the railway’s coal demands and its ability to remove it from the site. For instance, during the groundnut season the railway was unable to transport coal. The oscillating transport and demand schedule for coal influenced management-worker relations in that while the workers wanted job stability and a reliable work schedule, management desired maximum flexibility to retrench or augment labour supplies as railway conditions dictated.

The coal was a soft grade of sub-bituminous coal which rapidly disintegrated in tropical humidity and was difficult to stockpile. This made the colliery and coal consumers vulnerable to work stoppages and gave the 4,000 miners an economic power exceeding their numbers. Thus, as energy workers, their objective position in the political economy made them an important sector of Nigeria’s colonial labour force.

The human factor derived from the pattern of social organisation which had existed among the various Igbo clans inhabiting the mine area prior to the colonial presence. This had far-reaching consequences on the character and nature of working class consciousness at the mines.

The Nkanu, who occupied the fertile plateau surrounding the colliery, had evolved a labour system which exploited, predominantly through slavery, the labour of their neighbors the Agbajas, who inhabited the infertile eroded Udi escarpment (Horton, 1954:311-13).

As a result, even though both clans served as initial and “local” sources of labour to the colliery, (particularly in the unskilled categories), this indigenous differentiation resulted in Agbajas being channeled/forced into
underground work. The Nkanu, on the other hand, filled less dangerous surface positions.

Workers who hailed from more distant areas such as Onitsha, the commercial centre to the west on the Niger River, and Owerri, a town in central Igboland, were considered "foreigners". The "foreigners", however, by virtue of earlier exposure to European missionary education, were able to hold the more desirable skilled and semi-skilled posts such as hewers, the coal producers.

A second feature of the human factor was the imposition of warrant chiefs in Igboland and their use as labour recruiters after 1919.

The dialectical relationships between the two "local" clans, one having a pre-colonial slave status to the other; between the "locals" and the "foreigners"; and between the labour-recruiting chiefs, their representatives in the mines, "boss boys" and the labourers they recruited, represented an interface of clan (ethnic) and class conflicts. The clan/job coincidence permitted "boss boys", interpreters and the management to exploit clan divergencies to control the workers. Thus, while class affiliation was rooted in capitalist production relations, clan affiliation was based in the pre-capitalist and pre-colonial reality. The complex of class and non-class bases of consciousness demonstrated that consciousness is affected by variables outside and inside the workplace. While worker consciousness facilitated collective action increasing labour's bargaining power, ethnicity divided workers making them vulnerable to exploitative strata in the workforce, village chiefs, heads of urban ethnic unions and management. Because of the coincidence of clan with job, occupational conflicts were sometimes obscured by the rhetoric of ethnicity and clan.

In 1914/15 conquest and labour mobilization were concurrent events contradictorily "freeing up" labour from pre-capitalist encumbrances (slavery, household labour obligations, etc.) through the "unfree" system of forced labour. Punitive expeditions forced hundreds into corvée labour for the evolving colonial state. Antagonistic features of the social formation were co-opted, destroyed or reformulated to create local acquiescence to the political and social structures undergirding the colonial capitalist political economy.

Before colonial rule, the Igbo lived in segmentary units in which the village-group was the highest level of political centralization. The imposition of warrant chiefs, Lugard's local equivalent of indirect rule, assisted the state in administering the colony and, importantly, distanced the state from direct involvement in coercive labour recruitment. Warrant chiefs had opportunities for capital accumulation which accelerated rural differentiation. Some, like the paramount Agbaja Chief Onyeama, accumulated capital during both the mercantile and industrial capitalist phases of the areas's incorporation into the world market. At the turn of the century, before becoming the major supplier of underground Agbaja labour, Chief Onyeama had become wealthy as a slave trader. Thus, colliery recruitment was merely a new form in which he exploited his peoples' labour. As recruiter he creatively adapted his exploitation to the new conditions. He forced his people into the mines, collecting fees
from government and skimming off his recruits' wages for the "privilege" of working in the colliery. Further, he continued his trading activities as a palm merchant. In the 1920s he was caught using the same conscripted coal miners, often after the working day, as porters to carry his palm oil to trade depots. This contradiction between two systems of labour exploitation interfered with the workers' productivity and management naturally complained.

