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The political potential of Ghanaian miners : a case study of the AGC workers at Obuasi

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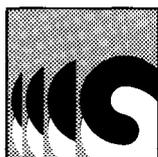
The political potential of Ghanaian miners

Piet Konings

A case study of the AGC workers
at Obuasi

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THE POLITICAL POTENTIAL OF

GHANAIAN MINERS

A case study of the AGC workers
at Obuasi

Piet Konings
Afrika-Studiecentrum
Leiden. 1979

| | <u>Page</u> |
|-----------|---|
| 4.3.2. | The national union's moderate economic strategy: its perception by the local branch of the AGC 79 |
| 4.3.2.1. | Strike action: its perception by the local branch of the AGC 80 |
| 4.3.2.2. | The strike history of the AGC workers 83 |
| 4.3.3. | National union leadership compared with local branch leadership: its perception by the local branch of the AGC 93 |
| Chapter V | Conclusion 104 |
| | Selected Bibliography |

TABLES

- 1 Ghana's exports
- 3 Population of Obuasi
- 4 Population of Obuasi in 1970
- 5 Occupational structure in Obuasi
- 6 Mines: general statistics, 1900-70
- 7 Socio-demographic characteristics of the AGC workers
- 8 Workers' Origins in the mining industry around 1940
- 9 Miners' Occupational background
- 10 The AGC workers' job preferences for themselves and their children
- 11 Jobs and job satisfaction for AGC workers
- 12 AGC workers' income
- 13 Consumer price index (CPI) and indices of average nominal and real earnings of skilled and unskilled workers (1964-74)
- 14 The lowest and highest rates in the Public Service in Ghana
- 15 The AGC worker's household
- 16 Help given by miners to rural kin in a single month
- 17 Owing money to somebody or to a specific institution
- 18 Miners and membership in voluntary associations
- 19 Improvements after ten years
- 20 What kind of things (other than money) do workers want
- 21 Self-management of factories
- 22 Who should own the large foreign companies, banks, etc.
- 23 Miners' perception of their present position in Ghanaian society
- 24 To what factors do you attribute your satisfaction with your present position in place of residence and Ghanaian society
- 25 Privileged social groups in Ghanaian society
- 26 Underprivileged social groups in Ghanaian society
- 27 Who profits from the development policy of the NRC?
- 28 Names of poor workers' friends
- 29 what should the government do to improve living conditions?
- 30 Matters discussed at union meetings

IV

- 31 What should unions do for the workers?
- 32 The union's political role
- 33 Should unions have more voice or power in the government?
- 34 Were recent strikes in Ghana justified?
- 35 When are strikes justified?
- 36 Miners and strike action
- 37 Other means than strikes to improve workers' conditions
- 38 Strikes in Ghana by sector
- 39 Percentage of strikes by industries based on the total man-days lost in each year (1966-72) in Ghana
- 40 Familiarity with names of TUC-leaders
- 41 Familiarity with names of local branch leaders
- 42 Are local branch officers more interested in gaining power or money than serving the workers' interests?
- 43 Union leadership qualities

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During my fieldwork in Ghana in 1975 I received invaluable help from the University of Ghana, The Ghana National Archives and the Ghana Trades Union Congress. I remember with gratitude the long discussions and interviews I had with various miners and local union leaders at Obuasi, and national union leaders at Tarkwa, who were quite willing to share their experiences with me. I received much stimulating advice from my friends, Patrick Twumasi, Eboe Hutchful and Ema Hansen, lecturers at the University of Ghana; Jack Arn of the University of Toronto who is studying the "labouring poor" in Greater Accra; and Thomas Bediako, deputy-secretary-general of the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT).

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It is my hope that this study may contribute to our sparse knowledge about the political consciousness and action of African miners in general, and Ghanaian miners in particular.

