

## **LABOUR RELATIONS IN A MINING ENTERPRISE ESTABLISHED AFTER INDEPENDENCE**

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This article is based on research conducted between 1989 and 1991 at a gold mine located in southern Zimbabwe. The mine was established in 1980 as the first post-Independence project of a mining multinational with its headquarters in the United Kingdom. The mine itself has about 8 000 people living in its area of jurisdiction, which in turn is located in the middle of a communal area with a population estimated at 52 000. The area falls into Agro-Ecological Region IV which is suitable for semi-extensive ranching. The rainfall is patchy and ineffective and the average temperature ranges between 17° and 26°C. The soils in the communal area are sandy loams of low fertility because of the continual cropping, with low soil-nutrient inputs. The topography is varied, with some of the areas being sloping and rocky.

The major crops grown by the farmers are maize, groundnuts, sorghum, sunflowers and rapoko. Most of the farmers do not grow enough food both to feed themselves and to market to meet their cash needs. There is a low turnover of crops in the local markets and an estimated 65 per cent of the people in the communal area receive drought relief and participate in food-for-work programmes. Livestock ownership varies greatly between households but, in general, cattle ownership is lower than the national average; at least 21 per cent of the households have no livestock. The low livestock numbers can be attributed to poor grazing and high mortality during the war years and the droughts of 1982-4.

In the area at least 66 per cent of the male heads of household are engaged in wage labour in order to generate off-farm incomes which can be used to purchase food supplements, agricultural inputs and other necessities that cannot be produced in the local economy. It is in this context that the intervention of the mining company will be examined.

### **THE ESTABLISHMENT OF 'GOLD MINE'**

In 1980, when the mine which I shall refer to as Gold Mine was established, there were high expectations on the part of the Black Zimbabweans in general and the people around the mine in particular with respect to the benefits that were to be extended to the hitherto-disadvantaged sectors of the population. It is important to note that in Zimbabwe, until the 1970s,

the mining and agricultural industries depended more on Black immigrant unskilled labour than on local unskilled labour. Mining tended to be low-paid, hazardous and unpopular with the locals. The safety records of some of the mines, particularly the small ones, were bad. Locals thus tended to pursue jobs in the better-paid sectors of the economy, and they were able to exercise this choice because a large proportion of them held land rights in the communal areas. These rights were safeguarded and activated by the wives and dependants of male wage workers, and they farmed the land in the absence of their menfolk. Immigrants have not been able to use these strategies or to fall back on communal land for farming, so they tended to concentrate on waged jobs wherever they could secure them, which explains their preponderance in the mining industry. After Independence Zimbabwe's mining companies were under pressure to improve the conditions of the Black working class, to repay the historical debt accumulated through their poor working conditions, wages and general treatment of labour. The mining company felt these pressures, reflected in the calls for accelerated Black advancement in all sectors of the economy, quite acutely.

The mining company was thus interested both in making profits and in demonstrating to the government that it was willing to play a part in the construction of the new society after Independence. The government was still learning how to run the affairs of the state, but it had made it clear that workers were to be treated in a humane fashion and that the crude domination and mistreatment of Black labour by White capital through predominantly White management were no longer acceptable in an independent Zimbabwe.

The people were guarded in their reaction to the mine, because it was necessary to resettle the people who lived on the land that was to be occupied by the mine. The communal area was quite densely populated and the mine would take up 340 hectares of land. The mining company first negotiated compensation arrangements with locals whose land was required. An agreement was eventually reached between the villagers and the mining company whereby 1 270 hectares of land were purchased adjacent to the communal area to resettle all the people whose land was occupied by the mine. Altogether, 116 families were resettled and two schools, roads, boreholes and a church were built by the mining company in the resettlement area. The company also paid out each family for lost agricultural land and investments, and provided transport to the resettlement area. The two headmen whose villages were affected supervised the move. The company spent Z\$318 000 on resettling the villagers so that, by September 1980, it could start constructing its mine and township.

By 1982 Gold Mine employed 930 permanent workers and 35 per cent of these workers came from communal areas within the jurisdiction of the

area's District Council. It is important to note that people from the immediately-adjacent communal area were not happy about the number of villagers who had been employed at Gold Mine. From their discussions with mine officials when the mine was being set up and 'sold' to them, they had expected more of their people to be employed. The mining company needed people with some mining experience, which the villagers did not possess. This issue remained unresolved and was to resurface again and again in varying contexts in the relationship between workers and officials at Gold Mine.