Exploitation in two modes of production caused eclectic forms of worker resistance. Agbaja workers deserted, plaguing the mines with persistent shortages of unskilled underground labour. Among the Nkanu surface workers a similar situation obtained. In their case, labour supplies were controlled by the freeborn or Amadi who had slaves, called Ohu. When pressed by Chief Chukwuani, the Nkanu paramount, they pushed their Ohu into the mines. Adapting slavery to the new mode of production and innovating on their traditional rights to Ohu labour, the Amadi attempted to seize a portion of their wages. In this case resistance, like labour exploitation, was rooted inside and outside the workplace. In 1923, the people of the Nkanu village of Akpugo, which had a large Ohu population, marched into Enugu to protest forced labour and the Amadi attempts to appropriate wages (Horton: 334). The struggle overlapped with Ohu agitation for land titles, an important manipulation of the new legal system as the area became the breadbasket for Enugu.

The ambiguities of the unsystematic apparatus of labour control prevented the state from holding labour obtained through the chiefs for the duration of their contract. Many deserted and returned to their villages, presumably to continue farming. Desertions exposed the chiefs' impotence, deprived them of the stipends and damaged their credibility both with the regime and their constituents. In World War I, village resistance along the railway routes and in the colliery reached serious proportions.

Although desertion was the major form of resistance, other types of protest occurred concurrently. These coincided with skill, labour commitment and familiarity with the forms of struggle in the capitalist workplace. In 1920, while the unseasoned Agbaja workers deserted, the skilled and semi-skilled "foreigners" organized the colliery's first strike. The strike occurred amidst rapid post-war socio-economic change—burgeoning urbanization, food shortages, imposition of paper currency and inflation. The 1918 Influenza Pandemic and demands for unskilled labour to construct government buildings facilitated workers' collective action. The "foreigner" artisans demanded a war bonus and protested the unfamiliar paper money and food shortages. They picketed working miners, sabotaged equipment and constituted themselves into a negotiating team. Despite the dismissal of the leaders, the workers forced government to grant a 10% wage increase, only partially paid in paper currency, and to secure supplies of yams for the colliery market. A further increase in real wages occurred when government agreed to sell yams for paper money at below market price.²

Perhaps more significantly the strikers used a negotiation strategy which was subsequently followed in all colliery strikes. They rejected negotiations
with the mines' management and insisted on meeting with the District Officer. This strategy exploited the conflicts within the state's system of labour control and subsequently limited the manager's autonomy. The success of the strike popularized collective action as a means of achieving worker demands (Brown, 1985a:42-50). To resolve the problem of persistent labour shortages, government entered an agreement with the Nkanu and Agbaja, chiefs formalizing the stipends for supply of labour. The agreement, which perpetuated the clan/occupational stratification, enhanced the chief's influence in industrial affairs. However, neither Onyeama nor Chukwani was able to meet their quota leading government to recruit further afield into Bende, a regional slave trading centre.

No sooner had the Bende miners begun work when the hewers, called "pickboys", and the men who pushed coal tubs, the "tub boys", again struck for increased piece wages. Again the manager was circumvented but this time the administrative head of the province, the Resident, was summoned by the workers for negotiations. The strike quickly succeeded because of a labour shortage occasioned by a construction boom when Enugu became administrative seat of the eastern provinces administration.

From 1920 until the depression three other strikes occurred revealing a correlation between job position and militance, a conscious manipulation of intra-state conflicts over labour policy and an awareness of the significance of the peak period of coal demand. "Foreigners" again led the longest strike, December-January 1924/25, and unsuccessfully demanded restoration of a wage cut made during the 1921 recession (Akpala, 1965:347).

"Foreigner" militance made management receptive when Agbajas demanded a monopoly in all future hiring. Assuming that "locals" were too "backward" to be militant, the industry increasingly gave "locals" underground jobs. From that point the "foreigners" were given preference in the clerical posts. Thus clan/regional divisions were further institutionalized in the industry's labour structure.

