'WE ARE TAKEN AS SHOVELS, USED AND PUT ASIDE . . . ': ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE ORGANIZATION OF WORK AND WORKERS IN ZIMBABWEAN INDUSTRY IN THE FIRST DECADE OF INDEPENDENCE

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IN 1980 MUCH was expected of Zimbabwe's newly independent government. It had promised, in the party's Election Manifesto, that 'Tomorrow, a ZANU Government will ensure that the economic system is controlled and operated in the interests of the People as a whole' (Zanu[PF], 1980, 8), who would be involved as full participants 'in both the decision-making process, management and control of the industries concerned . . . and in the sharing of benefits in accordance with their contributions of in-puts of labour' (ibid., 4). Of course, read carefully with the benefit of ten years' hindsight, these statements promised only strong central state control over the economy, which was indeed delivered, before new promises were made in 1989 to dismantle its more stifling aspects in order to liberalize trade and rejuvenate the failing economy. But workers and the owners of capital alike may be forgiven for having in 1980 interpreted these electoral promises as implying a greater future involvement of workers in the management of industry.

In fact, very distant from the concept of worker self-management, government's main concern was to redress colonial racism, which had overlaid the racial difference between Black and White on the divide (which some would call a 'class divide') between workers and management. Existing hierarchies of top-down managerial control, inherited from the colonial past, have not been questioned as Blacks have taken the reins of management in both public and private sectors. If anything, new Black managers have tended to widen the already large gap between management and workers in ways that the newly introduced workers' committees have been powerless to control, even given their participation in works councils. The declines in output and worker productivity experienced by many industrial firms after Independence, including the two considered in this paper, perhaps reflect the workers' growing disenchantment with the new 'managerial class' as distinct from the old 'managerial race'.

From the perspectives of different categories of employee, this article examines work and its organization in independent Zimbabwe, drawing on

research carried out at two separate enterprises at two different times (1982–3 and 1989–90). I have given both firms pseudonyms: 'Zimtex' is a textile factory and 'Zimcor' a heavy industrial enterprise. Both invited me to investigate what their managements perceived to be organizational problems. Zimtex thought that its workers were taking excessive sick leave with the connivance of local health officials. Zimcor asked me to investigate 'why the workers won't work and the managers won't manage'. I agreed to both requests on the conditions that I would define both problems within the wider context of company organization, that I would be free to use whatever techniques of investigation I deemed appropriate, and that I would have free access to both the shop-floor and company records and meetings. In both companies I used standard anthropological methods of investigation: direct observation and participation where possible (though not infrequently this meant that I had to disentangle myself from attempts to involve me, as a neutral referee, in the resolution of disputes, for example in disciplinary meetings, over what, exactly, had been said). Unstructured, in-depth interviewing of individuals in their workplaces, plus group discussions among different categories of employee, supplemented my own observations of work and social interaction.

The two companies investigated are not really comparable. Though both are large employers, the primary industrial producer, which was still experiencing a decline in production at the end of the decade, was ten times larger than the textile firm, which had by then overcome its crisis of the early 1980s (described in Cheater, 1986 and 1988). Their ownership, too, is very different: Zimcor has a majority shareholding by the state and minority shares held mainly by multinational corporations, while Zimtex is owned mainly by individual local and overseas investors through its listing on the Zimbabwe Stock Exchange (Cheater, 1986, 5–7). While Zimcor is still is constrained in its profitability by state-controlled prices and the necessity to export through a parastatal, Zimtex has successfully exploited its freedom to explore export markets independently and to negotiate sales in the domestic market without price constraints. Yet, despite their differences, the views of workers in these two enterprises showed some remarkable structural similarities which I shall explore and attempt to explain here.