The political climate in 1980 was very different from that in colonial times, and mine officials recognized the need to treat the villagers as well as the mine employees carefully if the whole mining enterprise was to succeed. Independence had brought with it new political structures inherited from the liberation war. The ruling party, ZANU(PF), had created neighbourhood committees which had been used to co-ordinate the provisioning of and intelligence-gathering for the guerrillas during the war. The ruling party strengthened these structures after the war and the activists in the party had a ready-made constituency among the mine employees. Party officials were also eager to flex their political muscles after Independence, given that a new political culture was in the process of formation. These officials were well placed to direct the new political culture within as well as outside the workplace. Moreover, the peasants and workers were exuberant because they saw the White colonial regime as having been defeated. They were confident and defiant in their dealings with the Whites and any structures that they perceived as being controlled by White people. In 1980 the Industrial Conciliation Act was still in operation and regulated the relationship between labour, the state and capital in most enterprises. Under this legislation, labour's scope for industrial action was heavily circumscribed. Within this context, industrial relations at Gold Mine were established.

Gold Mine's interactions with the surrounding villagers was and is governed by the Mines and Minerals Act (*Chapter 165*), which allows any person to peg a mining claim and to conduct explorations for minerals underground anywhere in Zimbabwe. No landholder may deny a prospector permission to explore for minerals. The rights of landholders apply only to soil and vegetation, for anything below the ground is the property of the state and can be exploited by any claim-holder with state permission. However, it is incumbent upon the claim-holder to conduct mining operations in such a way that the activities of landholders are not disrupted. Thus the village people, some of whom were also employed at the mine, encountered the mine structures within as well as outside the workplace, since exploration activities continued in the communal area even after the mine had been established.

## INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AT GOLD MINE

Paterson's (1972) job evaluation system was used for grading all jobs. With the exception of the mine manager, employees fell into 19 grades, with differential pay scales and conditions of service linked to these gradings. In 1982 Gold Mine employees were distributed as follows:

Grades	1 - 3	489	unskilled miners	Paterson A band
Grades	4 - 8	370	semi-skilled miners	Paterson B band
Grades	9 -14	58	skilled operatives	Paterson C band
Grades	15 -19	13	supervisors/managers	Paterson D/E bands

The employees were organized into eight functional departments: engineering, geology, survey, administration, security, milling, mining and personnel. The mining and milling departments were combined into one production unit which employed 62 per cent of Gold Mine's labour force. In 1982 400 of the workers belonged to the Zimbabwe Associated Mineworkers' Union. At the same time, the workers' committee and works council functioned to regulate relationships between workers and management within the enterprise.

The system of workers' committees and works councils within enterprises was a result of the labour unrest that had been experienced nationwide in 1980 and 1981. Most wage workers were dissatisfied with the prospect of continuing to operate under the Industrial Conciliation Act, which they viewed as anti-worker in its thrust and conciliatory in its approach. The government was forced to put into place a series of changes that were calculated to safeguard workers' interests until new labour legislation could be passed.

In the meantime, employers whose operations had thrived on the basis of cheap Black labour found themselves in trouble because of the minimum wages laid down after Independence. They also found it difficult to lay off labour because the state (in the new Employment Act, No. 13 of 1980) made it mandatory for employers to obtain state approval before any retrenchment of labour could be effected. At workplaces employers and employees had to interact within the rubric of the workers' committees and works councils. Although the objectionable parts of the Industrial Conciliation Act were amended by the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act (No. 23 of 1981), the labour legislation that was to replace the Industrial Conciliation Act became law only at the end of 1985. For employers there was little room for manoeuvre with respect to disciplining labour through retrenchment or suspension. The processes for getting state approval tended to be bureaucratic and cumbersome. Some employers managed to secure permission to retrench their labour, while others resorted to hiring seasonal, casual or temporary, rather than permanent, unskilled labour.

The mining group to which Gold Mine belongs had its first major post-independence experience of retrenchment, dismissal and redeployment of labour when one of its nickel mines had to be closed because of the fall in nickel prices in international markets coupled with the poor-quality ore bodies at the mine. There was a long delay by the state in granting permission, but the nickel mine did eventually close, although the delay cost the mining company more than Z\$3 million. Workers were given various options at closure. They were offered favourable terminal benefits, depending on their grades, or the option of transfer to other operations in the group where their skills were needed. Some of the immigrant workers opted to be repatriated to their countries of origin, such as Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique.

The absorption of workers from the nickel mine into Gold Mine's operations, thus accounted for the relatively small numbers of local people taken on when the mine started operating at full capacity. This was resented by the local workers, who felt that their earlier agreement with the company's officials had been breached. But, as noted earlier, the mine officials argued that they needed miners with some experience and could not accept inexperienced workers.

Compromise between workers and management was frequent, particularly with respect to dismissal and suspension from work. There were many incidents where management decided merely to issue 'final' warnings to workers in breach of mining and company regulations, at least some of whom could have been summarily dismissed had management wished to do so. But management needed to maintain good relations with both the labour relations officials and the workers' committee on the mine. It was necessary to deal reasonably with the workers' committee because the mine management depended on it to communicate effectively with workers. In situations of conflict old 'favours' from management in retaining workers when they could have been fired could be useful in getting the workers' co-operation. It was also necessary at times for management to boost the credibility of the workers' committee if it was to be taken seriously by the workers. One sees the contrast between these cases and those in which the Ministry of Labour's industrial relations officers were tardy in dealing with requests for suspension and dismissal; usually pleading lack of transport to the mine as an explanation for their slow response to management's communications; in a few such instances, the mine sent a car to fetch the industrial relations officers to the mine to hear cases.

