

RÉSUMÉ

Stratégies des travailleurs miniers au Zimbabwe : Migrations et semi-prolétarisation revisitées

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Cet article résulte d'une récente étude menée au Zimbabwe qui a mis en lumière un modèle continu de migration parmi les travailleurs miniers et leurs familles qui, même quand ils sont employés sur une base permanente et/ou qu'ils ont grandi dans le village minier, conservent des liens avec les zones rurales. L'étude a aussi trouvé d'autres éléments d'une dynamique historique qui font parti intégrante du travail migrant. Il s'agit d'un système d'organisation du travail basé sur des bas salaires, de bas niveaux de compétences et une production intensive du travail organisée autour d'un niveau de capitalisation peu élevé. Ceux-ci étaient relativement surprenants étant donné les lois contraignantes du travail forcé de chibaro, le travail contractuel temporaire, ainsi que les nombreux facteurs qui devaient augmenter les salaires et les niveaux de compétence. Le plus surprenant vient du fait que ce modèle s'est retrouvé également dans les mines engagées dans un processus d'introduction de nouvelles technologies et de compétences multiples, des techniques habituellement réservées pour la production intensive capitaliste qui requière un haut niveau de compétence et des employés bien payés. Est-ce que ces migrations persistantes sont une fonction de semi-prolétarisation continue ou est-ce que la capacité de travailler de façon permanente signifie qu'il est temps de revoir la notion de semi-prolétarisation?

Mineworkers' Strategies in Zimbabwe: Re-visiting Migration and Semi-proletarianization¹

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Introduction

This article is an attempt to make sense of the conclusions of a recent study in Zimbabwe that found ongoing patterns of migration among mineworkers and their families who, even when employed on a permanent basis and brought up in the mine village, retain links with the rural areas. We also found other elements that had been integral to the migrant labour system in the past, that is the use of a labour utilization system based on low wages and skill levels, and labour intensive production organized around low levels of capitalization. These were somewhat surprising given the end to legal constraints of *chibaro*'s forced labour and the temporary work contract, as well as the elimination of influx control after independence in 1980, which allowed for permanent employment and urbanization, and made it possible for workers and their families to live in urban areas, including mine villages, all of which should have driven wage and skill levels up. Most surprising of all, this pattern was also found in mines engaged in introducing multi-skilling and new technology, tech-

¹ The study was made possible with the financial support of Saint Mary's University Faculty of Graduate Studies and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and with the support of the Institute of Development Studies and the Institute of Mining Research, both at the University of Zimbabwe. The study would not have been possible without the able assistance and expertise of Edmund Chifamba.

niques usually reserved for capital intensive production requiring highly skilled and paid workers. Is this persistent migration a function of ongoing semi-proletarianization or does the capacity to work permanently mean that it is time to take another look at the notion of semi-proletarianization?

The notion of semi-proletarianization is one of the central paradigms explaining the nature of the African working class. This labour form is the result of ambiguous colonial labour policies and capital's changing needs that wavered between wanting a stable or fluid labour force and maintaining the peasant sector (Cohen, Gutkind and Brazier), requiring that workers move between the capitalist mode of production and the non-capitalist subsistence sector (Hyden; Cooper) and thereby establishing a pattern that combines semi-proletarianization, migrant labour and non-permanent urbanization. Recent literature continues to link semi-proletarianization with ongoing patterns of migration. Urban workers in Zimbabwe continue to engage in a form of circular migration (Potts and Mutambirwa), especially the most poorly paid (Mazur and Mhloyi; Grant), Zambian miners return to the rural areas after retirement and are thus "differentially proletarianized" (Ferguson) while South African miners still migrate to and from the peasant sectors in Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland (Wilson; Stichter; Moodie; Harries; Crush, Jeeves and Yudelma; Crush and James). These authors conclude that there is a Southern African pattern of semi-proletarianization, characterized by labour mobility and dependence on complex family strategies incorporating both rural and urban strategies.

Colonial state coercion and forced labour systems compelled workers to migrate from subsistence, non-capitalized agriculture where livelihoods were unsatisfactory but attainable, to travel to mines and commercial farms, organized around labour-intensive production, to work in low skill and poorly paid jobs on temporary contracts (Stichter). Workers were not fully proletarianized as they relied on activities in both sectors for different aspects of production and reproduction (Cohen). Labour was characterized as a "worker-peasantry", reflecting this dichotomous reality, resulting from split families with ties to the rural areas for the reproduction of labour power, then made available cheaply for capitalist production (Bush and Cliffe). Subsistence production then became a hidden subsidy to industry by supporting the reproduction cost

and maintenance of workers during periods of non-employment (Potts and Mutambirwa). It was expected to wither away as the end of colonialism and apartheid resulted in the removal of state coercion and influx controls and the introduction of stabilization policies and permanent employment. Workers would then be able to adopt a “normal” pattern of capitalist development, accompanied by the emergence of a fully fledged proletarian class, in which proletarianized work-seekers migrate more or less permanently to slums on the fringes of industrial areas (Stichter). This requires that workers choose between an urban or a rural strategy and losing access to land (Potts and Mutambirwa; Bush and Cliff). In other words, a complete bifurcation between urban and rural and a permanent urbanization were needed in order to be recognized as being fully proletarianized.