In order to do so, it is necessary to consider the two workplaces, each with its multiple productive units, within the context of the organizational interfaces among workers, management and the state or government (see Cheater, 1986, chs. 7 and 8). In examining these interfaces, it is also necessary to bear in mind that, although enterprises have formal rules by which they are organized, each also has an 'informal structure' of personal relationships linking role incumbents (Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939; Blau, 1964). Within such informal, personal relationships, workplace issues

are actually negotiated among those differentially placed in the work hierarchy. Workplaces are, therefore, sites of micro-political struggles concerning production: they are not places in which rules are simply enforced without resistance. 'Management' is one description of this process of negotiation in which, if it is successful, labour, raw materials and other resources are combined to yield a new, marketable product. But such negotiations are also influenced, if not 'managed', by those who contribute their labour to the production process. They can go slow, refuse to work overtime, sabotage equipment or use delaying tactics in meetings. While they do not have the formal authority vested in management, workers do have informal power over the production process. Management tactics that treat workers as 'shovels', to be used and then put aside, are therefore generally unsuccessful. Rules alone are insufficient: they have to be supplemented by effective personal interaction.

BUREAUCRATIC RULE AND ITS EFFECTS IN THE WORKPLACE

As I have argued elsewhere (Cheater, in press), the new Zimbabwean government appears to have regarded bureaucratic theory as the solution to its problem of how to de-racialize the economy in a fair and equitable manner. The legal authority of an impersonal bureaucracy, as described by Weber (1947, 329, 341), is based on rationally-agreed rules laid down in writing, which are applied consistently by officials within clearly-defined, specialized spheres of competence. These offices are ranked in a hierarchy of supervision, and their incumbents, who are responsible to the system of rules and appointed on the basis of their technical qualifications, are remunerated at standard, defined rates. Officials have no personal claim on the resources of the offices they hold. Offices are not 'appropriated' by their incumbents. In theory, then, and leaving aside the problem of 'red tape', a system of bureaucratic rules and offices, irrespective of the individuals who apply or hold them, should guarantee equity of treatment among Black and White Zimbabweans. Rules of recruitment and promotion should treat all equally on the basis of their qualifications. With the exception of subsidiaries of transnational corporations, however, industrial workplaces in colonial Rhodesia were generally not bureaucratized. Formal recording procedures that might have been expected to be part of a large work organization, as I have described for Zimtex (Cheater, 1986, 105), tended to emerge as a result of quarrels among interdependent individual managers over the availability of resources necessary to ensure production in their own sections. Only after Independence did the ethos of bureaucracy become widespread as government legalized new rules of procedure, insisting, for example, on the formal recording of wages paid and received even among domestic

workers, as well as instituting new procedures for dismissal which now require government approval in each individual case.

It should be noted that the effects of bureaucratization, which are perceived by the workers and managers themselves to have a negative impact on their work motivation, have resulted at least in part from this external imposition of a new system of work rules. However, where those concerned have instituted the rules themselves to protect themselves against their colleagues, bureaucracy has grown 'from below' without the same threatening impact.

Prior to Independence, workers, as well as management, generally possessed experience rather than formal qualifications. Those workers who had proved themselves on the job and had been promoted into line management as supervisors and junior managers were often very poorly educated and totally 'unqualified' in bureaucratic terms (see, for example, Cheater, 1986, 58–63). Their on-the-job skills, specific to particular enterprises, were acquired over extended service with a single company and were not easily transferable. This type of skill acquisition, then, locked them — usually voluntarily — into loyalty to their individual firms and (as Kapferer (1972) has also noted of this type of employee) into a commitment to resolving problems in that organization over the long term, rather than facilitating their move to another firm. In the new bureaucratized order, however, their informal, uncertificated skills have been severely undermined by the emphasis on formal qualifications and the discounting of experience.

There is, of course, a problem of quantifying and comparing the on-the-job experience possessed by most employees before Zimbabwean industry was bureaucratized. At Independence managerial experience in particular was held mainly by Whites and for that reason was especially problematic. Therefore, those in favour of a bureaucratic solution to Zimbabwe's racial imbalances can argue that 'twenty years' experience' is not actually the experience of twenty years but, rather, 'one year's experience repeated twenty times' where a person has done the same job for all of that time. Such arguments, if upheld, terminate the further promotion prospects of employees with experience only.