"Local" docility was deceptive, for in the summer of 1926 when the colliery was asked to bunker ships during the English General Strike, the Agbaja underground labourers left work demanding a one penny wage increase. The mines were competing for labour with Enugu construction and the extension of the northern branch of the railway. Adopting the now traditional strategy of "foreign" labour militants, the Agbaja insisted on meeting the Resident. The timing in a period of peak coal demand and labour shortage made it difficult for the state to reject them.

A final strike, in 1929, suggested considerable class stabilization and consciousness. Management had abdicated considerable powers to the "boss boys", the "native" supervisors and the chiefs' representatives in the mines. Exploiting their position as intermediaries between the village and the industry, the "boss boys" had developed an elaborate system of extortion which often followed the men into their hometowns. Some dismissed their workcrews before pay day and drew their wages. Since only the "boss boys"
knew the names of workers in their crew the management claimed total ignorance of the abuses. In September 1929, despite clan affinity with the "boss boys", the "pick boys" struck against illegal pay deductions. Although unable to force a total examination of the "boss boys" system, the workers did force prosecution of several for bribery. Significantly, the strike was the first test of clan against class interest. Undoubtedly, since kinship did not prevent the "boss boys" from exploiting the workers, the clan factor was now challenged as a basis of social consciousness.

Industrial contraction and labour surplus during the depression discouraged worker resistance. The trade slump and the railway's declining coal needs led management to reduce wages and eliminate redundant workers. The colliery experimented with African supervisors, finding them less expensive than European staff. But in 1936 signs of economic recovery encouraged agitation to restore the wage cut. The next year the hewers presented demands which clearly indicated a considerable degree of class stabilization and a sophisticated awareness of the market value of their skills. They demanded wage increases, improved working conditions, better labour camps, workmen's compensation and increased European supervision. The strike settlement changed the entire wage system and began an era of state-directed paternalism, hence, deserves close examination.

*The Bulkeley Award: The Beginnings of a Minimum Wage*

The Director of Transport, Bulkeley, responded immediately to the workers' action and launched a full scale investigation of the industry. In the face of the forbidding signs of war in Europe the Colonial Office was resolved to minimize future industrial disputes. In the absence of trade unions, government was forced to play a more interventionist role supervising labour to avoid strikes. Impressed by the danger and poor conditions of underground workers, Bulkeley instituted a daily pay rate to supplement previous tub (piece) rates. The daily rate was effectively a minimum wage, a guaranteed pay for each hewer. Predictably it led to petitions from all classes of labour, each arguing that its functions were either indispensable or especially hazardous and so warranted pay increases. (Brown, 1985a:102-28).

In his investigation Bulkeley found that since 1915 the industry had made enough profits to finance the very improvements in the labour camps and worksites that had caused the disturbance. He also found evidence supporting the Colonial Office suspicions of management incompetence. He uncovered the vast network of corruption made possible by management's "benign neglect" and abdication to the "boss boys". Management incompetence was seen in the inaccurate and incomplete personnel cards which prevented payment of seniority increments granted in the Bulkeley Award. Further, now that every hewer was entitled to a minimum wage, accurate work rosters and productivity controls and quotas were mandatory.
The Colonial Office assumed more direct supervision of the troublesome industry and demanded monthly management reports. Disturbed by the lack of labour/management communication the C.O. created two new posts of Labour Master and Staff Welfare Officer. The former was to supervise the camps and reorganize the card registry while the latter was to identify worker grievances before they led to a dispute.

The full extent of management neglect became obvious when the Labour Master found over 4000 names in the card registry for the colliery's 2600 positions. But rather than eliminate superfluous workers the manager began a work-sharing system, called "rostering", by which the 4,000 workers shared the 2600 jobs. Although "rostering" resolved the immediate crisis and gave management the flexibility it desired, it soon caused unrest when workers realized they would not be able to earn a living wage. Further, it added another layer of corruption as the timekeepers, who daily posted the list of workers, demanded bribes.

There was no consensus within the state, however, on the camp improvements. C. H. Croasdale, the new Labour Master, complained that better housing would free the miners from the control of the village chiefs, "... earn new wants, become dependent on the Colliery ... and liable to discontent in case of a slump in the coal market." Further he felt they already had a standard of living "... far above the other ... labourers in the township".5 Croasdale recognized that an urban proletariat was emerging outside the control of the chiefs. However, he did not understand that as it prepared for World War II, the state could not risk disruptions in the export economy.