Ferguson nuances this “either or” choice in his study of Zambian Copperbelt workers, recognizing that workers use a complex set of livelihood strategies to bring together a shifting mix of trajectories and strategies, drawing on both urban and rural resources to become “differently proletarianized”, a form of proletarianization unique to each situation, with its own characteristics and dynamic. O’Laughlin argues that this fails to consider the structural processes of proletarianisation and differentiation driven by the accumulation of capital, and thus fails to understand the proletarian nature of the group and its strategies. Thus the characterization of groups moving between, but remaining marginal to the two sectors, as “semi-peasants and semi-proletarians” (Isaac) is rejected by Tomlinson who questions how far this concept can go in capturing the complex reality of workers in mines and plantations. He argues instead that they should be seen as both peasants and proletarians, and farming families as both proletarians and peasants, in other words retaining the full character of each rather than as a unique analytical category that in the end explains very little. To fully understand this complex reality requires looking at the nature of the labour process within the agrarian economy itself, in the case of peasants, in order to understand the extent to which peasants now make use of proletarian strategies. The same insight is even more relevant for the analysis of permanently employed mineworkers, requiring that we focus instead on the labour process in which they work to determine if

they are using proletarian strategies and may in fact be fully proletarianized in spite of the need to retain some ties to rural areas.

This means shifting the study away from assessing the nature of proletarianization in Africa only as a function of worker migration and their links to the rural areas. Such a focus looks only at the relationship between production and the reproduction of labour; in other words, it looks at proletarian forms as a function of the work done within the household in order to satisfy the needs of household reproduction (Isaac). It is necessary instead to shift the study to an analysis of workers within the workplace by looking at the use they make of proletarian strategies in response to labour exploitation, shaped by a labour process in which they confront employers' efforts to control that process through their resistance strategies in which they make use of their skills and labour organization to win the best returns on the sale of their labour power. Determining the nature of proletarianization by looking at their strategies in relation to the labour process might well reveal that proletarian strategies shape the nature of rural strategies, as fully proletarianized workers subordinate rural strategies to the need to sell their labour power and get the best possible return for it.

This article will assess the proletarian nature of Zimbabwean mineworkers not as a function of their ongoing migration but within the context of the labour process by looking at their reliance on proletarian strategies and how their ongoing links to the rural areas fit into this. By demonstrating the extent to which workers have become fully proletarianized, we will understand persistent migration not as a function of workers' semi-proletarianization, but as part of a safety net created by fully proletarianized workers in response to problems they face at work. The inability to improve their working and living conditions at the workplace because of the historical subordination of labour in the face of the colonial state and capital domination has resulted in workers' use of a complex set of proletarian and rural strategies which has changed over time as they have become increasingly proletarianized in response to the changing organization of production and the legal framework in which capital-labour relations take place.

What we might be seeing is, faced with the inability to change the organization of production, fully proletarianized workers

maintain links with rural subsistence production as a way of providing security and support outside of wage employment, made necessary by an organization of production that continues to rely on low skill and wage levels, and temporary accommodation, as well as the absence of adequate mine-based pension programs and government-based social programs. The absence of a social wage in Zimbabwe and other parts of Africa, combined with the inability of earning adequate wages while employed, requires that workers engage in strategies that will create a safety net outside the workplace, just as fully proletarianized workers have done in industrialized countries.

To do this we will look at the strategies undertaken by Zimbabwean mineworkers and the way they are shaped by the current organization of production in mining, and the way in which they also make use of rural-based strategies. We will draw on data collected in a study of mineworkers and their spouses undertaken in 2000 and 2001, in six mines in different parts of Zimbabwe, mining a variety of minerals. Data was collected through the means of focus groups, individual and group interviews with workers and spouses, as well as the administration of a brief survey questionnaire to 87 workers, and another to 98 women, spouses of mineworkers, made up of a series of closed and semi-open questions. Neither of these surveys are statistically significant but give us a snapshot of workers' response, and spouses responses, to a series of issues which when analyzed in conjunction with the focus group and other interviews provide a more complete picture of workers and family strategies. These different activities brought us into contact with 195 workers and 25 worker representatives, including trade union national executive members, as well as with 172 women living at the six mine sites. In addition, extensive interviews were undertaken with different members of staff and management at each of the mines so that we were able to put together a picture of mining's organization of production during that period as well as the basic living and working conditions of mineworkers and their families. This article presents only a small part of the data collected during these fieldwork periods, especially as it concentrates primarily on worker strategies, leaving the broader set of household strategies to another paper. Another aspects which will not be discussed in this paper but which is also important are changes occurring in the

rural areas that also have an impact on the necessity of maintaining urban employment and the quality of links workers are able to maintain with the rural areas.

Mining Workforce

Organization of Production

The mining industry in Zimbabwe is dominated by some of the world's largest mining giants – Rio Tinto, Lonhro, Anglo-American, and other South African interests – mining a variety of metals including gold, coal, and more recently platinum, along with several base metals and industrial minerals. Gold is also mined by the government-owned Mining Development Corporation and numerous smallworkers and artisanal miners panning for gold on riverbanks, whose activities fluctuate according to the price of gold. The industry has been, alongside agriculture, a principle contributor to the country's development, yet during the current economic crisis, its contribution to export earnings has fallen from 19% to 17% in 2002, while its contribution to total non-government employment fell from 5.5% to 4.3% in 2001, as the number of mineworkers fell from a high of about 61,000 in 1998 to 41,000 (IMF: 101, 121).² While the overall GDP is estimated to have fallen during 2002 by 12.8% (IMF: 5), mining production is also estimated to have fallen by 7%.³ The Chamber of Mines describes the sector as sluggish, suffering from many of the same woes as the economy as a whole as it attempts to keep up with a 350% inflation rate, at the time, and shortages of goods, including electricity. It claims to be suffering from a decline in production, limited investment, erosion of production capacity and non-existent exploration.⁴ Yet companies can now access a portion of their sales in foreign currency while paying labour costs in local currency and in spite of these difficulties, three important new

² These two figures on the level of employment represent the two extremes in employment levels as the figures fluctuated between the two throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The highest was 68,000 in 1981 when gold prices were at an all-time high. The current number of 41,000 is the lowest since independence. The numbers are estimated to have fallen further since then.