In return, the industrial relations officers would point out some of the errors in procedure on the part of the mine management and deal with requests in a conciliatory manner. For example, at the beginning of the 1980s, the industrial relations officers used to stick to the technicalities of

the law with respect to issues of suspension and firing. They would reinstate workers who had been suspended or dismissed in a manner which was technically incorrect, even though the offence might legally merit such a decision if it was executed in the technically correct manner. As time went on, they started advising mine management on what not to do in order to avoid situations where dismissed workers were reinstated pending dismissal in a legally acceptable manner.

The state's role in this process of adjustment between workers and management in the post-Independence era is important because it laid down the rules within which both labour and capital had to operate. The state found its regulatory role more difficult to effect as the economic recession deepened in Zimbabwe, but its labour relations officers were slow in replying to letters requesting legal permission to suspend or dismiss erring workers. This had the effect of undermining discipline, because the workers were able to see their colleagues who had flouted regulations continuing to work without penalty. For example, some workers reported to work drunk or slept on duty and their disciplinary cases dragged on for months because permission had not been secured for their dismissal. Assaults on supervisors were reported and these cases took an inordinately long time to process.

Drunkenness was quite dangerous in the mine since workers used heavy equipment which was difficult to manipulate. Drunken workers also endangered the lives of their colleagues when dealing with explosives and drilling in small spaces. Carelessness could result in severe injuries and even death. The cumbersome bureaucratic procedures of the state effectively reinforced worker indiscipline and undermined the state itself, which was viewed by management as having a negative approach to regulation. Management generally felt that state bureaucrats had no appreciation of issues pertaining to efficiency and profitability in enterprises. The sluggishness of the state bureaucracy also made the work of the newly appointed Black supervisory staff harder and undermined their authority at work.

Thus the realities of everyday existence and the need to maintain a peaceful and workable co-existence, led workers, management and state functionaries to manipulate their bureaucratic interactions in extra-bureaucratic and non-bureaucratic ways.

### RACE AND CLASS AT GOLD MINE

Within the mining group pressures to Africanize the higher-level jobs were strong. The jobs that were Africanized first were those which were not related directly to production. Thus the most senior Blacks were in personnel and public relations. The chairman of the group was a Black former

headmaster and board member at different institutions. The personnel superintendent at Gold Mine was a Black male graduate from the national university, but the group's director of personnel was a White man.

The mining and reduction departments, the major production units, were managed by Whites. The mining department had acquired its first Black underground manager only in the late 1980s. Black male graduates were hired in the metallurgy and geology departments: they were mostly inexperienced and had replaced Whites (who had left for South Africa, been promoted within the group, or had left to take up better jobs elsewhere). These young Black male graduates were highly conscious and critical of the dominance of Whites in the managerial ranks of the mining group.

A group of skilled middle-level operatives was Black. They were mostly fitters, turners and miners who had qualified at the mine school in Bulawayo and had accumulated experience on the job. Below these certified, skilled workers were the semi-skilled miners who had gained their knowledge on the job and had been working on the mines for longer than their certified counterparts.

These differentiations in skill were reflected in the social stratification of housing and services within the relatively closed mine community, in which the division between work and home was not pronounced. Each stratum of workers had its residential zone with distinct types of housing and environmental standards. The zones were clearly separated. The low-income, unskilled workers were all Black and were housed in 682 semi-detached houses sited close to the mine to facilitate access to the workplace. Each semi-detached house consisted of a lounge, two bedrooms, a kitchen, inside toilet and shower. All the houses had electricity and running water. Adjacent to this zone was the area for middle-income employees. There were 41 houses in this area, all detached. Each house had three bedrooms, a lounge/dining room, spacious fitted kitchen, inside bathroom and toilet with hot and cold running water. The senior employees lived in 43 detached houses with separate bathrooms and toilets, three or four bedrooms, a garage or carport and a bathroom *en suite*. Bachelors in the skilled grades were housed in the single quarters next to the social club patronized by the senior employees. There was some housing under construction to accommodate those employees still living in temporary quarters.

Three social clubs provided recreational facilities for the employees, with a nine-hole golf course, tennis courts, squash courts and swimming pools. In theory, all the social clubs were open to all employees, but, in practice, clubs were stratified by income and grade, with the skilled workers patronizing the clubs with higher fees and sports such as tennis, golf and squash. The unskilled employees patronized the club with lower fees and sports such as soccer. In addition to the clubs, a tavern serving clear and opaque beer served the mine residents and many people from

the neighbouring communal area. The mine was served by a post office, police station, petrol station, bank and supermarket. Small traders also sold vegetables, fruit and other commodities at the mine's business centre. A primary school served the children of the low- and middle-income workers. The children of the higher-income workers attended private schools in the major towns. Two pre-schools were also organized along the lines of parental income, with the one for the higher-income workers' children charging higher fees than that for the children of the low-income workers. The mining company also built a secondary school for the miners' children, which accepted children from the surrounding rural areas as well.