Persistent worker militance on the eve of the war also forced government to fine tune the system of labour control and introduce a rudimentary consultative system to channel labour militance. Representative Councils, appointed by the manager, were introduced for each category and clan grouping at the colliery. While management saw them as conveying its policies to workers, the councillors saw themselves as representatives of the workers. Predictably, as the "foreigner" members dominated the councils, the Agbaja championed their clan distinctiveness. In 1938, they petitioned for separate meetings and to "... let Agbaja section get their own work separately."6 (sic)

The competing allegiances of clan and class crystallized in June, 1938 when the councils demanded the end to the interpreter system. The interpreters, like the "boss boys", were locals and allegedly equally corrupt. The councillors complained that they extorted bribes by threatening to influence European overseers to dismiss resisters. Interpreters lived in European residential areas, ostensibly to be accessible for translation. In at least one instance, this close relationship forged an alliance of convenience and some European overseers were accused of involvement in an extortion scheme.

In June, the underground Agbaja workers were forced to choose between their interpreter clansmen who seized their wages or the "foreigner" councillors who campaigned against their extortion. The incident provoked a crisis of consciousness which split the Agbaja underground workers. Their reaction
appears related to their residence. While village-based Agbaja supported the interpreters and asked for clan-segregated councils and worksites, those who lived in the labour camps opposed segregation. They suspected that those supporting separation "are planning another way of bribing themselves after the division is made."\(^7\)

The infinite possibilities of clan-based fragmentation were revealed when Ngwo, the Agbaja on whose land the mines were located, broke ranks and complained of underrepresentation in clerical posts.\(^8\)

The Representative Councils were disbanded in December, 1938 and a costly lesson in worker representation ended. Although weakened by ethnic conflict, workers still tried to use the councils to attack the persistent corruption and exploitation in the mines. Worker support for the councils was contingent upon their ability to produce results. The forms of protest, petitions and court cases, showed a manipulation of the legal institutions of the state. Despite its primordial appeal, clan cohesion was a fragile nexus of consciousness whose influence was conjunctural given the demands of the industry.

**Trade Unions and World War II: 1941-49**

The war brought major changes to Nigeria and the industry. Import shortages, inflation, restriction of press freedom and the right to strike occurred when Britain was more dependent than ever on her colonies. Colonial exports increased but peasant prices were restricted by expatriate collective buying agreements. This hardship occurred in the face of war propaganda which lauded the "contribution" of colonial peoples and their resources and emphasized the "democratic freedoms" that distinguished the Allies from their "totalitarian" enemies.

Confronted with widespread worker militance, Britain introduced trade unions throughout its Empire and emasculated them with special restrictions—compulsory registration, close monitoring of finances, frequent arrest and persecution of union leaders. Nonetheless in one year, 1939-40, the number of unions grew to 41, representing 17,000 workers.

Having introduced unions, the state attempted to reduce their effectiveness. In 1941, government passed the Nigerian Defence Regulations banning strikes in "essential services", a broad category that included the bulk of the working class, and outlining a cumbersome process of compulsory arbitration and conciliation.

The first colliery unions reflected the clan and occupational divisions in the industry. The Colliery Surface Improvement Union (CSIU) and the underground Colliery Workers' Union (CWU) were founded by the clerks, "boss boys" and former interpreters who were so embroiled in the Representative Councils' struggles. Underground workers were the most sceptical of the new organizations because their leadership was handpicked by the management. By 1942, only 300 had joined the CWU while the CSIU claimed 1900 workers.
The unions’ leaders virtually ignored the concerns of the workers and became engrossed in endless fratricidal struggles. But wartime strains forced them to collaborate in securing the industry’s first wartime bonus. A second increase, in 1943, followed cost-of-living agitation by the Lagos-based African Civil Servants and Technical Workers’ Union (ACTWU) (Ananaba, 1979:27-48).