³ Chamber of Mines of Zimbabwe, *October Report*, Harare, 21 October 2002. Online: www.chamines.co.zw/newsletter.htm.

⁴ *Financial Gazette*, 17 July 2003.

projects were announced in 2003: one in platinum, one in diamonds and one involving the expansion of coal output.⁵

Production is organized in medium-sized mines and quarries that remain labour intensive, using many elements that remain from the migrant labour system, yet employment at the mine is now permanent. In focus groups, interviews and from the workers' survey, workers indicate being hired on a permanent basis and in fact show little mobility between mines, staying in one place for their entire working career. From the survey, the average length of employment is 10.63 years with many workers being at the same place for decades. A retirement monitoring document from one of the mines, listing those preparing for retirement in 2001, and their starting date, indicates that many workers, in all skill levels, were now retiring after being hired in the late 1960s, and during the 1970s. Workers in the focus groups also said they would only leave this job if they found a better one.

Like Canadian mines, the only temporary workers encountered at the mines were those doing specialized development work, but they were permanent employees of contract companies, hired to do specialized, short term development projects. Among those surveyed or interviewed, it was a rare occurrence to meet someone who had worked at another mine – only 9 surveyed (or 10 per cent) had worked at another mine prior to their current employment, and then only at one mine. Workers in the professional and skilled categories can be more mobile because of their degrees and trade certificates, resulting in a different labour market for these two senior groups as they move in search of higher wages and better working conditions.

Production is organized around a highly stratified workforce, divided according to the Patterson grading scheme, used throughout the Southern African industry in which shift-paid workers are divided into several categories based on a hierarchy of responsibility and skill levels. Many now use the National Employment Council's (NEC) modified scheme based on 13 categories of skill and responsibility levels of shift paid workers, with the lowest being grade 1, a general labour or hand lasher who along with grades 2 and 3, the assistant operators, makes up the unskilled cat-

⁵ *Business Tribune*, (Harare) 24-30 July 2003 and 31 July – 6 August 2003. Online: www.tribune.co.zw.

egories. Semi-skilled workers are in groups 4 to 8 which include the operators doing drilling, charging and blasting – the key mining jobs and the senior operators and senior gang leaders. The skilled grades range from category 9 to 13 and include the assistant overseer miner, the overseer miner and the shift boss, grade 13, as well as those in designated trades. Shift paid workers fall under the national collective bargaining agreement negotiated between the Chamber of Mines and the Associated Mineworkers of Zimbabwe (AMWZ) through the NEC. Management levels above grade 13 are the Mine Captains and Mine Managers, as well as the executive levels based at group head offices in Harare.⁶

Under colonialism, the nationally legislated job colour bar prevented African workers from going beyond the semi-skilled ranks but the real distinction was between the “junior” workers (grades 1-10) and the “senior” ones (grades 11-13). In spite of the unionization of grades 11 to 13, distinctions tend to remain to this day as to wages, education, housing, access to services and mine village amenities, along the dividing line between juniors and seniors with grades 11 to 13 receiving many of the same benefits as management, due in large part to the different labour market in which their licenses, certificates and degrees put them. This distinction is reminiscent of the old job colour bar but since independence, the combination of greater access to education, reaching all the way up the university level, as well as the skills training and skills testing that took place in the first few years of independence, has resulted in an Africanization of even the most senior management positions. All mines visited had African staff in senior management positions, while at some, the mine manager was also African. Most skilled workers, and all workers in semi- and unskilled categories were Africans.

Recruitment, Education and Training

Recruitment into mining employment varies by skill levels and, like other sectors in Zimbabwe, it is heavily degree-driven. Professional and skilled categories, the seniors, require, licenses,

⁶ At the time of the fieldwork, the AMWZ was the only union accredited to negotiate on behalf of mineworkers and it had rejoined the Zimbabwe Confederation of Trade Unions (ZCTU). Shortly thereafter, the Zimbabwe Federation of Trade Unions (ZFTU), opposing both the AMWZ and the ZCTU, began organising in some of the

Table 1 <i>Education and Age</i>			
Age breakdown	20-29y	30-39y	40+y
(% of all workers surveyed)	35	36	27
Education levels per age group (%)			
with "O" levels	87	66	17
without "O" levels	3	31	79
Higher than "O" levels	10	3	4
Education levels	With "O"	Without "O"	"O" +
(% of all workers surveyed)	59	34	5.7

degrees or certificates in specific mining related skills and the designated trades, and upward mobility is limited for those without certification. Several human resources managers noted that many of the new recruits into the unskilled and semi-skilled shift categories, the juniors, are starting with several "O" levels because of high national unemployment rates among school leavers. In spite of this availability, human resources managers indicated that they tend to hire from within the mine village, especially sons of their employees as it reduces tension in the mine village where a large number of unemployed youth, either living in the mine village or from surrounding areas, wait in hopes of finding employment. Thus while the general level of education is higher among younger workers (87% of those in their twenties have "O" levels) than older ones (79% have less than "O" levels), there are still many workers with low levels of education (34% of total number of workers surveyed do not have "O" levels) and once working, it is difficult to obtain more education and certification because of constraints of time, costs and proximity to educational facilities. Many workers, especially younger ones (61% of those in their twenties, and 34% of those in their thirties, but only 8% of those in their forties or above) expressed an interest in getting more education and training so that they could do something other than mining.

mines by signing up individual members which Zimbabwe labour laws permit. They have recently become recognized by the Ministry of Labour to bargain on behalf of those members that have been signed up.