The social differentiation described above pervaded most interactions among workers, within as well as outside the distinctions of race, class and ethnicity. Those Black employees who were seen by the Black unskilled workers to have benefited from Independence, felt aggrieved because they perceived their White seniors as racist and unfair in their practices within as well as outside the workplace. In 1983 at least two meetings had been held with the mine manager and the area industrial relations officer to protest about racism in the location of houses. The mine manager agreed that racial criteria had been used in the allocation and distribution of houses and pledged to do something to integrate all employees regardless of colour.

On issues of grading and promotion the feelings of the skilled Blacks were even stronger than about housing. As more Black mine captains were appointed, planning meetings were no longer open to mine captains as before. There were allegations of preferential treatment of Whites, who were seen as having access to real promotions whereas Blacks tended to be offered lateral transfers in lieu of promotion. Nepotism among the Whites was also alleged in grading, and Whites who felt restive were apparently given financial incentives and promotions to stay though Blacks were not treated likewise. Generally, these Blacks felt that their promotions were window-dressing, since they had no substance in practice. The senior Blacks were unhappy feeling that they suffered doubly by being disliked and resented by their unskilled Black subordinates and mistreated and ridiculed by their White equals and superiors.

These issues were considered at a meeting between the general manager, the mine manager, the underground manager and the senior Blacks. However, only the management grades were invited to that meeting, so all of the senior Blacks not in management were excluded. At that meeting the general manager insisted that the company wished Black management staff to identify with management. He asserted that they tended to identify with the Black workers and to complain that they were used as window-dressing. He exhorted them to be willing to make the unpopular decisions which went with the responsibility of their jobs. He



disagreed with those people who wanted authority without responsibility for fear of being branded 'sell-outs'. On the exclusion of those non-management staff members who were said to be the leaders of the 'Black caucus', he observed that, if managers were being led by their non-management counterparts, then the company had erred in its promotions. He then went on to explain the reasons for the decisions regarding housing, transport, planning meetings, resignations and racism, denying any window-dressing in promotions in the company. As a result of this meeting, some procedures were altered to ensure racial equity in housing, and mine captains were brought back into the planning meetings. But allegations of racism did not stop and they have surfaced periodically since that meeting as the perceptions of Black workers and management staff have responded to post-colonial adjustments in which political, social and economic forces made some relationships uncomfortable.

Gold Mine has also had to deal with problems arising from the new labour regulations effected by the state. At Gold Mine the power of a state controlled by Blacks was viewed by the Black workers as a boost to their workplace struggles. By June 1982 what was described by the personnel manager as 'industrial unrest' had been reported at the mine. This unrest occurred just two days before the official opening of the mine by the Prime Minister. The unrest took the form of an unofficial go-slow by the underground workforce. Discipline was said to be poor and supervisors were unable to get the miners to mine. The underlying threat was that the miners would ruin the official opening of the mine by the Prime Minister. The cause of this go-slow was apparently the workers' anger at having to work on the Sunday after the official opening of the mine on the Friday, which was declared a day off for all the workers so that they could see the Prime Minister. The idea of juggling work-time in this way was apparently mooted by the workers' committee and the mineworkers' union. According to the workers' committee representatives, the workers themselves had rejected the idea of working on either the Sunday or the Friday.

When the mine personnel staff tried to persuade the workers' representatives to convince the workers that the company and the country could not afford the loss of a day's production and its foreign-exchange value, the workers' representatives were not at all impressed. Instead, the representatives suggested that they might try to persuade the workers to work on the Sunday, provided that they got the Friday off and overtime rates for the Sunday. The mine officials resisted paying two and half days' wages for one day's work, but, in the end, acceded to this request on condition that production and discipline underground returned to normal.

Senior mine officials clearly recognized that their arms were being twisted and that the company would lose political face if there was any disruption of the Prime Minister's visit by the workers. Interviews conducted

with some Black underground supervisors confirmed that the workers would not work and were resistant to any form of discipline from their seniors. The workers were quite aware that firing was difficult since ministry approval had to be secured first. Supervisors had been threatened with assault (one actually was assaulted) and insulted and accused of being 'Rhodesian' when they tried to enforce the rules regarding work. They reported malingering by some workers, and threats to their families when they disciplined workers. Some supervisors were actually told by the union man who worked underground that the union would handle issues of discipline. One supervisor mentioned that the work of the lashers and trammers was being left for the miners and gang leaders. The same supervisor, on reprimanding a driller who was not doing his work correctly, reported being told by the driller: 'Get your wife to do the drilling'. The supervisors also alleged that workers from the surrounding communal areas were not loyal to the mine or committed to their work, which they viewed as a supplementary source of income to their farming and livestock husbandry.