In that year Britain’s Combined Production and Resource Board asked the colliery to increase output by some 250,000 tons to supply the railways of the Allies’ West African colonies. The mines first manager, William Leck, was replaced by a young Welsh engineer, Roy Bracegirdle, who increased the workforce to 7,300. By 1945, output reached a record 600,000 tons and Enugu coal was the staple energy source throughout West Africa.9

Disturbed by the intra-union conflicts, the Colonial Office sent a British trade unionist to educate the workers in “responsible”, i.e. non militant, trade unionism. The British Trades Union Congress (TUC) thus became partners with the state in controlling their colonial counterparts.

In July, the CWU submitted demands influenced by the conditions of European and American miners. They demanded an underground allowance, recently awarded to European supervisors and mentioned in a wireless report about American miners. They also re-issued the 1938 demands for annual increments and free boots. The strike collapsed because the unions had been weakened by internecine conflict.10

The period of effective union militance is associated with the emergence of a trade union leader and the escalation of nationalist agitation in Enugu. Okwudili Isiah Ojiyi was a “foreigner” in training for the junior technical staff. Unlike other trainees, he ignored promotions and used his knowledge of trade union laws to exploit the legal options offered by the state. As a “foreigner” aspiring to lead “local” underground workers, he avoided the tradition of clan-based politics and in so doing he offered a new pivot of consciousness, breaking with the devastating experience of the Representative Council era. His rise to prominence was watched suspiciously by the industry’s collaborators and the clan leaders who resented the growing stature of this “foreigner” among their workers.

In August, 1944 Ojiyi submitted a memorandum demanding a seven-hour working day, workmen’s compensation and an underground allowance. Reflecting the industrial health standards in the national labour codes, it claimed poor underground conditions caused rheumatism, consumption and respiratory diseases that plagued the underground workers. He further claimed that wages and conditions of surface workers had deteriorated under the new manager. When Bracegirdle rejected the demands, the colliery moved into a new phase of confrontation which lasted until 1949.11

The new phase of struggle occurred in the volatile political context of post-war radical nationalism. Despite its nominal commitment to unionization, the Labour Party Government was charged with reviving the devastated British economy. Thus, as custodian of the imperialist state, Labour tried to insulate
the new trade union movement from the radical tendencies in the decolonization movement. "Apolitical trade unionism" became the goal despite the obvious incongruity with the Labour Party's own history.

Against a background of increasing convergence of radical nationalism and trade union economism, naked state repression was coupled with inducements to create a "responsible" framework for neo-colonial transformation. The British TUC began training colonial unionists at Ruskin College, Oxford. Joint Consultative boards and Whitley Councils tried to ritualize and moderate industrial conflict. But the national trade union movement forged ahead in directions considered dangerous to the state. Massive state intervention was needed to remove militant leaders while the new apparatus of neo-colonial transformation took root. The occasion for far-reaching labour reform was presented by events at the colliery.

From 1945 to 1949 the union was involved in a wave of consecutive trade disputes. In 1945, then the union again raised the 1943 Memorandum, the manager seized the opportunity to rescind the daily wage. He proposed that the workers be paid group rates based on the total output of 30 hewers and 30 tubmen. The proposal, subsequently endorsed in binding arbitration as the Long Award, was immediately recognised as a scheme to enforce productivity and as such was a major reversal for the workers. When the manager made continued employment contingent on the workers' agreeing to the new system, the entire work force refused and was dismissed. The manager then revoked recognition of the CWU, arguing that it had failed to convince the workers to comply with the award.

When management began hiring replacements, the miners blocked them at the recruitment sites. New workers were then recruited in the "foreigner" area of Owerri, but they similarly rejected the pay system. The manager was then forced to revert to individual payment for work performed in the syndicates. With individual payment restored many old workers petitioned for reappointment and it appeared that management had won. But the old miners simply moved the struggle into the workplace and successfully propagandized among the new recruits. By the end of 1945, the colliery's output had dropped from 151,000 tons to 16,500 tons.

With the union's loss of recognition, management sought alternative means of worker representation, but none received the support of the workers. Ojiyi continued to act as legitimate union leader. He petitioned the Chief Secretary, Southern Provinces and the Governor about the workers' demands and complained of union victimization. De facto recognition was granted in April 1946 when the Harragin Commission, which deliberated on the condition of established government staff, summoned Ojiyi to present the colliery workers' case. In 1947 a second commission, the Miller Commission on unestablished staff, similarly recognized the union. When the Miller Award, a national wage increase, was granted, the colliery manager was charged to adapt its findings to the wage scale at the mines. Without consultation the
manager announced a pay scale which ignored all previous increases, consequently lowering the workers' award.