Without a trade or specific mining degrees in geology, mining engineering, mining related diplomas from the School of Mines, or designated trades, new recruits enter into the lowest category, grade 1, working as a hand lasher with the intention of working their way up the job grades by obtaining on-the-job training to gain mine-based skills. But this training depends on management's decision to budget and carry out on-the-job training, and then to send the worker to get government testing for this training. Moving from the unskilled job categories 1-3, to the semi-skilled job categories 4-8 requires company based-training in machine operation and blasting safety and techniques, as well as government testing for the blasting licence, a test obtained only with company sponsorship. The most difficult barrier to cross, the one from junior to senior worker, into grade 11, requires the full blasting licence and certification obtained from the School of Mines. The full blasting licence requires not only several years of experience, significant company based-training but also government testing, done in English. Many workers noted this test was difficult to get through because of the English requirement.

Most significantly though, the mine limits access to training because of budget considerations, so that in some mines, only minimal training is undertaken so as to make sure the appropriate skill sets are available when needed. HIV/AIDS has played havoc with this requiring companies do more training, but creating, as one human resources managers told us, a sense of futility as their training "investment" was being wasted. The one exception is the two week induction training in basic underground safety received by all workers when they begin.

Skill Mix

If the worker succeeds in obtaining training, he will only be promoted to a higher job category if the mine has created a vacancy at the higher level. Thus, the ratio of unskilled, to semi-skilled, to skilled is decided by the company. In other words, it is a company decision to keep a mine operating at a more unskilled level and most have decided to maintain a generally low level of skills as evidenced by the skill mix we found in the 6 mines studied, which remained relatively consistent in spite of the different ores produced and differences in the organization of production.

Table 2 Skill Mix (percentage of total workforce at each of the 6 mines)				
A) Mines using traditional methods				
Skills levels	Mine 1	Mine 2	Mine 3	Mine 4
Grade 1-3	40.0	31.0	40.5	45.7
Grade 4-8	49.0	45.0	48.7	44.1
Grade 9-13	9.7	9.7	9.3	8.3
Management (& profess.)	1.3	1.6	1.3	1.8
B) Mines using multi-skilling and new technology				
Skills levels	Mine 5	Mine 6		
Grade 1-3	12.6	31.0		
Grade 4-8	64.9	42.5		
Grade 9-13	16.9	26.0	(includes professionals	
Management (& profess.)	5.5		and management)	

All the mines in our study continued to operate with a large proportion of workers classified in the combined un- and semi-skilled categories. The proportion of these categories as a share of the employees at each mine ranged from the lowest at 73 per cent to the highest at 89 per cent.⁷ All human resources managers and training personnel at the mines, even in the two mines in the process of introducing some new technology and multi-skilling, told us theirs was a labour intensive mine and there was little incentive to go much further in changing that, given current economic conditions. The two mines with some new technology and multi-skilling had improved their skill mix, decreasing the unskilled categories, increasing the semi-skilled categories, and increasing the skilled categories, yet the shift was not dramatic as their combined unskilled and semi-skilled still made up 77 and 73 per cent of their respective workforces⁸, prompting management to continue describing their mines as labour intensive. The per-

⁷ It is interesting to contrast these figures with two national studies. In 1981, the combined national total of unskilled and semi-skilled was 84 per cent and in 1993 88 per cent. (Government of Zimbabwe. Ministry of Labour; Dansereau).

⁸ These calculations were based on figures provided by each mine giving the complete skill distribution of the total mine workforce for each of the six mines in the study.

centage of these same categories in the four remaining mines without multi-skilling was between 76 per cent and 89 per cent.

The continued high percentage of un- and semi-skilled workers in the two mines with new technology is a result of only a partial modernization of their production. They had eliminated most of the hand lashing underground, an important step on the road to mechanization, and as a result were able to eliminate many of the grade 1 tasks, so that the remaining tasks of the grade 1 and 2s were multi-skilled into grade 3. They moved workers up the job scale and new workers entered immediately into grade 3. Most of the ore is moved underground through the introduction of the mechanized scoop tram or load-haul dumper, and their drivers were classified as skilled worker, grade 9.

Thus while the unskilled and semi-skilled workers continue to make up the vast majority of mineworkers, even in those mines undergoing some technological change, the demarcation between junior and senior workers is underlined by the difficulty junior workers have in moving into the senior category, constrained by the need for degrees, licenses or diplomas. But it is also constrained by the companies' unwillingness to move away from labour intensive production. Promotions are limited into the skilled categories, even grade 9. The five new scoop tram operators in the two multi-skilled mines moved only into grade 9, and few workers with a mine blasting licence are in fact able to move into category 9, the assistant overseer miner. Frustration with this lack of upward mobility was the most commonly referred to dissatisfaction voiced by unskilled and semi-skilled workers in all of the focus groups, and was repeated at each of the mines, even in mines with multi-skilling. Further complaints were heard about the greater degree of fatigue in the mines with multi-skilling as the telescoping of job categories resulted in a greater intensity of work, in an already physically demanding job that is usually accomplished without a food or tea break, for a shift of at least eight hours, 26 shifts a month, with a normal working week of 48 hours.