INTRODUCTION

The political consciousness of workers in large-scale foreign and state enterprises has been a subject of a lively debate in Africa. Political consciousness refers here to the workers' perception of their (objective) class position in a neo-colonial society. Do workers accept their class position in such a society, or do they reject it and strive for radical or revolutionary change in the neo-colonial society?

The debate was opened by Giovanni Arrighi and John Saul, two marxists who opposed the traditional communist view that workers in Africa constituted an "exploited" class, and were likely to develop a revolutionary class consciousness and lead the struggle against neo-colonial regimes. (1) Arrighi and Saul argued against this idea much as Fanon (2) and various other modernization theorists (3) did. They viewed the workers, and in particular semi-skilled and skilled workers in the employ of large-scale foreign and state enterprises as constituting a privileged class, a "labour aristocracy", divorced from the really exploited classes in the neo-colonial society, the lumpenproletariat and the peasantry, and in league with the elite and sub-elite in upholding the neo-colonial status quo. (4)

Arrighi and Saul's labour aristocracy thesis has been criticized on theoretical and empirical grounds by various authors. (5) In his study about workers in large-scale foreign enterprises in Nigeria, Peace stresses the various factors that make workers identify "downwards" with the urban and rural poor; he asserts the existence of a "populist consciousness" among workers and other sections of the urban poor, and attempts to demonstrate that the workers ("the political elite"), because of their higher educational level and organisational potential, play a leading role among the urban poor in the struggle against an inegalitarian status quo. (6) The existence of a vague populist consciousness among urban workers - the urban poor versus the exploitative and oppressive rich and powerful ("the big men") - was supported by Jeffries with regard to workers in the railways, a large-scale Ghanaian state enterprise. (7)

In a very recent study about the "labouring poor" in Greater Accra, Sandbrook and Arn suggest that the relatively well educated workers in large-scale foreign and state enterprises are more likely to develop an incipient "working-class consciousness" than other

sections of the "labouring poor", such as workers in small enterprises, artisans and craftsmen, who are more likely to have a populist consciousness. They write:

"...Although a populist perspective is common among the Ghanaian poor, a working-class consciousness occurs more rarely.... In Ashaiman, a significant number of industrial workers not only blame the deprivation they feel upon an unjust politico-economic system, ... but also employ explicit class-based categories to interpret reality and justify illegal strike actions ... But these working-class images have arisen only in a situation where relatively well-educated industrial workers from large establishments dominate, numerically and economically, an isolated town in which a nominally christian, though essential secular, culture envelops the majority. This is an unusual confluence of circumstances, perhaps only duplicated in Ghana among the skilled railway workers of Takoradi and the Tarkwa gold miners". (8)

The question remains: what is the political consciousness and action of Ghanaian workers in large-scale foreign and state enterprises? This study tries to answer this on the basis of a sample of workers in a multinational in Ghana, the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation (AGC) at Obuasi. This enterprise represents one of the richest goldmines in the world, and is a vital industry in the Ghanaian political economy; it has been affected by a degree of nationalization since 1972 as part of the present military government's policy of "capturing the commanding heights of the economy".

The study is based on fieldwork undertaken in Ghana in 1975. A 10% random sample was drawn from AGC-workers in two mining quarters at Obuasi, making for 133 structured interviews of various skill levels. Moreover, I discussed various problems with local branch leaders of the Ghana Mine-workers' Union and AGC managers, attended local trade union meetings, and organised meetings with groups of workers. The results of my research will be presented as follows:

- (1) First, we shall provide readers with a concise historical outline of the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation and sketch its position in the Ghanaian political economy.
- (2) Second, we shall give a description of the town of Obuasi, in which the mine is located and in which the majority of the miners live. Remy like Sandbrook and Arn, emphasized that workers' attitudes and behaviour are strongly influenced by the type of industry in which they are employed and by the nature of the wider environment in which they live: "the presence or absence of a supportive proletarian

community and of alternatives to industrial employment shape both the relation of individual workers to their employer and the amount of community support workers can expect during industrial disputes".(9)

- (3) Third, we shall make an analysis of the AGC proletariat: its historical development, its present socio-demographic characteristics, its job securement and job satisfaction, its standard of living, and its political consciousness.
- (4) Fourth, we shall indicate the impact of trade unionism on workers' political consciousness and action.
- (5) And finally we shall draw some conclusions from this information.