In November, 1947 the CWU circumvented the Defence Regulations by starting a "go slow". Management failed in its attempts to use clan councillors and urban improvement unions against the union. Ojiyi accompanied the industrial action with appeals to the nationalist press (Akpala, 1965:355). When the manager began dismissing workers, the Chief Commissioner intervened and despatched a labour advisor to be conciliator and he awarded 100,000 pounds in back wages. While most workers benefited, a number of issues remained unresolved. "Rostering" and union victimization remained and became the seeds of the next phase of industrial conflict.

The award, however, was a mixed blessing. In the midst of the negotiations a British trade unionist, Robert Curry, reorganized the CWU to be a "responsible" union. Curry's real purpose was to isolate Ojiyi from the rank and file. He replaced the union's unitary structure with occupational branches for surface workers, clerks, hewers, etc. This created a new bureaucratic strata between Ojiyi and the workers. This decentralization was even more effective for Curry's purposes because it resembled the organizational models of urban-based Igbo village improvement unions which emerged in Enugu in the 1930s (Akpala, 1965:356-357).

In the view of the miners, Curry had replaced the CWU with several autonomous unions whose officials were of equal standing with the CWU executive. The structure thereby institutionalized the centrifugal forces already working in the union and increased the leverage of the small anti-Ojiyi clique.

In a second respect the award created problems. Ojiyi and his executive collected over 2,000 pounds in a levy and kept no records of dispersal of the funds. For the dissidents, left out of the levy, the incident led to intensified anti-Ojiyi activities as they joined with management and clan leaders' to attack the CWU.14

As the colliery entered 1949, the imbroglio had reached new heights. In a second conciliation in December, 1948 the union's recognition had been restored. By the spring of 1949, union and management were involved in Joint Consultative Committees and Whitley Councils. But the industrial environment reduced their effectiveness. Rumours, apparently circulated by dissidents, claimed government owed an additional 180,000 pounds for illegal use of "rostering" after June 1, 1946.15 Further, Ojiyi's credibility was questioned as he was seen attending frequent conciliation meetings with management. The manager manoeuvered the union into promoting "rostering" claiming that without it railway bottlenecks would force him to close the mines. To regain credibility, Ojiyi introduced new demands.

In June, when the hewers began a "go slow" the state had already assumed a confrontational posture. In September, when additional seniority pay was granted to all but the hewers, they were in virtual revolt against the CWU. Thus, in November when the CWU failed to get seniority pay for the hewers, the hewers' executive, acting independently began a "go slow".
The 1949 Enugu Shooting Incident

On November 8th the CWU met with the African members of the new Enugu Coal Board, which had been established to distance government from the problematic management of the colliery. However, the crisis escalated rapidly when the manager began dismissing miners. Recruitment of "scabs" and continued dismissals convinced the miners that a "lockout" was imminent. On the 14th the hewers began a sit-in, fearing that management would replace them. Government, in a confrontationist mood, decided that the sit-in jeopardized public safety because the strikers had access to mine explosives. On November 16th the decision was made to send armed northern Nigerian police to remove the explosives. Offers to mediate by the Ngwo clan councillors and H. L. Honey, Senior Labour Officer, were rejected. The result was the killing of 21 unarmed miners who gathered to watch the evacuation of the explosives from the Iva Valley mine site (Brown, 1985a:299-306; Akpala, 1965; Fitzgerald Commission, 1950).

The political reverberations were immediate. From November 18th through the 26th riots occurred in the major urban centres of southeastern Nigeria. The participants were market women, casual labour, small traders and the urban unemployed, the "unruly urban mob" most feared by the colonial government. The targets of the lootings were expatriate firms, indicating broader causes than revulsion to the massacre.

While the urban poor responded, the nationalists formed the National Emergency Committee, which briefly coordinated the disparate branches of the independence movement (Sklar, 1963:77-80; Brown, 1985a:308-311). Although the shooting became a catalyst for the growing appeal of the nationalist program, the seeds of regional/ethnic fragmentation proved too strong to sustain the unity.