The discounting of experience in the new bureaucratic order has not only been especially detrimental to unqualified, unskilled workers, but also to those with practical qualifications. For example, over the past decade many jobs have been regraded, particularly in large organizations adopting a simplified grading system such as the Paterson Method. Such regrading is done, in the language of management, to 'rationalize' minute 'discrepancies' of relative skill and status which actually mean a very great deal to a formally unskilled workforce. In some large enterprises the loss of job status has led to considerable disaffection among workers and

has contributed to declining productivity. Workers have been demotivated by a bureaucratization which they do not understand except in its negative impact on their own systems of ranking themselves. It was precisely in the context of re-grading within the Paterson Method that a worker who had had his job down-graded made the remark that I have used in the title of this paper: 'We are taken as shovels, used and put aside . . . working without a job title. Even road sweepers have a job title.' And in the same context, another worker noted that 'deprived one can be very annoyed and go off disgruntling'! The workers' problem is that they do not have the necessary education, or often even the skills of literacy and numeracy, to be able to understand or manipulate a bureaucratized workplace. Bureaucratization has increased their disadvantaged position at work, and workers' representatives who have understood the source of this disadvantage have pin-pointed it very precisely in their resolve 'to fight this evil *written down* to the workers' (my emphasis).

The bureaucratization of recruitment is worth specific mention here in the context of unskilled as well as skilled and managerial jobs. Colonial systems of hiring at the company gate men recommended by supervisors or existing workers was anathema to the new government, which insisted on formal hiring, wherever possible through a labour exchange which keeps a waiting list of job applicants. As I have pointed out in the case of Zimtex (Cheater, 1986, 43–4), unskilled workers have a different view. Their view is a result of the past mode of recruitment, which attracted, from a limited number of chiefdoms and villages, numerous chains of related migrants (shown in detail for Zimtex in Cheater, 1986, 43–58). At Zimtex, these migrants, over 40 per cent of whom came from beyond Zimbabwe's borders, settled in the company village, married (often locals), and produced families which had very little contact with their fathers' rural homes. For these 'urbanized' offspring of proletarians, their subsistence depended not on access to rural land but on gaining employment. Zimtex's workers therefore regarded their offspring, kin and friends as having a moral entitlement to employment in their company which should take priority over all claims to employment by outsiders. They saw Zimtex not as an impersonal bureaucracy but as a 'moral community', whose members had obligations to, as well as rights over, one another. Although I did not gather comparable data from Zimcor (which also had a company housing estate) concerning its workers' origins, they, too, regarded their kin as having a moral entitlement to employment with their company. Yet the preferential employment of kin is part of an existing 'corporate culture' which bureaucratization seeks to eliminate.

Those with formal qualifications of a practical rather than a theoretical type have also been disadvantaged in recruitment and especially promotion by the rigid ranking of qualifications. A degree, for example, outranks a

Higher National Diploma in engineering, so even if the HND-holder is more competent as a result of his longer experience on the job than the degreed engineer, the latter is likely to leapfrog the former through promotion. And, while workers generally do not comprehend the new bureaucratic requirements, managers, Black and White alike, who are experienced on the job, are scathing about the real value to production and output of highly-ranked formal qualifications, especially when they are not accompanied by experience, since their holders often prove, if not incompetent, at least very slow on the job for an extended period of time while they gain practical experience. Perhaps the last weapon available to those who defend personal experience against formal qualifications is ridicule: 'They will want degree people even in the mill here — to pick up the scrap!'

Executive managers who favour the bureaucratization strategy, rightly note the threat to the continuity of the management of an enterprise that is inherent in the experience of individuals: 'What happens when you are no longer here? We must write it down. We must create a company history of procedures, so that the company can continue.' For immobile workers who assume that they will be with a company for life and will be succeeded by their children and grandchildren as company workers, there is, of course, no such problem. Their personal expertise will be available on request, even after retirement in the locality. But the bureaucratization strategy assumes that people will move from one job to another.