NOTES

- (1) For the traditional communist view, see for example Woddis, J., New Theories of Revolution, London, 1972.
- (2) Fanon, F., The Wretched of the Earth, Harmondsworth, 1967.
- (3) See Konings, P.J.J. Vakbeweging en Ontwikkelingsstrategie van de Overheid in Ghana, 1874-1976 (Trade Union Movement and Government Development Strategy in Ghana, 1874-1976), Tilburg, 1977.
- (4) Arrighi, G., and Saul, J.S., Essays on the Political Economy of Africa, New York/London, 1973.
- (5) For an admirable summary, see Waterman, P., «The "Labour Aristocracy", in Africa: Introduction to a Debate», in Development and Change, VI, 3(1975), pp. 57-73.
- (6) Peace, A., "The Lagos Proletariat: Labour Aristocrats or Populist Militants", in Sandbrook, R., and Cohen, R., (eds.), The Development of an African Working Class. Studies in Class Formation and Action, London, 1975, pp. 281-302.
- (7) Jeffries, R.D., "Populist Tendencies in the Ghanaian Trade Union Movement", in Sandbrook, R., and Cohen, R., (eds.), op.cit., 1975, pp. 261-80.
- (8) Sandbrook, R., and Arn, J., The Labouring Poor and Urban Class Formation: The Case of Greater Accra, occasional monograph series no. 12, Centre for Developing-Area Studies, McGill University, Montreal, 1977, p. 73.
- (9) Remy, D., "Economic Security and Industrial Unionism: A Nigerian Case Study", in Sandbrook, R., and Cohen, R., (eds.), op.cit., 1975, p. 161.

CHAPTER I. THE ASHANTI GOLDFIELDS CO. (GHANA) LTD.

Gold mining has a long history in Ghana. (1) The former name of Ghana, the Gold Coast, indicates the fame of this part of the West African coast in the gold trade. "Guinean" gold gave rise to long-distance trade between West and North Africa and the emergence of large states in West Africa. (2) Gold was important to the early Portuguese mercantile interests centered at Elmina, who were soon joined by the English and then the Dutch merchants.

The incorporation of the Gold Coast as a Crown Colony into the British empire in 1874 was followed by the infusion of British capital into gold mining operations and the necessary infrastructural investments. (3)

In 1895 E.A. Cade secured a written agreement from the chiefs of Adansi and Bekwai for 100 square miles of land within the traditional area of Adansi and Bekwai, and established the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation in 1897. The agreement stipulated that the chiefs of Adansi and Bekwai were to receive £ 100 and £ 66 annually, and the government would receive royalties of 3% on profits plus a commuted royalty of £ 500 on each of the first five years of operation. In return for these minimal obligations, Ashanti Goldfields Co. received very great powers which included the right to undertake mining, trading, rubber and timber extraction, road-making and town-building. (4) In 1898 the mine was opened at Obuasi, and soon became one of the richest gold mines in the world. In 1903 Obuasi was linked with the coast by the extension of a railway line.