Within a week a commission was appointed composed of two British and two African judges. Despite demands by socialist and communist MP's no trade unionists were selected. The hearings convened on December 12th in Enugu amidst a "state of emergency". Gradually the nationalist figures eclipsed the miners and turned the hearings into a platform for their program. But the miners continued the "go slow" in the face of police intimidation and the virtual collapse of the CWU. The union dissidents, totally exonerated from responsibility in the crisis, continued their attack on Ojiyi. At the hearings they made submissions through their lawyer, Charles Onyeama, son of the Agbaja chief who became wealthy as a colliery recruiter.

The commission's report was a far-reaching critique of the pace of Nigerian decolonization and the government's trade union policy. However, it levelled its most scathing denunciations at the national trade union movement and its leaders. It held Ojiyi personally responsible for the crisis. Bracegirdle, who was flown from Enugu immediately after the shooting, was also criticized for "serious errors of judgement" (Fitzgerald, 1950: 14-36). The Nigerian government was criticized for confusing a purely industrial dispute with a political confrontation.
The complete story of the shooting remains to be told. Most published accounts rely exclusively on the Fitzgerald Commission Report. A valuable but less available source are the commission's proceedings. The hundreds of documents submitted to the commission remain classified in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office despite the expiration of the 30-year moratorium. Until their release, oral testimony is the only alternative to the official version of the event. Thus the investigation into this important phase of West African working class and political history remains incomplete.

Conclusion

This history of the Enugu Colliery working class has been conceptualized within the framework of the dialectic of labour control and labour resistance. We have traced the formation of the working class and its relationship to the state; the forms, causes and expressions of consciousness; the functions, character and forms of ethnicity and the nature of the contradictions between strata in the workforce. While rejecting notions of "proletarian romanticism" it draws on Marxist methodology to identify the dominant and emerging processes that inform workers' awareness at various stages of their history.

During the thirty-five years of the study, colliery workers reacted to strategies of labour control emanating from a broad number of sources. In the early years, 1914-1920, they were simultaneously subjected to several modes of labour appropriation. At the top of the hierarchy of labour control was the colonial state which initially demanded forced labour which it ideologically justified as a means of releasing labour from the institution of slavery. Later, as custodian of the mines and centre of political authority, the state fashioned a coherent but essentially reactive labour policy.

Against the numerous processes of labour control were the collective and individual actions of workers whose resistance shifted from a rejection of the new capitalist relations to habituation and a skilful manipulation of the contradictions in the colonial political economy.

This paper has presented the perspective of the colliery working class and explored the conditions under which it resisted. Labour control and resistance took pre-capitalist and colonial capitalist forms. The Ohu revolt, in 1923, demonstrated that while the capitalist industry could co-opt the old slave system it did so at the cost of destabilizing the social conventions that bound chiefs, freeborn and slaves. For the Ohu, the experience of "free" wage labour fostered a consciousness which led them to expect payment for their labour.

In its role of controlling labour, the colonial state found it difficult to conceal its relationship with expatriate capital, and, even more problematic, to function as impartial mediator between labour and capital. The daily involvement of its functionaries alerted workers to the political significance of labour control and permitted them to manipulate its contradictions.

By 1947, the government assumed a coalition between militant trade unionism and radical nationalism which threatened the smooth neo-colonial
transformation of Nigeria. Thus, state policy aimed to separate "political" from "economic" issues in order to drive a wedge into this dangerous alliance. However, the unreality of this distinction was manifested in the state's evaluation of the November 1949 hewers' sit-in as a "political" and not "industrial" action.

The gradual evolution of imperial labour policy was apparent at the mines where its reactive character was exposed. Far from being an expression of enlightened paternalism, the policy clearly attempted to thwart the development of consciousness among colonial workers. At the same time, the workers' response to the labour control mechanisms insured that the policy was only moderately successful in containing worker militance.

The Sources of Consciousness, Militance and Solidarity

Within the first six years, a tradition of collective resistance had taken root. Through their collective actions and the state's constant interventions, the workers perceived the hierarchy of power within the colonial system and their centrality in the colonial economy. Consequently, they frequently took their protests and demands directly to the apex of the colonial state.