Indeed, the emphasis on formal qualifications and discounting of on-the-job experience are designed precisely to ease job mobility among the formally well-qualified rather than to promote loyalty to an individual firm over a long time. This point is absolutely apparent when one looks at figures for length of service among different categories of employee: the average length of service was 8,9 and 13,5 years in the two companies studied but, in both cases, managerial and administrative staff had served their respective companies less than half of these average times. Yet they sought to impose their bureaucratic view of ephemeral work commitment on those whose cosmology of work included lifelong service.

Lifelong service also represents a form of job security which seemed, at least at Zimtex, to be predicated on the distances from which workers had migrated to the company. Perhaps because they had come so far, these workers' visits home were few and irregular. They seemed disinclined to change jobs when the security of home was so far away. This attitude predisposed towards a stable workforce with little turnover but, together with their acquisition of company-specific skills referred to earlier, it also exposed workers to grave threats when their companies went through lean times and had to retrench the older, infirm, long-serving employees no longer capable of doing heavy manual labour (see Cheater, 1986, 135).

There is yet another way in which workers are disadvantaged by

bureaucratic work organization: in the distribution of rewards accruing from the value of their labour. The bureaucratization of managerial know-how requires, at least initially, a considerable expansion of administrative staff to produce and apply the written rules required. Administrative and managerial jobs carry high salaries and many perks, yet these are not productive offices in an industrial enterprise and must, therefore, be paid for from the value of workers' labour realized in the sale of output. If workers are sometimes hazy about the precise mechanism by which this transfer of value is effected from themselves to others, they have no difficulty in understanding the principle when their own transport services are cut to save money while managers simultaneously receive new cars, as had actually happened in the larger of the two companies I studied. And they are well capable of arguing (as at Zimtex: Cheater, 1986, 135) that workers' jobs and wages may be preserved by the withdrawal of expensive perks from management.

As administrative management has been expanded in the bureau-cratization of work, one result has been the shifting upward of respons-ibility. Trivia like leave and overtime forms, once the responsibility of supervisors, gravitate up the management hierarchy. Higher-level managers, burdened by the new paperwork, abandon their shop-floors to attend meetings and sign papers, and things start going wrong more frequently. The new rules, for example concerning dispute settlement, remove disciplinary authority from individuals and vest it in committees. Feeling themselves under threat, individuals gradually withdraw from their remaining responsibilities while complaining that the new bureaucratic systems do not allow managers to manage or supervisors to supervise. Finally, decisions which should properly be taken by management are put before the Board of Directors, who complain about having to perform managerial functions. Meanwhile, those lower-level managers who have lost their responsibilities regard themselves as no longer trusted to perform the jobs for which they were hired. Indeed, their jobs may be formally redefined as the hierarchy is expanded to create new administrative jobs.

THE COMMUNICATION OF INFORMATION IN THE NEW HIERARCHY

As the new hierarchy expands, communications are, paradoxically, restricted to single channels. No longer do junior managers have direct access through an 'open-door' policy or by accidental meetings in the works to those more than one level above them in the hierarchy. They no longer control the information fed upward from their own level but they are in a position to remove or alter the content flowing upward from their subordinates and, sometimes, that coming down from superiors. Control

over the content of information substitutes for control over its direction. Information is thus more easily politicized as a tool to create relations of patronage over subordinates — which contradicts the theoretical intent of bureaucratization — as this 'gate-keeping' function has been slipped into formal offices to the advantage of individual incumbents.

Where official communications have been 'streamlined' in this way, one would none the less expect that information would be exchanged informally through the social networks of individual managers and workers. While this certainly happens among workers, since Independence it has tended to happen less and less among managers. Some firms, like Zimtex (Cheater, 1986), underwent their managerial revolutions around this time, as the founding age-cohort of managers retired simultaneously and were replaced by strangers who tended not to socialize with one another after work. White managers resigned from larger enterprises, like the heavy industry studied, and were replaced by Blacks who tended not to be absorbed into the existing managerial social networks as friends nor to remain very long in any given job before moving on to better prospects. Nor, it would appear, did the job competition among upwardly-mobile Blacks permit the creation of even temporary new social networks among Black managers. Instead, competitive suspicion resulted in small cliques of temporary allies exchanging gossip (usually detrimental to the interests of 'the opposition') in local pubs.