Wages

The most important distinction between juniors and seniors is the wage differential. At the time of the study, a worker had to have reached category 12 – a skilled category earning Z\$6757 a

month⁹ before reaching the Poverty Datum Line, calculated at Z\$6327 in December 1999.¹⁰ The country's economic problems, reaching crisis proportion after 2000, meant that constant inflation devalued real wages so that hard fought wage increases only allowed workers to catch up temporarily with increases in the cost of living. By 2002, the Consumer Council of Zimbabwe estimated that a family of four or six now required a minimum of Z\$32,000 a month for a basket of food items to meet the food poverty line.¹¹ The new collective agreement signed for July 1, 2002 indicates that a worker would have to be above a grade 10, a senior worker, to reach that amount as the gross minimum wage was only Z\$31,025 a month.¹² Mineworkers were not unique as the Business Tribune reported that about 80 per cent of the employed workforce in the country earns a net income of less than Z\$20,000 a month.¹³

The situation for skilled senior workers was significantly better. Negotiated minimums on the NEC scale were between Z\$36,346 for grade 11 and Z\$42,025 for those in grade 13; thus a grade 13 earned 2.3 times higher than a grade 1 worker.¹⁴ Yet the most significant difference between the juniors and seniors comes from the comparatively larger differential in actual wages paid to senior worker. Actual wages are those actually paid by some mines and are higher than the minimums negotiated through the NEC. These are not subject to negotiation and as a result they vary from one mine to another, with large mines suspecting of paying

⁹ Government of Zimbabwe, *Collective Bargaining Agreement: Mining Industry*, Statutory Instrument 292 of 1999, Harare Government Printer, 27 August 1999.

¹⁰ Poverty Datum Line published in the UNDP & Poverty Reduction Forum, *Human Development Report 1999 Supplement*, Harare, 2000, p. 7. The official exchange rate at the time was Z\$55 = US\$1, but high inflation rates and the presence of a parallel currency market make such equations of little value which is why we are attempting to give a sense of value by linking wages to the poverty datum line.

¹¹ *Business Tribune*, 19-25 September 2002. Online www.btribune.co.zw/Se19_Se25/local/001.htm, 31 July 2003.

¹² National Employment Council for the Mining Industry, *Rates of Pay as of July 1 2002 to 31 December 2002*, Harare, Circular to Mines, NEC 5083, 12 July 2002. That same circular indicated that grade 1 workers earned only \$18,119.75 in the same time period.

¹³ *Business Tribune*, September 2002.

¹⁴ National Employment Council for the Mining Industry, *Rates of Pay as of July 1 2002 to 31 December 2002*, Harare, Circular to Mines, NEC 5083, 12 July 2002.

more than smaller mines, with increases fluctuating from year to year according to the financial health of the mine in question. Most importantly though they fluctuate according to the workers' categories. A 1993 national survey of the industry showed that actuals for unskilled workers were only 12 per cent higher than the negotiated minimums, while skilled workers earned 7.44 times more. (Dansereau). A Chamber of Mines survey in 1998 found that while 56.9 per cent of workers in grade 1 earned the minimum, only 1.3 per cent of workers in grade 13 earned the minimum.¹⁵ This further underlines the distinction between "junior" and "senior" workers and reflects the very different labour market between the two groups, and while human resources managers we met in 2000 and 2001 quite openly gave us the actuals for unskilled and skilled workers, many were reluctant to divulge the rate for skilled workers. One mine representative did give us their actuals, in 2001, for their senior group and, as expected, the differences were large, as the highest graded unionized worker was paid 5.85 times higher than the lowest graded worker.

Housing

Another important distinction between juniors and seniors is access and quality of housing as access to mine housing varies according to skill levels as junior workers are housed in a high density mine village with varied quality housing, while seniors were lodged in low density suburbs, in higher quality larger houses. Most housing is now family housing, though at each mine there are some accommodations for single workers, essentially one room with no facilities, but many workers live there with their wife, and perhaps a young child while they wait for larger accommodation. The quality of housing varies from one mine to another. Five of the six mines visited had constructed a mine village in proximity of the mine, while the sixth chose to build housing in a nearby municipality, requiring they transport workers about 30km each way.

Two of the mines visited, belonging to the same company, are considered to have poorer housing as their housing stock is older.

¹⁵ Chamber of Mines, *Mine Workers Wage Survey: December 1998*, Harare, 9 August 1999.

At one of these two mines, the high density mine village had 755 houses, varying in size from one to six rooms. A high proportion of houses (78 per cent) were between two and four rooms, and only 21 per cent of houses had all facilities of water, power and internal toilets, while 53% of houses had no facilities at all, with the balance having power only but no running water and internal toilets. Workers in these houses had to use outhouses and outside taps or communal taps and toilets. In many houses, cooking also had to be done outside. Workers at this mine and others complained of overcrowding as the houses were too small for their families, usually estimated at five people, though many are now larger as many families are caring for orphaned children of family members struck with HIV/Aids. Because of the relatively small number of better quality houses, which only become available if a worker leaves, the human resources manager at this mine said that competition is stiff with a criteria of selection based on the workers' grade, years of service, and size of his family.¹⁶

Workers paid little or no rent for the houses at this mine because the houses are older than 20 years. Rents are negotiated through the NEC and houses older than 20 years are exempt. Workers still had to pay for electricity and water charges if they had them. Thus, for example, a grade 1 worker in our survey, who had worked at this mine for six years, had a three room house without facilities and paid Z\$5.48 a month in 2000. A semi-skilled grade 9 worker, working for 27 years, had a six room house with water and electricity, and paid Z\$29.80 a month.