The evolution of consciousness was a complex process. Despite severe clan divisions, the harsh working conditions and low pay shaped a collective class consciousness. Worker solidarity and collective action often led to concrete gains while clan-based action made the workers vulnerable to manipulation.

Part of the collective experience was shaped by residence in labour camps and in Enugu. The earliest camps, while veritable slums, reduced clan control and gave workers their first experience of living with non-kinsmen. But the total impact of multi-clan residence was not definitive because the majority of the inhabitants were "foreigners".

By the post-war period, most workers exhibited a consciousness which transcended ethnicity and occupation. The colliery workers were a vanguard in the working class whose activities had a demonstration effect on wage levels in the regional private and public sectors.

The nature of the colliery workers' political consciousness and their impact on the nationalist struggle of the period are complex and difficult to evaluate. However, the task can be approached from two perspectives. First, through the confrontations with the management and the state, the workers developed an acute political awareness which may be described as occupational political consciousness. Second, and at the level of colony-wide nationalist politics, the workers failed to develop a project or radical political ideology. Their direct impact on the petit bourgeois nationalist leadership or the broader nationalist movement is ambiguous and requires further exploration. But in spite of the limitation of the workers' political consciousness at the occupational level, it is significant that the industrial action and massacre of November, 1949 became the pivot of one of the major nationalist agitations of the late colonial period. The state's drastic response to the crisis highlights
it sensitivity to the political implications of the workers' protests which had the potential to escalate to large-scale anti-colonial insurgency.

Finally, this study points to the necessity to examine the formation of the African working class under the specific conditions of the ambiguous colonial capitalist political economy. It has elucidated the complex processes of the emergence, forms and expressions of worker consciousness but more remains to be done.

NOTES

1 The village group or "town" is a cluster of villages each inhabited by extended families. Residents of several related towns form a clan. Before colonial rule no central political structure or person united the clan.

2 National Archives, Enugu (NAE), ONDIST 12/1/1562, Executive Udi to Resident Onitsha, 24 February 1920; Nigerian Railways and Udi Coal Mines (NRUAR), Annual Report for 1919.

3 Interview with James Ogbodo, Obuofia, Udi, 2 June 1975.

4 Public Records Office (PRO), CO 583/26, Bourdillion to Ormsby-Gore, 3 April 1937.

5 NAE, NIGCOAL 2/2/94, Croasdale to Secretary, Southern Provinces, 9 August 1938.

6 NAE, NIGCOAL 2/1/98, Joseph E. Ekowa et al. to Colliery Manager, n.d. (1938?)

7 Ibid., Agbaja People to Colliery Manager, n.d. (1938).

8 Ibid., Ngwo Town to Manager, Enugu, 10 June 1938.

9 NAE, NIGCOAL 2/1/175, "Abnormal Increase in Coal Output".

10 CO 583/261, OAG to Colonial Secretary, 30 November 1943.

11 Nigerian Coal Corporation Personnel Files, P. 2/1/1, Ojiyi to Manager, 16 August 1944.

12 The Harragin Commission made proposals to reduce the disparity between European and African established staff in all Britain's West African colonies (Ananaba, 1969:66).

13 The Miller Commission on unestablished staff consolidated COLA and other increments into a single pay rate. Because it began regionally-based wage scales it made it difficult for unions to organize on a national level (Cohen, 1974:189).

14 David Smock Papers, Interview with H. J. Honey, Macclesfield, Cheshire, England, 7 December 1961. Because Honey was not biased against Ojiyi he was gradually marginalized during the discussions.

15 The demand for additional back pay came from interpretation of Sections 31 and 36 of the Trade Union Ordinance, effective June 1, 1946. It prohibited "rostering" and penalized employers using it by requiring that all workers be given seven days notice before their contract was terminated or they must be paid the amount they would otherwise earn.

16 The British members were the chairperson, W. J. Fitzgerald, a former colonial officer and P. W. Williams, an MP and legal adviser to the National Union of Mineworkers. The two African members were S. O. Quashie-Idam of the Gold Coast and N. A. Ademola of Nigeria (London Times, 28 November 1949).


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