The railway, the subjugation and colonization of the Ashanti, combined with the slump in South African gold production in the Boer War, led to a boom in the Gold Coast's gold production. There was considerable speculation, as many new companies were floated. The boom soon collapsed; nevertheless, some companies survived, and among them were the Ashanti Goldfields Co. and various companies around Tarkwa and Prestea. The value of gold exports increased dramatically from £ 22,000 in 1901 to £ 1,8m. by 1914. Gold became Ghana's second major export and provider of wage employment. In the 1920's production declined, partly because of labour problems, but the 1930's saw a dramatic recovery as many countries left the Gold Standard and the price of gold rose. (5)

The AGC, a capitalist enterprise geared to an accumulation of profit, had to operate within an industry in which the price of its commodity was internationally fixed, and for the most part stationary.(6) The fixed and stationary price of gold (\$ 35 per fine ounce) made the industry extremely vulnerable to inflationary costs. It meant that profits were dependent on a high level of output, low production costs and a benevolent government, one that would not impose heavy taxes on the company and would support the mine's low wage policy. AGC was not only able to meet the first two conditions, it could also generally count on the colonial government's support and protection:

- The AGC has a very high level of output. AGC is one of the richest goldmines in the world, yielding over eight ounces of gold for each ten tons of ore mined (while another Ghanaian mine at Bibiani only yielded about two ounces for each ten tons).
- While the AGC could not minimise the cost of materials, it could do so with labour costs. AGC assessed the adequacy of wages primarily in terms of its being sufficient for the reproduction of labor, the bare minimum needed to maintain a single labourer in production. In the forties and fifties AGC was able to keep wages down by
 - 1) claiming (together with other mine owners organised into the powerful Chamber of Mines) that with rising capital costs and a gold price fixed at £ 35 per ounce, the effects of increased labour costs would be catastrophic for several Ghanaian gold mines - at least for the poorest ones. Its success was aided by the government's fear of mine shut-downs, because of the vital position of the mining industry among the country's exports (see table 1). (7) Obviously the 35-50% working profit of the AGC throughout the period indicates a high degree of success, and even a rising minimum wage could not seriously jeopardize its operations.
 - 2) disagreeing that increased productivity resulted automatically from an increase in wages.
 - 3) emphasizing after 1947 that the taxation policies of the government formed an obstacle to wage increases. The AGC and the Chamber of Mines were even able to divert the attention of the Mineworkers' Union from its own low wage policy to government taxation policies, as expressed by D.K. Foevie, the then treasurer of the union: "The relationship between the companies and the union is good. We do not

propose to detail the differences existing. It has been explained by the Chamber that government takes heavy tax. The Union would fight hard for reduction in tax in order that they (workers) may also benefit". (8)

4) trying to weaken trade unionism in the mine in order to prevent wage demands. (9)

- During a substantial part of the colonial period AGC was able to exploit Ghana's gold resources with no substantial contribution to the development of the Ghanaian political economy. The 5% royalty on profits was augmented in 1934 with an export tax of 15% of the gold premium, a negligible amount of the profits made. In 1939 a war-time surtax was imposed amounting to 50 per cent of the price of gold in excess of 150s. per ounce. After the war the surtax was abolished, but to make up for this loss to the Treasury the export duty was increased to 20 per cent. In 1952 the export duty was replaced by a minerals duty imposed on all mineral-producing companies. This was a graduated tax based on the ratio of profit to revenue, and designed so as to favour mines of low profitability. (10)

Table 1. Ghana's exports

| Export product | 1951 | | 1970 | | 1974 | |
|----------------|--------|------|-------------------|------|-------------------|------|
| | £ 000 | % | £ m. ^x | % | £ m. ^x | % |
| Cocoa | 60,310 | 67.6 | 300.4 | 64.3 | 466.4 | 55.5 |
| Gold | 8,562 | 9.6 | 25.7 | 5.5 | 94.8 | 11.3 |
| Magnesium | 7,217 | 8.1 | 7.2 | 1.5 | 10.5 | 1.5 |
| Diamonds | 5,971 | 6.7 | 14.5 | 3.0 | 14.6 | 1.7 |
| Bauxite | 143 | 0.2 | 1.3 | 0.2 | 3.5 | 0.4 |
| Timber | 4,972 | 5.6 | 19.9 | 4.2 | 63.9 | 7.6 |
| Sawn Wood | ..... | ... | 17.1 | 3.6 | 34.0 | 4.0 |
| Other exports | 1,844 | 2.2 | 81.4 | 17.7 | 153.2 | 18.0 |

^xNote: 1 cedi was equal to about \$ 0.85.