The high density village at this mine was in poor shape, with poor quality houses, unpaved roads, small lots, meagre marketing and schooling facilities, a rowdy bar and denuded soccer fields. This contrasts dramatically with the low density village where the skilled senior workers live. Large leafy lots, paved roads, tennis courts, a clubhouse and other amenities surround larger houses, with a minimum of six rooms, all with electricity and running water. One worker that took part in our survey at this mine lived in such a house. He was a skilled tradesman, grade 11, whose take home pay was Z\$12,000 a month in 2000, after tax, schools fees

¹⁶ Unnamed mine, *Housing Statistics – High Density Village*, 2000. Document provided by the mine's housing authority. Additional data obtained from author's interview with Human Resources Manager at the mine, 1 August 2000.

and housing costs were deducted. Because his house is over 20 years old, he paid no rent but was charged Z\$52.00 for electricity and water. Children of mineworkers in the senior ranks are also bussed to a former Group A school. Another mine in our study has a better housing stock as their houses were less than 20 years old and as a result charged substantially higher rents. The high density village was in better shape as all houses have electricity, running water and indoor toilets, mostly paved roads and somewhat larger lots. The majority of houses were four rooms, consisting of two bedrooms, a lounge and kitchen, with rent and charges of Z\$193 a month. A few workers had a six room house that cost \$410 a month. Single men lived in smaller houses and were charged \$79 a month. Workers complained these rents were too high, eating up a substantial portion of income. At this mine, they received a housing allowance that ranged from Z\$208 a month for the grade 1 workers to Z\$739 for a grade 10 worker, yet this left them no further ahead as it was taxed, which ate away most of its benefits. In 2002, the NEC succeeded in reaching a new rental agreement for the industry, the first increase since 1993, where charges increased to Z\$400 per room including rent, maintenance, water, electricity and refuse.¹⁷ As mentioned above, a grade 1 workers' minimum wage at that point was between \$18,000 and \$19,000 a month.

The housing stock belongs to the mining companies,¹⁸ and workers are required to leave it when they lose their job irrespective of either their years of service or place of origin. For “juniors”, this means leaving between seven and 21 days after retrenchment, retirement, injury or ill health, or 24 hours if they

¹⁷ Chamber of Mines, *October Report*, Harare, 21 October 2002, Online: www.chamines.co.zw, 19 November 2003.

¹⁸ At the time of the our interviews, mining companies were exploring programs that would allow them to divest themselves of their houses. They supported a home ownership scheme, the Mine Ownership Trust, undertaken through the NEC, consisting essentially of a registered savings plan that would allow workers to purchase their house. Interview with Mr. Mishi, Director, National Employment Council for Mining, Harare, 4 August 1999. Workers, when asked about this, were not very enthusiastic as there was little money to put aside for such a scheme though many were interested in being able to buy their mine house. Some mines have begun negotiations with government to transfer the houses to the local district council, arguing that it could act as a local growth point for regional development. Mineworkers were opposed to this as it would undoubtedly mean higher rental costs.

are fired. They are not allowed to continue living with an offspring at the mine village as the mining company physically moves them from the mine, arguing that the house is too small for more than one family, nor is the salary of one worker sufficient to support other members. Most mines visited have a retirement preparation package starting about one year before their retirement date. It consists essentially in preparing them to leave company housing, encouraging them to make plans for where they will live as without this preparation time, human resources representatives claim that miners say they have nowhere to go and ask to be kept on longer. When they do leave, the mine usually provides transportation home if within Zimbabwe or to the border of the country to which they are returning, usually Malawi, Mozambique or Zambia.

As long as a mineworker is employed by a company, he and his family can live in the mine house, and the workers we met intended to stay where they were whether they liked the job or not. Workers showed a great deal of permanence with little mobility, either upwards through the ranks or moving from one job to another, or from one mine to another. This permanent employment indicates a full proletarianization yet the labour process continues to be organized around many of the structures of the former migrant labour system with labour intensive production, low skill levels and low levels of technology, resulting in persistent low wages in spite of a 48 hour working week and skills acquired from years of work experience. Low wages and the inability to procure permanent housing during their working years, combined with the loss of mine housing when employment ceases leads to a reliance on multiple strategies ranging from proletarian to rural based strategies. The following section will examine the role each plays in the lives of workers and their families in response to different problems in mine employment.

Workers' Strategies

Proletarian Strategies

Workers engaged in proletarian strategies aimed at improving their situation at work, and among these the most obvious one is their participation in the trade union, the Associated Mineworkers of Zimbabwe. The union negotiates with the Chamber of Mines, via the National Employment Council (NEC) for a national

agreement that establishes minimum wages, job classifications and other measures governing working and living conditions. There are no closed shops in Zimbabwe, or in the mines. Each worker has to be signed up individually but even those that are not signed up members are covered by national agreements. Among the workers who responded to the questionnaire, 66 per cent were union members, a figure that is consistent with the AMWZ's own figures on union participation.¹⁹

Only 35 per cent of union members in our survey said the union was able to help their situation, while 31 per cent of all those questioned said it would help. This recognition of the union as weak reflects, in part, a recognition that the problems go beyond the union's capacity to solve but are a product of the country's growing economic hardships. Several workers noted that the union had helped protect them against mis-classification or other individual problems, yet was less effective in the area of wages, the mineworkers' principle concern. There was a recognition that low wages were a national problem especially since the nominal increases were high. For example, in July 2003 wages increased by 150% (120% on January 2003 and another 30% in July 2003, with an anticipated further increase of 20% in September 2003)²⁰, but when compared to an inflation rate of 350% at the time, mineworkers, along with others, were still falling behind, and by the end of 2003 with inflation hovering around 500%, matters were getting worse. In 2002, the union won a major gain in that wage increases would now be given the "dollar value"; in other words, percentage wage increases would be calculated on the actual wages, not the minimums, a significant victory especially in those mines with higher actuals, and especially for the skilled categories whose actuals are substantially higher than the minimums.