In addition to the formal communications flowing up and down the supervisory hierarchy of the enterprise itself, other organizations also act as channels of communication. In the past, the trade unions, through their shop stewards, have handled grievances over pay and other matters. Since Independence some union functions (especially those dealing with shop-floor grievances) have been taken over by the workers' committees. For this and other reasons the relationship between workers' committees and unions in most workplaces, including both of those I studied, has been one of considerable suspicion. Some enterprises, like the heavy industry studied, refuse to recognize any other associations of workers (such as supervisors' or secretaries' associations) which could potentially act as channels of communication, and insist that all issues be handled through the workers' committees (as does the state's Department of Labour Relations: see Cheater, 1986, 130). Such bureaucratization of communication has been enormously frustrating to workers with interests different from those of the mainstream which they can no longer communicate to management.

Moreover, the state has required a single organization (the workers' committee) to validate communications not only between workers and management but also between management and the state — for example, in signing applications for retrenchment. This bureaucratization of com-

munication channels may simplify the state's tasks but, as I have indicated elsewhere (Cheater, 1986, 130), it has imposed on these new and poorly-trained committees an additional impediment to their ability to function as 'workers' representatives'. In addition to their new intercalary role *vis-à-vis* management, they are required to line up with management against the workers if the enterprise is get what it wants from the state — notably the right to fire workers. Members of workers' committees thus run the risk of being categorized as *vatengesi* (sell-outs) as a consequence of performing the communications role that they are required by the state to fulfil.

INTERCALARY AND OTHER UNCOMFORTABLE WORK ROLES

In all representational systems some roles are 'caught in the middle' of two conflicting sets of expectations which arise from the brokerage function of these roles. Classically, in those parts of Africa colonized by the British, this intercalary 'squeeze' affected indigenous chiefs and headmen (Gluckman and Barnes, 1949) who simultaneously represented the interests of their people to the colonizers and acted as the lowest-ranking administrators of the new state system. In industry supervisors occupy a similarly uncomfortable position, being caught between the workers they supervise in particular work units spatially separated from others and the management whose lowest rank they are. 'Workers think that when it suits us we join management and when it suits us we join workers.' Executive directors may be similarly squeezed between the interests of the employees of the enterprise they manage and the Board of Directors representing the interests of its owners (see Cheater, 1986, ch. 5). The workers' committees, because they are required to support management views in relations between the enterprise and the state and because they are constituted as the only legitimate channel of communication between workers and management, have also been caught more and more in an intercalary squeeze, which may not have been intended but certainly could — and should — have been predicted from the structural principles involved.

Towards the end of the colonial period in Zimbabwe, many Black workers were promoted to supervisory posts vacated by emigrating Whites. In the mid-1970s, as I have described elsewhere in detail (Cheater, 1986, ch. 5), Zimtex's executive management promoted Black supervisors without informing the Board of Directors (presumably because it feared their opposition to these promotions) and without clarifying the management status of the new Black appointees. Black supervisors were an anomaly within the Zimtex system because, in the past, Blacks had always been workers and supervisors had always been White. The responsibilities of the new Black supervisors' jobs were never spelt out and the conditions under which they worked (including their pay, which was much lower

than that of the Whites whom they replaced) suggested that they were
seen by the company primarily as Blacks rather than as supervisors. For
five or six years this anomaly continued until the Black supervisors went
on a four-day strike late in 1981. They were summarily dismissed and lost
two days' pay but were immediately reinstated in their jobs without
interruption to their continuity of employment and the company finally
publicized their position and status as part of management in a formal
notice to the entire works.