Source: Bauer, P.T., West African Trade, London, 1963, p. 198; and Government of Ghana, CBS, External Trade Statistics of Ghana, Accra, various issues.

Table 2. Estimated value of gold produced by the AGC.

| PERIOD | ESTIMATED VALUE (£) |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 1912 - March 1966 | 98,834,403 |
| April 1966 - March 1974 | 169,074,813 |

Source: Ghana, Chamber of Mines Forty-Seventh Annual Report, 1st April 1973 to 31st March 1974.

Table 2 shows the estimated value of gold produced by the AGC. A clue to the profits made during the colonial period was given in 1965, when AGC asked for an extension of its 99 year lease due to expire in 1986. Nkrumah pointed out to General Spears, chairman of the AGC, that

- (1) the AGC had invested only £ 750,000 in its operation since it came to Ghana in 1897.
- (2) Between 1910 and 1960 the company had transferred profits totalling £ 19 million.
- (3) Such a rate of profit would work out at almost 1.600 per cent of their original investments capital. (11)

Ghanaians were not unaware of this blatant pillage of their mineral resources. However, appeals to the colonial administration were in vain. When Africans in the Legislative Council immediately prior to the war asked for compulsory royalties on mining operations, governor Hodson stated in reply: "...I feel sure it would be a short-sighted and extremely harmful policy for the government to interfere in a matter of this sort, because capital is very sensitive and it might have the effect of driving it away to other parts of the world...". (12)

During the "positive action" period the AGC feared the militant nationalism of Nkrumah, CPP and certain trade union leaders.(13) In 1950, the Chamber of Mines, on whose board General Spears as chairman of the AGC sat, lamented: "The industry deplores the irresponsible and reckless propaganda which (is) contrary to the best interest of the African but is assured that his native good sense will show him where his path to advancement lies and prevail against the poisonous doctrine now so vociferously expounded in certain quarters". Certainly, according to The Spark, General Spears feared that the good old days were definitively gone when the colonial government colluded with capital interests to exploit the nation. (14)

However, General Spears's fears had apparently disappeared during the "tactical action" period; he told a stockholder's meeting in 1953 that "African ministers are acquiring a great sense of responsibility as they realize the problems of government".(15)

General Spears's hopes for a "responsible" government in Ghana in the days after independence seemed to become reality. The CPP which took over the government from the colonial power in 1957 did not implement the recommendations of a Commission of Enquiry into Concessions under the chairmanship of Mr. Kwaku Boateng which submitted its report on 31st December 1958 (published in 1961).(16) And in striking accord with the 1972 NRC policy, that Commission actually recommended that "not only should minerals be vested in the State but the State should also participate in the equity share capital of the mining companies to the extent of 51%)). Although it was obvious to Nkrumah and the CPP that the mines played such a vital part in Ghana's economic life that it was necessary for the state to become increasingly involved in the actual operations of the mining business, they were afraid that any form of participation in the mining enterprises would scare foreign investors at a time when Ghana needed investment capital to make the "second revolution" a success. The Nkrumah government nationalized only those foreign mines which threatened to close down for purely economic reasons and then gave the shareholders favourable terms in order to save the country from massive unemployment.(17)

However, the Nkrumah government took a hard line against the stubborn resistance from AGC, particularly from the board chairman Spears, to accept the suggested state participation in the ownership of the principal goldmines. Moreover, the government employed taxation as a means of extracting its share of the profits from the mining industry. The various forms of direct and indirect taxation amounted to 70% of the working profits, as compared with 55% in the manufacturing and trading enterprises. The tax rate in the mining sector was among the highest in the world (the rate in Zambia is 50%, in Canada 50.5% and in the USA 52%). (18)