The second most prevalent area of worker complaints and work-related strategy is to gain access to training and promotions so they can work their way up the category ladder, seen as the most effective way of improving their situation at the mine and to

¹⁹ The Zimbabwe Federation of Trade Unions has organized mostly in smaller mines. Telephone Interview with Edmund Rezive, President, National Union of Mineworkers, 5 August 2003.

²⁰ Interview with Rezive, 5 August 2003.

earn higher wages. In our survey, 78 per cent of workers said they were interested in getting more training at the mine as this would allow them to earn more. While the focus groups revealed the same interest, they also revealed that workers perceived a problem with the difficulty in getting promotions up the category scales, not only into the skilled categories but into the semi-skilled ones, even once they had received the appropriate certification. In one of the mines, there was an often-repeated story about one worker who obtained his full blasting licence which made him eligible to enter the skilled category, but he had not yet been promoted, thus discouraging many others and giving the impression of favouritism in the promotion process. Accusations of favouritism are often heard among mine workers in different countries, and is a sign of mistrust between management and labour.

In focus groups, many workers said that while they did not enjoy the job, they stayed because there is no other job. If they found another better paying job, such as being a driver or other jobs, they would leave, or if they succeeded in getting more education, they would find a better job. While workers sometimes put a good face on their situation, especially in focus group discussions, speaking with some assurance of eventually finding a better job, there was also a keen recognition that they would stay where they were given the stiff competition for jobs due to high levels of unemployment. Of those surveyed, 36 per cent were still working at improving their education through correspondence courses or other strategies. For those under 30, 61 per cent were doing so.

Workers saw training as the most important strategy among the major ones facing them. We asked workers to prioritize between getting more training, higher wages or access to land as the element that would most allow them to improve their current situation. In response, 42% of workers put training in first place, 31% put land in first place and 27% put money in first place (i.e. higher wages for the same job). Training was chosen most often because with that you could get a promotion, thus higher wages and in the end, more money. With money you could get what you needed, including money to work the land, and if you had enough money you would not have to rely on land. Higher wages though was chosen as a way of solving immediate problems such as buying food. Land was seen as important as it would allow

security in the long term but the majority underlined the necessity of having money even if you had land so that you could work it and have access to markets.

Rural Strategies

Rural based strategies reflect the organization of labour at the mines. While most workers did not consider the mine village home (72.5 per cent of those surveyed), many citing a rural area as “home” and concerned with maintaining links, what clearly emerged was the necessity of building a permanent house because of the loss of housing if they were retrenched or retired for medical or age reasons. Among workers surveyed, 93 per cent had already built, were in the process of building or were planning on building a house. This was explained in the focus groups and thus emerged clearly that one day they would have to leave their current housing and find a place to live. Only six workers surveyed stated they had no intention of building. They were all very young (in their 20s), they underlined a lack of resources as an impediment to building, and five of them had been brought up in mine villages as their father was a miner.

In spite of the large number of those in our survey whose father was already a miner (46%) and had thus grown up on a mine, an even larger number (75%) planned on retiring to the rural areas to engage in agriculture, and, in many cases, to supplement their income through income generating projects. Of the 22 (the remaining 25%) who said they would not it was either because they were under 30 years old (14 workers or 64%) or they were skilled senior workers (six or 27%), or were planning on returning to their home outside the country (five or 23%), or their father was a miner (13 or 59%) and therefore had grown up at this or another mine. Some had a combination of these factors that would indicate the choice of a more urban strategy. Only two in the whole of our survey were none of the above and still did not plan on returning to the rural areas to farm.

The focus groups explained the thinking in this regard. It came out clearly from the participants in the skilled and senior categories that they would be able to afford an urban retirement because of higher salaries, and often because their spouse was also in wage employment. Many were currently in the process or had already built a house in an urban area and planned to move there

after retirement but until then they earned additional income by renting it out while they lived at the mine site. The survey indicates that out of the 12 skilled workers, half did not include rural strategies in their current or future plans.

This urban option was out of the reach of most workers in grade 10 and below, and even though many indicated they would like to live in an urban area, they could not afford either to build but especially to maintain an urban home after retirement as they know their pension will not be adequate to sustain them for very long, given the higher costs of urban living. The idea while working is to hurry and build a round house in their rural home, and eventually to save and build a rectangular house in the same area where they can sustain themselves through agricultural activity either for subsistence or commercially and engage in income generating projects. Most were hoping to work at least until their children had finished school when they would no longer have to pay school fees, after which their need for a cash income would be significantly reduced. Their wife's role in maintaining activities in the rural areas and supplementing the family income was crucial in this regard, but analysis of this aspect of our study falls outside the parameters of this article.

Participants in the focus groups also explained the age issues. They understand the large proportion of young people in our survey who were not planning on a rural strategy (67 per cent of those not planning a rural strategy were under 30 years old). Many younger workers do not see the need to begin preparing a rural home for retirement. Nationals (none foreigners) begin preparing as soon as they are married as they are now under pressure to begin buying goats and cows, a pressure imposed by their parents. One focus group did recognize that not everyone begins at a young age: "Some start only when they are over 50, when they start thinking". Thus over half of those not planning a rural strategy who were under 30, were single, and a few even lived with their parents who were still employed by the mine.