This unrest illustrates some of the problems arising from cross-cutting loyalties which may conflict at particular moments. The workers felt empowered by their ability to supersede their terms of reference in situations where they could see that it would not be politic for those who held formal, contractual authority over them to exercise that authority. This manipulation of situations by labour as well as by the management of Gold Mine was important in their dealings with each other. Thus the outcomes of specific interactions were quite negotiable, in spite of what the law said about contractual obligations. The class issues loomed quite large here because the underground workers used the occasion of the official opening of the mine to torment their Black superiors who had benefited from the company's promotion of Blacks, while simultaneously taking a swipe at the predominantly White company officials by threatening to embarrass them when the Prime Minister came to open the mine.

#### GENDER AND CLASS IN INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AT GOLD MINE

There have been two major incidents of industrial unrest at Gold Mine. The first involved a demonstration carried out by women whose husbands were involved in a promotion-related dispute at the mine, which erupted when a popular White underground manager left. The major contenders for the vacant job were two Black mine captains and a White man who had been a lesser-ranked shift boss until just before the post of underground manager had become vacant. The longest-serving mine captain had risen through the ranks, while the other contender was a mining engineer with a first-class degree from a British institution. The White contender had been a policeman and, like the most senior Black mine captain, had risen

through the ranks. In terms of overall seniority, the Black mine captain who had risen through the ranks was the most senior and had assessed the other two contenders while they were still shift bosses, the White contender very favourably and the Black degreed contender less favourably. The White contender had then been promoted to mine captain just before the selection of the successor to the underground manager. The most senior Black mine captain had in turn been assessed at shift boss level by the departed underground manager, whose assessment was less favourable than the one the Black mine captain had made of the White shift boss who had been promoted to mine captain.

For the purposes of promotion to underground manager, the assessments at shift boss level of all applicants were taken into account. The contender with the most favourable assessment overall was the newly appointed White mine captain, who was then appointed underground manager. But, before the selection was finally made, skilled Blacks said that the two most senior Black contenders had been asked whether, if given the job of underground manager, they could perform it well. Both are alleged to have qualified their responses, with at least one of them stating that he could do the job with some help. The general manager's response was believed to have been that the man had to take the job and do it or turn it down, because everybody had their own jobs and nobody could help him to do his job. The man is then supposed to have said that, in that case, he would not be able to do the job, which was offered to the White contender. The result was the demonstration, led by the wife of the degreed Black who did not get the job, against racism in the company with particular reference to promotions. The women called on the new White underground manager to resign.

The area member of Parliament visited the mine in the wake of this demonstration and asked company officials to explain why they had promoted the White contender with the least experience to the post of underground manager. The mine officials produced documentary evidence to prove that the Black senior mine captain had actually refused the post and that he had assessed the other two contenders and rated the White contender as more competent at shift boss level. The MP felt that the choice of successor was correct from the evidence of the documents and did nothing to censure the mine officials. He also asked the personnel superintendent for his opinion on the choice of underground manager, who indicated that he agreed with the appointment. This was the beginning of the personnel superintendent's problems with the Women's League of the ruling party.

In the event, the White manager did not actually take up the substantive post: he was appointed to act as underground manager but subsequently left to join another operation and a Black underground manager from

another mining group was appointed. The above case illustrates the conflicts that exist or are perceived to exist among Blacks who aspire to positions vacated by Whites. It is important to note that, in these labour relations issues which involved workers' wives, the adversaries were Blacks competing for a common occupational position from the diverging paths of education and experience.

The second demonstration occurred in 1984, when mine workers' wives belonging to the ruling party attempted to overturn the car in which the Black personnel superintendent was travelling. They were angry that the mine management always wanted to know what was discussed at party meetings, but they also resented the penetration of the security department personnel into workers' private lives. The personnel superintendent in particular was perceived as high-handed in his interactions with miners and their families with respect to housing and other social amenities, discipline, discrimination against low-income workers, compensation issues relating to injured workers and other disciplinary matters. The issue of compensation is important, because mines with poor safety records, whose workers have to be compensated, pay higher workmen's compensation insurance premiums. The personnel superintendent was perceived to be more interested in saving company money than in safeguarding the interests of the workers. The women were also unhappy about what they viewed as the intransigence and lack of co-operation by the personnel superintendent in the provision of community services, such as making available the mine bus for shopping trips to the nearest large town, the provision of support to the women's club, the proposed crèche, the buying of uniforms for the mine's football club, and the building of a community hall, to name but a few issues.