Clearly, this example is precisely the reverse of the 'window-dressing'
Black appointments so often complained of after Independence, when Blacks
were hired to positions with good pay and high status but few productive
responsibilities. Yet one of the post-Independence managerial complaints is
that Black supervisors will not exercise the responsibilities of their position,
which complaint has also been used as an excuse for the relocation of these
responsibilities to a higher level in the managerial hierarchy. White managers
in the heavy industry I investigated believed Black supervisors to be corrupted
by the extended family system and reluctant to exercise work authority over
kinsmen. Black managers noted that the localized training for supervisors
was not of the same quality or standard as the overseas courses used before
Independence. The supervisors themselves said: 'Supervisors can't discipline
anyone. When the workers' committee get up in arms, management are
afraid to make decisions and stand on your side', a view with which some
managers themselves concurred.

Supervisors (of all races) were also acutely aware of the importance
of personal, face-to-face relations on the shop-floor. When a supervisor
requires extra labour to finish an urgent job, he cannot order workers to
work overtime, for that is not part of their contractual obligations to the
company. He must persuade them to give up part of the leisure which is
the company's contractual obligation to its employees. For a 'good man',
workers will oblige; but for a 'hard supervisor', who has refused their earlier
requests for leave at a specific time or other 'favours', workers may refuse an
overtime request, and jeopardize specific contracts. The more disorganized
and inefficient a company is, the greater will be the demands on its supervisors
in this area of work negotiations. If increasing bureaucratic rigidity in the
application of company rules removes their freedom to negotiate, supervisors
cannot supervise work effectively: and 'if we can't supervise effectively,
we're useless'. At both the companies studied, the Black supervisors used
their personal knowledge of workers' private lives in such work negotiations
and regarded living in the same company township as a useful source of
such personal information. Workers feared that their supervisors would
transmit such information further up the management hierarchy.

One of the functions of brokers is, of course, to communicate, but
supervisors were particularly incensed (because it impaired their

negotiating ability on other matters) at always being required to break bad news to their workers (about job regrading, for example, or the loss of benefits and perks). At Zimtex, there was no personnel department to handle such issues, but at Zimcor the supervisors felt that their personnel section was evading its newly defined bureaucratic responsibilities in this respect to the detriment of supervision generally.

WORKER–MANAGEMENT RELATIONS

At both workplaces studied executive management regarded their enter-prises' difficulties as resulting from the failure of the workers in their over-manned organizations to do a decent day's work. I witnessed, in works council meetings in both workplaces, executive managers argue that small perks recently withdrawn from the workforce could possibly be restored only if output rose. These small, non-taxable perks — in the poorly-paid workers' view, 'small things [which] matter most' — were the colonial 'in-kind' insulation against low wages, and ranged from food rations through company transport to sub-standard company products. They have become even more important in the late 1980s as inflation has completely eroded the workers' earlier nominal increases in wages, which have, of course, also exposed them to direct taxation from which they were formerly shielded. While executive management removed perks from wage workers, they regarded managerial perks as contractually guaranteed, defensible in law and, therefore, not to be tampered with. In contrast, workers who had invested much of their working lives in these moral communities for which they produced, argued that, at least with respect to entitlements to (differentiated) perks, '*tose we are equal, management nevashandi*' ('we are all equal, management and workers').

The executive view that idleness among the workers was responsible for falling output was disputed, in both companies studied, by middle management, who were largely responsible for the manning levels. In both companies, middle management acknowledged severe managerial deficiencies, going right to the top of their organizations, and were much less inclined to blame workers than management for the crises of their companies. Bureaucratized 'management by committee' and particularly collectivized disciplinary action, they felt, were the prime internal causes of declining output — shortages of foreign currency, spares and raw materials being the most important external constraints, over which firms continue to have little control. Those middle managers whose stinginess in the allocation of the productive resources under their own control paralleled that of their Boards (see, for an example, Cheater, 1986, 105–7) tended also to be the most critical of their own workers.