However, this generational difference was less than expected as we had been warned by mine management that we would find great differences as older workers retained the desire to return to the rural areas for cultural reasons, while the younger ones would be disinterested. Yet 55 per cent of those between 20 and 29 years old were planning a rural retirement, compared to 78 per cent of

those in their 30s, and 96 per cent that were 40 or older. But while the percentage is lower for those in their 20s, it is nonetheless a significant numbers especially considering that all those who were single in our study (12) were in their 20s.

The other factor which explains the decision of some workers not to choose a rural retirement could be the number of so-called “foreign” workers. Historically Zimbabwe’s migrant labour system resulted in a large number of workers from Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique working in the Zimbabwean industry. With Zimbabwe’s independence, these workers were given a form of citizenship and remained within the industry. Different estimates put the current number of “foreign” workers in the workforce at about 40 per cent though no firm numbers exist.²¹ One of the mines gave us their figures for foreign-born workers in 2000 as 34 per cent of that mine’s total workforce, though the human resources manager estimated that there are many more who are descendants of foreigners. In our survey, only nine workers identified themselves as being from outside Zimbabwe, and only five of those were planning on returning to their country of origin after retirement. From discussions in the focus groups however, it is clear that there are many “foreigners” as there was extensive discussions about their different strategies as many do not have access to land while working and cannot therefore begin developing their rural strategy until they return home. Some have however gained access to a plot in Zimbabwe either by making an agreement with a local chief in the rural areas or through marriage to a Zimbabwean women. Thus while only nine identified themselves as being from outside Zimbabwe, it is very possible there were others who merely identified their home area as the area where they have now acquired land. Recent changes in Zimbabwe, ranging from issues of access to land and changes in immigration regulations may make it harder for “foreigners” to gain access to land in the country, thus requiring that a larger number leave the country upon retirement.

What mineworkers see as an ideal rural strategy, especially workers in the unskilled and semi-skilled categories for whom urban retirement is perhaps desirable but unaffordable, is to build

²¹ In our 1993 survey, several companies indicated the foreign portion of their workforce at about 40 % (Dansereau).

a house and maintain a plot in a communal area, either visiting it regularly, or through the labour of a spouse staying in the rural areas between 2 and 4 months of the year, or through the work of parents, so that they and their family will have a house and a livelihood upon retirement, while perhaps also providing additional income and food in the current period, as well as support for parents. While this is seen as an ideal, many workers commented that they are having difficulty maintaining the link because of growing financial constraints, making travel and even investment difficult. In fact, 27.5 per cent of those surveyed said they had not been absent from the mine for a period of seven days or more in the year prior to the interview. Many of these workers indicated that because they needed money they sold their holiday days or took their holidays and stayed in the mine village. Thus while the ideal is to invest in the rural home, the reality is more difficult to maintain.

The fear is that the failure to maintain that link will result in retirement in which one is destitute and homeless and forced to live in one of the squatter camps that exist near each of the mines. It is commonly understood that a great number of “foreign” workers who, after being driven back to their country of origin by the mining company, return to the squatter camps as they have not maintained a rural strategy while at work, or they seek employment in the commercial farms, an option which may now be closed to them given the changes on the commercial farms in the past few years. Yet it is a fear of all mineworkers which was eloquently expressed in a mass meeting of the AMWZ, when one miner characterized their situation as that of “nomads and destitutes”.

Conclusion

Clearly workers use a complex set strategies, some proletarian, some rural-based. They join unions, seek training and educational opportunities to gain advancement in the workplace and to improve their wage levels. At the same time, they seek to maintain rural links as part of a rural strategy to ensure security for their retirement, for both themselves and their family. Both these sets of strategies are dictated by the very nature of the organization of production and the inability to work their way up the steep hierarchy of numerous grades, to earn adequate wages, to procure

a permanent home for themselves during their working lives and to provide for their retirement.

On the surface this might not seem to be any different than previous forms of migrant labour. But the removal of legal constraints limiting permanent employment and urbanization has resulted in mineworkers who are now permanently employed with a tendency, particularly among the unskilled and semi-skilled workers, to remain at the one workplace their entire working life or at least for a significant part of it. Few had the intention of leaving though many still entertained hopes that they would be able to find another type of job. There was a clear recognition that employment would be needed until they were able to get by on subsistence production. Some thought this could come once the children no longer required school fees while others pushed it as far back as they could, even speaking of finding other employment once they were retired from the mine.

Rural strategies were subordinated to this principal strategy of maintaining wage labour. The particular shape of it – the need for a house, a place to retire, a place to engage in subsistence production and income generating projects – is shaped by the inadequacies of this employment. It fills the gap left by it, but ironically the very act of filling the gaps provides a hidden subsidy to the industry as it allows workers and their families to get by. It provides for the livelihood and reproduction of the workforce by supplementing for what continues to be a single, rather than a family wage. It does this not because workers are semi-proletarianized but because, even now that they have become fully proletarianized, the organization of production based on labour intensive production dictates the ongoing reliance on these rural strategies.

This prompts the next question: how is it that this organization of production persists despite a fully proletarianized workforce since it was widely expected that once workers were employed on a permanent basis, skills levels would increase and an upward pressure on wages would push capital into changing the organization of production by introducing labour saving devices, thus shifting to more capital intensive production? However, the two mines that are currently in the process of introducing some new technology have seen little change in either wage levels or a dramatic change in the skill mix, in spite of their multi-skilling.

It is suspected that this might be due to the political constraints, both historically and in the present time that limit labour's capacity to resist both at the shopfloor and within the broader political arena, thereby limiting labour's capacity to resist capital's domination within the labour process. A possible answer lies in an understanding of the country's political economy, shaped as it is by its colonial history and economic structures which significantly limit labour's effective resistance and the impact that could have on bringing about development and change, an exciting topic for future research.

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