In mining communities the wives and children of miners interact closely with the employers of their husbands and fathers. Their housing, schooling, leisure activities and incomes, indeed, their whole lives are determined by the mining company, which generates friction. In their protests, the women used political symbols and actions in order to foil what they perceived to be Gold Mine's management's attempts to control their activities. The ruling party was seen as a powerful mediator between the workers and the mine, and workers and their wives believed that the company would not want to fall foul of the party unnecessarily. The wives and the children of the miners were thus incorporated into a relationship with the mining company in ways that included but exceeded that emanating from their husbands' direct relationship with their employer. The mine officials expected the workers' families and households to co-operate in keeping to the terms and conditions of residence in the township, to desist from interfering with the mine administration and to support the miners in the company's employ. The families expected the company to

provide basic services and to co-operate with them in advancing community interests. Periodic negotiations took place within this relationship and, as shown above, the negotiations were sometimes less than amicable. Mine management, then, had to deal with their employees' dependents as well as the employees themselves, and this markedly increased the scope of industrial relations. In 1984 the Zimbabwe Republic Police had to be called in to disperse the women's demonstration.

The women's demonstrations resulted in the appointment of a female community-services officer with a social work background. She subsequently took over the tasks of liaising with the mine community and developing community services.

### THE POSITION OF THE PERSONNEL SUPERINTENDENT

The hostility expressed towards the personnel superintendent was not confined to workers in the junior grades and their wives. By definition, the personnel superintendent's position was a sensitive one, calling for reserves of diplomacy and fairness in dealings with employees. With respect to housing allocations and other entitlements, the personnel superintendent at Gold Mine was perceived to be punitive and unfair by those in Grade 12 and below in his allocation of houses and other perks.

One geologist felt particularly hard done by because, he said, the personnel superintendent liked to give the impression that he had power and at times exceeded his authority in order to demonstrate to employees that he made decisions affecting them. The geologist alleged that the superintendent had paid him at Grade 11 when in fact he was a Grade 12 employee. He had discovered this mistake when he was moved into Grade 13 after an appraisal which moved him to the next notch. He also pointed out that, despite the fact that the personnel superintendent did not have the power to allocate houses to employees beyond Grade 11, he gave the impression that such allocations were his responsibility. The geologist further alleged that, because he was unmarried, the personnel superintendent had actually tried to kick him out of the house that he was entitled to. The geologist was indignant about this because he had voluntarily stayed in the single quarters, despite the fact that in Grade 13 he was entitled to a house regardless of his marital status. He said that the personnel superintendent had not informed him, as a Grade 12 employee, of his entitlement to a house. When he then asked for a house, the superintendent would not give him one. The geologist had then gone on to his line manager, who said he had been under the impression that the geologist was quite happy in the single quarters, but then liaised with the mine manager who was responsible for house allocations in the senior grades and the geologist moved into a house the following week.

Dissatisfaction with the personnel superintendent was also seen as a major factor in generating the female-led demonstrations. Employees interviewed thought that the major reason why the wife of the losing candidate for the underground manager's post had no problems in mobilizing the community against the mine management was the heavy-handedness of the personnel superintendent in his dealings with the community. Senior Blacks cited their lack of information about perks such as school fees for their children, relocation allowances which newly-hired senior employees were entitled to and other benefits as directly attributable to the superintendent's desire to control and keep secret information which should have been made available to employees. The Black employees said they were particularly disadvantaged in this respect since there were no senior Blacks apart from the superintendent who could make this information available to them if the superintendent did not. The Black employees perceived him as someone who did not want to lose face or the appearance of possessing power by referring issues upward if they were beyond his level of bureaucratic responsibility. Thus, because information about perks was not freely available, employees had to enquire from the personnel department what their entitlements were and this made them dependent on the personnel superintendent in a way that made them uncomfortable.

One of the mine captains who left to work for another mining group indicated that his treatment by the personnel superintendent contributed to his reasons for leaving. Some employees pointed out that high insurance premiums, resulting from the many work-related injuries in their enterprise, contributed to the under-reporting of injuries at work. The mine captain who left was perceived by his peers to have been a victim of the superintendent's desire to save the company money by under-reporting, misreporting or delaying the processing of accident reports. This mine captain's case was often quoted as an example of the superintendent's preoccupation with saving the company money.

The mine captain, then a trainee, was injured underground. A faulty skip was derailed and dragged him for about 50 metres, bumping him against the shaft wall. He lost all his teeth, dislocated his knee and had to have the damaged cartilage removed from the knee. He also injured his back. He had two operations on his knee to strengthen it and had to get a set of dentures fitted. He could no longer play squash, which was particularly painful to him as he was a keen player. The man stated that he was injured on a Saturday but that the accident was only investigated the following Monday. He said he was particularly aggrieved by the fact that the company doctor determined that he had suffered no lasting disability. The company had been insured by a London-based insurer (Lloyds) but in 1984 had changed insurers. The mine captain was then a mining cadet and

was covered by a policy for students which paid a percentage disability for injury. The mine captain said he had not been satisfied with the company doctor's determination and had pursued the issue of compensation with the underground manager. The underground manager was given the same explanation: that the cadet had suffered no lasting disability. The mine captain (then a cadet) was of the opinion that the company had covered up the accident thoroughly. He subsequently personally paid for the shortfalls on the operations and dental expenses that he incurred. He also discovered that he had actually been covered by workmen's compensation but had not been told of this by the company.