Middle managers were generally regarded by workers as more

reasonable than 'them up there' — the newly bureaucratized executive management, rarely if ever seen on the shop-floor. In part, even when individual managers were personally disliked, this view stemmed from their face-to-face relationships with workers, their experience and ability to sort out technical problems on their shop-floors, and their willingness to experiment with work organization in ways that were financially beneficial to their workers even though they violated bureaucratic requirements (see, for a Zimtex example, Cheater, 1986, 113–4). Middle managers also defended their workers against the rest of the enterprise, objecting, for example, to changing production runs in ways that disadvantaged their workers' capacity to earn bonus wages, even if those run changes were in the company's short-term interests. Like supervisors, middle management also had to negotiate with their workers if their departments or divisions were to run smoothly.

This negotiation often involved managers in paternalistic relations (reminiscent of the colonial period and anathema to the new bureaucratic order) which were articulated by workers in ways designed to emphasize managerial obligations to themselves, often using the idiom of kinship. Whereas in the colonial past White managers had accepted this role without much difficulty, post-Independence bureaucratization now provided a rationale for those who wished to evade such obligations: 'I am *not* your "father", much less your mother, and it's not my business. Times have changed, you know; we live in Zimbabwe now!'

Black managers and supervisors in independent Zimbabwe were more likely than their White peers to respond to such pleas to exercise paternalism. But Black managers also, paradoxically, tended to be more bureaucratic in the ways in which they exercised their managerial functions. The result of this paradox was the growth of patron–client relations within bureaucratic structures, together with a heightening of workers' perceptions of their conflicts with management as a class of patrons who today treat workers as bureaucratized objects ('shovels', or 'pens') rather than as human beings with individual needs and wants.

Nowhere was this conflict more apparent in the companies I studied than in symbolic aspects of the worker–management relationship, which symbolism the new bureaucratic managers (and some of the older ones, too) regarded as 'petty'. The provision of refreshments to those working in hot and humid environments; on-duty celebrations when a shift broke a production record; the knowledge of workers' personal names and the observation of basic politesse; the failure to offer subordinates a chair when discussing production issues in managers' offices; insanitary toilet facilities; the managerial insistence that workers queue in a straight line to receive their pay; the workers' (lack of) access to telephone messages; their entitlement to and use of soap, mutton-cloth and protective clothing

— all of these issues recurred again and again on the agendas of the companies' works councils' meetings, much to their managements' frustration. But, as the workers pointed out when this managerial frustration was verbalized, the reason why they remained on the agendas was management's failure to resolve these issues to the satisfaction of the workers. 'You expect the demoralized worker to come begging on his knees' for the restoration of minor privileges removed to penalize falling production. 'If you want a big tree to grow, water the roots, those small things that collect nourishment' among workers concerned with their own status within a productive organization.

Status is recognized as being important to management, where it is reflected in differentials of pay, the type and quality of fringe benefits, the size and furnishings of office accommodation, and access to certain exclusive company facilities (the Boardroom, sporting facilities, on-site parking, etc.). Managers report themselves to be very status-conscious. Managerial committees, for example, prefer to keep company housing empty rather than allow occupancy by ranks not entitled to that grade of housing, which preference is often specified in the bureaucratic rules governing housing allocation; and executive salaries are usually kept secret even from the personnel and data processing departments responsible for paying wages and salaries. At company social occasions (as I have described elsewhere: Cheater, 1986, 103) distinctions of rank within the work organization are translated into spatially-discrete groupings of similarly-ranked employees. Yet enterprise management appears singularly ignorant of the importance of status gradations among unskilled and semi-skilled workers.

When differences of earned income are reduced, even to zero, other indicators of relative status within a large organization become more, not less, significant to those workers who, because their 'concerns are so frequently focused on simple survival and subsistence', fail to be 'suitably worthy or valuable' in the eyes of management (Cheater, 1986, 138). In China, for example, where unskilled manual road-workers used to earn the same as health clinic attendants, the latter job was seen as infinitely preferable for its working environment, relative ease and cleanliness. Clinic attendants consequently enjoyed a much higher job status than road-workers, and much corruption was involved in individuals obtaining their allocation by the state bureaucracy to such jobs for which 'back-door connections' (through kinship, friendship and the party) were essential.