Through an irony of fate, only a few months after Nkrumah had declared that he would refuse to negotiate a new extension of the lease to AGC, he was overthrown by the military coup of 1966. British businessmen with Ghanaian interests praised the change in government. General Spears, chairman of the AGC, headed a British mission to Ghana, and pleaded with the West, especially Britain and the USA, to help the National Liberation

Council (NLC): "They are carrying too heavy a weight. They are very devoted people who need help". (19) A few months later he started to negotiate a new lease.

At the end of 1968 it was announced that the Ashanti Goldfields was taken over by Lonrho, a multinational company whose main sphere of operations was in Africa, both in the white-ruled south and in the independent African states; it was headed by Mr. "Tiny" Rowland, prominent in the "purchasing" of politically important allies and contacts in Africa. (20) The Ghanaian military government, the NLC, was prepared to go against Ghana's decree applying the UN sanctions against Rhodesia, and quickly welcomed Lonrho's takeover of the AGC. It authorized the company to say that it had also invited Lonrho to carry out a feasibility study of the state mines (published in 1971), and to take a direct interest in their operations. There was talk of Lonrho investing in breweries, in the sugar industry, and even developing Ghana's diamond areas.

The takeover sparked off negotiations over the terms of a new lease which the government proposed to grant the AGC. First Adansi chiefs were compensated for a long-standing grievance. Until 1968 the AGC annually paid only £ 132 to the Adansi traditional council for the land (concession). It was now agreed that the Adansi traditional council would receive over £ 100,000 annually, and the Adansihene became a member of the board of the Ashanti Goldfields.

In January 1969 Lonrho and the Ghana government agreed on state participation of 20% in the AGC, with an option on a further 20% at £ 1 a share. In return, the lease of the Obuasi concession, which was to have run out in 1986, was extended for a period of fifty years, starting on 1 Januari 1969. To counteract the feeling in Ghana that the Ashanti goldfields may have been developing the mine too slowly to meet the country's currency needs, Lonrho promised to extend the milling capacity of the mine from 45.000 tons of ore a month to 80.000 tons. Moreover, the government would be compensated if the dividend from its 20% of the shares fell short of royalties under the old lease.

While the chiefs, the Ghanaian establishment, and the Lonrho board room were pleased with those arrangements, peasants and workers were not. Peasants in the traditional Adansi area claimed one million new cedis (about £ 410,000) for damage done to cocoa and food crops by pollution from the mine. Their demands were not granted. The most dissatisfied group were the AGC workers, claiming three months "severance pay". The issue ultimately led to a strike in which three miners were killed by police bullets.

In early 1970 General Spears (chairman of the AGC until 1971), having always resisted state participation in the ownership of the mine, sought a meeting with Ghana's newly elected Prime Minister, Dr. K.A. Busia, who had said that his government was "going to look into" the question of taking a 51% share of the mining companies' holdings. Afterwards, Spears said that Busia had assured him there would be no nationalization. In mid-1971 Lonrho did produce its promised feasibility study of the five state-owned gold mines, which recommended necessary heavy investments. Before the Busia government could act on this report by asking Lonrho to undertake the changes in the state mines, as well as supplying managerial skills, Busia's civilian government was overthrown by another military coup.