The reaction of the company personnel, namely the mine manager and the personnel superintendent, to this incident, and the appointment of a Black underground manager from outside the company, contributed to his decision to leave the company. The mine captain viewed the appointment of an underground manager from outside as a political ruse by the company to frustrate the Blacks inside the company. He was of the opinion that the outside appointee was not competent and that the mine captains who were in the system had to support this man in the performance of his job. The new underground manager had performed an appraisal on this mine captain and his appraisal was negative. The mine captain had successfully contested the appraisal by pointing out how he had taken on mining responsibilities such as planning, ventilation, etc. He said he had successfully negotiated a salary increase with the new underground manager and had pointed out the unfairness of paying him a foreman's salary or, at best, the lowest rate for a mine captain. The mine captain said that when the mine manager was asked to approve his salary increment, he was unhappy because he thought that the mine captain had manipulated the Black underground manager. Thus the mine manager was perceived to have had very little confidence in the Black underground manager's judgement about mining, personnel and related issues.

The mine captain was extremely demoralized by all these events and decided to resign. His formal reason for resignation was that he was going to get married and he wanted to move into an environment in which his wife could get employment. He requested a terminal interview so that he could air all his grievances against the company personnel and their decisions pertaining to work, hiring and other policies. He said he was refused a terminal interview because the personnel staff were quite aware of his dissatisfaction and did not want to avail him of a formal platform for airing his grievances. Thus, the withholding of information regarding his compensation claim, the non-payment of compensation, the appointment of what he perceived to be a 'political' Black who was not competent, all contributed to his decision to leave the company.

The superintendent was perceived by the Blacks who remained in the

company to be furthering the interests of the company at the expense of the workers purely to save company money and to enhance its safety record. The mining company had, prior to the accident, received an adverse report from the Commissioner of Mines because of its poor safety record.

A second geologist related an incident that occurred in the neighbouring communal area during exploration. The geologists drove around in a Landrover and drilled in various locations, some of which were in the peasants' fields. Company policy was to compensate the farmers for any crop, livestock or other losses resulting from its mining and exploration activities. On one occasion the exploration crew was chased from the area by a farmer brandishing an axe because the farmer had felt insulted by the way in which the personnel superintendent had dealt with his claim for compensation for some of his maize that had been flattened by the exploration crew. The personnel superintendent had apparently taken a mine surveyor with him into the communal area in order to measure the width of the mine vehicle tracks, after which he is said to have infuriated the farmer by offering him half a bucket of maize as compensation and telling him that he would not have realized more than the half-bucket anyway since there was a drought that year. The geologist said that, after that incident, he preferred to take a more junior personnel man to negotiate with the farmers because the superintendent was likely to get him killed by the villagers. The more senior Blacks felt that the personnel superintendent had poor public relations with communities outside as well as within the mine.

The superintendent was in a very sensitive position and was constantly expected to tread a fine line in balancing the different interests of the various mine constituencies. On the one hand, he had to prove to his White superiors that he could make decisions without fear or favour. Given the sentiments that had been expressed by the group's general, mining and underground managers and the Black skilled employees, the superintendent was under pressure to be seen to be identifying with his management colleagues. If he was ineffectual, he could be accused by Blacks of being a window-dressing appointment. On the other hand, if he made decisions acceptable to Black workers, his White colleagues would perceive him as being unwilling to make unpopular decisions. His position was aggravated because most of the White employees were on a par with or senior to him in 'hard' operational positions, while personnel was perceived as a 'soft' area in terms of status, career and long-term managerial prospects in corporate life.

As a Black man in the ranks of White colleagues, the personnel superintendent was under fire from both sides. The Blacks expected him to play an advocacy role across class and gender lines in the mine environment and when he sided with his class counterparts of a different race he was



discredited by the majority of the mine community who were predominantly Black. The specific problem that he faced within the ranks of the Black skilled workers was that they did not see him as a potential ally or champion of their interests. He was effectively marooned among the Whites, with whom he could not interact meaningfully in his private space (his home) or in their private space outside the social clubs.

His dilemma is illustrated by some of the initiatives that he tried to take with regard to informing employees about the terms and conditions of all workers in the company so that all workers would have a clear picture of what the lines of command were in routine as well as conflict situations. Early in 1985 he asked the group to produce an employee handbook on personnel policies and conditions of service. His senior in head office was against this move: he did not think it politic to make information about the terms and conditions of senior grades of employee widely available since this 'would lead to endless demands and complaints'.

This case illustrates some of the problems that assail new groups of people who are promoted in isolation from others like them. It is difficult for a newly promoted person to function where he or she does not have a peer group with similar social characteristics. The position of such isolated persons is usually viewed as the result of 'token' appointments and they may actually overcompensate in their exercise of authority as a result of the conflicting pressures brought to bear on them in their everyday working lives.

### CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The study of labour relations at Gold Mine illustrates the fact that mining production relations are not necessarily simple and straightforward or replicable in all contexts. Specific social, economic and political contexts all affect the ways in which work is organized.

After independence the mining company had to adjust its perceptions and operations because of the political changes that had taken place since 1980. The company could not use the techniques of employer dominance that had been supported by the colonial order. Alternative ways, with increased emphases on consent and voluntarism, had to be developed in order to motivate the workers. In the skilled grades it was important to retain workers who were being motivated to move between enterprises because of the shortage of skilled operatives in the economy. At Gold Mine this implied that the frustrations of the Black skilled workers had to be recognized and handled, even if the handling was not always to their satisfaction.

In the relations between management and unskilled workers strategies of work control such as clocks, registers, punch cards and unscheduled checks proved difficult to effect. At Gold Mine workers were going slow,

malinger, insulting bosses, arriving late, leaving early and disobeying the orders of gang leaders and supervisors, particularly in the 1982-5 period. These types of behaviour were extremely taxing to supervisors and managers who sometimes had to do the work that was supposed to be done by their subordinates. Such methods and styles of work organization are in any case quite demanding and management-intensive. They are based on the assumptions of the irresponsibility of labour and deference to management, because managers are supposed to know and direct all the work that has to be done. These assumptions have a way of becoming self-fulfilling, in that they lock both workers and managements into strict roles that do not leave room for flexibility and innovation in the organization and performance of work.

Such assumptions also derived from work environments socially, economically and culturally different from those in Zimbabwe in general and Gold Mine in particular. They ignored issues related to age, ethnicity, race, gender and class and resulted in conflicts that retarded the performance of work. It is necessary for new managerial practices and non-combative ways of enforcing rules and handling disagreements to be devised. The situation at Gold Mine, whereby the supervisors could not relate to workers in order to ensure the desired outcomes in production, is a good example of the fact that hierarchies can operate only if there is consensus about their legitimacy and desirability. In mining communities work and home lives are closely knit. The work of mining is physically demanding and potentially hazardous. Thus workers and their families tend to take a very strong interest in the work and its organization. Moreover, mines have more or less limited lives depending on the quantity and quality of ore reserves and the technologies that are available and affordable to extract the ores. When the ore grades are poor, closure looms large, particularly for unskilled workers. This was the situation at Gold Mine by mid-1990. The workers were apprehensive and likely to react strongly to perceived threats to their livelihoods.

In situations of economic downturn, uncertainty and fear for their jobs tend to dominate workers' thinking. In the current situation of high unemployment in Zimbabwe, labour in general and unskilled workers in particular find it difficult to extract an advantage from capital. Unskilled workers can be replaced easily in a labour-surplus economy, so they tend to stay in their jobs, but they also bring their dissatisfactions to bear on the work and the circumstances of its performance. At Gold Mine those workers from the surrounding communal area were viewed as uncommitted and instrumental in their approach to mine work by the Black supervisors. Immigrant workers, in contrast to their Zimbabwean counterparts, were generally less secure and less combative in their workplace interactions with management. They had fewer options in their immediate environment,

which predisposed them to seek security within rather than outside the mining environment. Thus the motivations of the different types of workers are important in understanding and devising managerial strategies for workplace governance.

Skills differentiation among Black workers was also important. Black supervisory and management personnel were caught in a conflict in which exercising the prerogatives of their social class was difficult because of their racial identity with their Black subordinates in a situation where Blacks were in a majority disadvantaged by lack of those skills related to high status within the workplace. Black skilled workers adopted various strategies to cope with this problem depending on the particular situations in which they were operating. Some identified with their subordinates, thus earning themselves the contempt of their White superiors; others exercised their authority as expected and were accused of 'acting White' by their Black subordinates. The positions and manoeuvres of the skilled Blacks were important, reflecting those specific issues they deemed to be important at different moments.

Within the ranks of the skilled Black workers, differentiation also occurred on the basis of education and career path. The conflict between the two Black contenders for the underground manager's job exemplifies the differences that arise between those skilled workers who have risen through the ranks and have gained practical experience and those who have entered their jobs at high levels because of the degrees and diplomas they acquired locally or overseas, often in high-technology training institutions. The experienced but non-degreed skilled workers are usually perceived as the protégés of the dominant White management, itself usually academically unqualified but practically experienced. At Gold Mine the lower supervisory and semi-skilled ranks were staffed mainly by immigrant workers with long experience on the job but no formal mining qualifications. In situations of conflict such workers were assumed to be aligned with White management because of their common work experience and socialization, which were not necessarily shared by the degreed or skilled Blacks or even by the relatively well-schooled Zimbabwean apprentices.

I hope that the questions and issues raised in this case study may provide a basis for re-examining and re-analysing theories of management, work and work motivation with respect to mineworkers in Zimbabwe.