Among impoverished Zimbabwean workers, status inheres in *permanent* employment in a designated, stable job with a clear title, not merely an impersonal pay scale shared with hundreds if not thousands of others in a large bureaucracy. Jobs which permit access via skills

acquisition to a 'labour market' or ladder of promotion internal to the organization, are particularly prized, and may rank higher in the workers' estimation than their formal value to the organization (Cheater, 1986, 58–63). 'Front-line' production workers (such as weavers in a textile factory), on whose labour (cloth) output is critically dependent, enjoy a special status among their fellow workers.

The corollary of workers' rankings of their own importance to an enterprise is that threats to their systems of ranking themselves have a particularly demoralizing effect on the organization as a whole. Re-grading exercises, especially if they are undertaken regularly, are the equivalent of 'permanent revolution' and undermine the entire foundation on which workers construct their own hierarchical reality in the workplace. Likewise, demotion as a disciplinary measure is a total threat to a worker's self-esteem, since it forces him to re-rank himself relative to former subordinates of lesser status. Some workers prefer dismissal to such a reversal of status and loss of face. Indeed, in one of the firms investigated, a worker demoted for a year and whose resignation was refused on technical bureaucratic grounds, repeated his original offence in order to be fired: dismissal was, for him, the only release from an even more unacceptable loss of status within the workplace. Some managers thought him mad, assuming that his responsibility to his family had to outweigh his own self-image. But while family responsibilities and subsistence do undoubtedly loom large as a mechanism by which the majority of workers may be controlled, the actions of those who are not prepared to accept this definition of their own unworthiness as human beings or to be held to ransom by their dependants' subsistence requirements show with great clarity the importance of status to ordinary workers.

Workers' ranking of themselves is also affected by bonus systems, particularly where some workers and managers earn their bonuses on the basis of productive work by others. These 'others' may be workers in other units, as when service staff, including administration, are paid a 'general bonus' based on the averages of all production units, or, in the case of managers who are paid bonuses not on the quality and efficiency of their own performance of managerial tasks but on the output from their unit, these 'others' may be workers in their own units. Having others 'riding on our backs' in a bonus system, may cause those workers affected to diminish their own work input, to ensure that the others do not earn a bonus which, via increased income, may enhance their status relative to those on whom the bonus-earning capacity depends. As I have pointed out in my study of Zimtex (Cheater, 1986, 66), resentment of what is perceived as an unfair distribution of bonus pay may well 'drag output down to a level that threaten[s] the Company's financial viability' as workers devise strategies to defend their own status in the organization 'as a series of

worker-production units defending their own interests against other, similar units'. If, under such circumstances, a firm was to go bankrupt, it would be at least as much the fault of management for not understanding that the source of the problem lies within the social relations of the 'informal enterprise' as the fault of workers for withdrawing their labour because their position has not been understood.

CONCLUSION

In this article I have approached the organization of work and workers in Zimbabwean enterprises 'from within' and 'from below', concentrating on the relationships between social interaction in the workplace and the effective organization of labour. Such an approach emphasizes the importance of symbolic as well as social elements in the ways in which production is effected. It is an approach uncongenial to organizational and bureaucratic theories which play down the significance of human and social considerations. Yet any investigation of work, in Zimbabwe or elsewhere, that fails to take account of the fact that 'workers, too, are human', will *pari passu* offer an incomplete analysis of the social processes that enable workplaces to produce at all.

Indeed, many Zimbabwean firms have, since Independence, experienced declines in output and worker productivity. Some elements of capital and its management have attributed these declines to 'over-protective' legislation, which first defined minimum wages and then imposed piecemeal controls on hiring, firing and worker representation in decision-making. Later these provisions were consolidated into the Labour Relations Act, which was criticized even in its draft form, by labour and capital alike, for concentrating bureaucratic authority over the workplace in the hands of the state and government. This legislation has affected production detrimentally, but perhaps not primarily as a result of concentrating authority in the hands of state bureaucrats who make decisions very slowly. Instead, I would argue, the failure of this labour legislation is rooted much deeper: in its organizational unacceptability to both management and workers involved in *social* relations of production on the shop-floor.