In June, 1972, the new military government, the NRC, announced its intention to negotiate state participation in foreign-owned mining and timber companies operating in Ghana - within the framework of its policy of self-reliance and "capturing the commanding heights of the economy". Negotiations were opened with various companies to try to reach an equitable arrangement that would not discourage foreign investment in Ghana. On December 6, 1972, the government issued a "White Paper on State Participation in the Mining Industry" in which it regretted the failure of its efforts to reach an amicable agreement with the mining companies in the question of government participation. (21)

As stated in the white paper, the government proposed to the two largest mining companies (AGC and CAST) that they reorganize as joint ventures with the Ghanaian government, in which the latter's participation in the equity capital would be 55%, with the government having a majority of one on each board of directors. The government was to purchase its equity participation at company book value for income tax purposes, from dividends accruing from the joint venture over an eight-year period; or, alternatively, in cedis in a lump sum. In either case the transfer of foreign exchange was subject to exchange control regulations. In addition to income taxes, minerals duty, and other important duties, the joint venture was to pay a royalty of 5% on the gross proceeds of the minerals, and such payment would be deductible for income tax purposes. The technical management and direction of the mining operations were to remain with the foreign investors, subject to the general supervision of the board of directors. The reason given by the mining companies for rejecting the government's proposals as enumerated in the white paper related mainly to majority representation on the board of directors, valuation of assets, and royalty payments.

In order to clarify the government's new mining policy and define "the parameters of foreign private participation", the NRC promulgated the Mining Operations (Government Participation) Decree when it issued the white paper.

The decree provided for the reorganization of the two mining companies as Ghanaian companies in accordance with the laws of Ghana, and each re-organized company would be a joint venture of the government of Ghana and the foreign mining company, with the government having a 55% equity interest. The reorganization was to be retroactive from October 1, 1972. The government would pay for its participation on the basis described in the original offer to the mining companies. In addition, the mining ventures would pay a royalty at a rate not exceeding 6% of the market value of the minerals, and the government would have a majority of one on the respective boards of directors of the joint ventures. In promulgating the decree, the NRC promised to pay "full and fair compensation", and reiterated its commitment to the principle that the government welcomed foreign private capital and expertise in harnessing the country's natural resources. (22)

This 55% participation of the state in gold mining took place at a time of important changes in the gold industry. In 1970 the US government announced that it would no longer buy gold at a fixed price of £ 35 an ounce. This decision presaged the end of the dominance of the dollar in the system of international exchange established at Bretton Woods in 1944. It also presaged a growing crisis for the world capitalist economy, and a long-term strengthening in the demand for gold as insurance against weak currencies. In the short run, however, it meant that gold was no longer tied to a fixed price, but became a commodity subject to savings in the world market - and with a clear upward trend. (23) This rise in gold prices had enormous repercussions: new shafts were sunk and the exploitation of lower grade ore became profitable.

While the AGC (Ghana) Ltd. treated 794,000 tons of ore a year in 1972, it expanded to 869,000 tons in 1973, and to about a million tons in 1974. Expansion takes into account the ore reserves-development emphasis is on mining lower grade ores. This maintains the yield of gold, while it also provides for the continued operation of the mine. (24) The new Adansi shaft of 5,261 ft replaced three smaller inefficient and expensive shafts. (25)

At an average gold price of \$ 90.29 in 1972/73, the AGC realised the highest revenue and profits in the mine's history, even with the late deliveries of equipment and shortages of materials - the corporation obtained gross proceeds from bullion sold of £ 54,9 m. in 1972/73 about double the proceeds of £ 28,3 m. for 1971/72 and £ 21,5 m. for 1970/71.

In addition to its 55% share holding, the government earns revenue from royalties, corporation taxes and gold levies. In 1973, the government placed an additional levy on gold, which required the gold mines to pay £ 2.50 for each ounce of gold produced above the first 100,000 fot (fine ounce troy).

While the price of gold reached a record of \$ 195 an ounce in December 1974, it has since shown a downward trend. The average of \$ 126.4 in June, 1976, was 23% below the previous year's average, and has since continued to fall. (26) At the end of the 1975/76 financial year, the AGC made a very low profit of £ 2,577,474 after taxes and would not pay any dividend to its shareholders. The profit was ploughed back into exploration, as well as to carry out vital capital projects. (27) This low profit was attributed to the lower average price of gold realised on the bullion market, the overall grade of ore mined, and the introduction of the five-day working week. Still, an assurance was given that the AGC "is still very liquid and has a brighter future". Lonrho hoped to continue to do well out of what has been called "exploitation by participation". (28) "Tiny" Rowland once said: "I am totally in sympathy with this type of revolutionary capitalism (the partial takeover of national resources). If you have that, you won't get nationalization". (29) Lonrho had great expectations that the Ashanti Goldfields will remain the company's largest single profit-earner. Ghana's gold contributed about a fifth of the group's net profit of £ 112 m. in 1973, and Lonrho hopes that profits will rise again after the present fall in prices on the world market.

NOTES

- 1) See for example Dickson, K.B., A Historical Geography of Ghana, Cambridge University Press, 1969; Kimble, D., A Political History of Ghana, 1850-1928, Oxford, 1963; and Darkoh, S.A. The Changing Patterns of Settlement in the Mining Areas of Ghana, M.A. Thesis, University of London, 1962.
- 2) Hopkins, A.G., An Economic History of West Africa, London, 1973.
- 3) See McPhee, A., Economic Revolution in West Africa, London, 1971, pp. 50-52; Junner, N.R., Gold in the Gold Coast, Government Printer, 1935; Walker, L., The Gold Mining Industry in Ghana, Ph.D. Thesis, Edinburgh, 1971; and Greenhalgh, P., An Economic History of the Ghanaian Diamond History 1919-1973, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1974.
- 4) Kimble, D., op.cit., 1963, p. 24.
- 5) See Greenhalgh, P., op.cit., 1974.
- 6) Compare Johnstone, F.A., Class, Race and Gold, London/Henley/Boston, 1976.
- 7) Killick, T., Mining, in Birmingham, W., Neustadt, I., and Omaboe, E.N., (eds.), A Study of Contemporary Ghana, vol. 1., London, 1966; and Fitch, B., and Oppenheimer, M., Ghana: End of an Illusion, New York, 1966, p. 87 ff.
- 8) Notes of Meeting between Mr. E.W. Barltrop, Labour Adviser to the Colonial Office, and Representatives of the Gold Coast Mines Employees Union, Abosso, 22.1.1949, pp. 2-5.
- 9) See Gold Coast, Report of the Gold Coast Mines Board of Inquiry, Accra: GP, 1956.
- 10) See Allen, K.G., "Gold Mining in Ghana", in African Affairs, vol. 57, 1958, pp. 221-40.
- 11) Weekly Spectator, 26 August 1972, p. 1.
- 12) Bourret, F.M., Ghana: The Road to Independence, London, 1960, p. 133.
- 13) For Nkrumah's "positive action" and "tactical action", see Austin, D., Politics in Ghana: 1946-1960, Oxford University Press, 1964.
- 14) The Spark, 19 July 1963 (AGC "In Ghana, with Ghana?").
- 15) Cited in Ryan, S., "The Theory and Practice of African One Partyism: The CPP Re-examined", in Canadian Journal of African Studies, IV, 2(1970), pp. 145-73.
- 16) See Legon Observer, VII, 25, 15-28 December, 1972.

- 17) Bing, G., Reap the Whirlwind, London, 1968, p. 13; and Legon Observer, VIII, 16, 11-24, August, 1972.
- 18) Legon Observer, VIII, 16, 11-24 August, 1972.
- 19) First, R., The Barrel of a Gun, Penguin African Library, 1972, p. 384.
- 20) For Lonrho and its involvement in Rhodesia and South Africa, see Cronjé, S., Ling, M., and Cronjé, G., Lonrho. Portrait of a Multinational, Pelican Books, 1976; Cliffe, L., "Lonrho (a review article) , in Review of African Political Economy, no. 8, Jan.-April, 1977, pp. 130-33; and Department of Trade, Lonrho Ltd. Investigation under Section 165 (b) of the Companies Act 1948. Report by Allan Heyman, QC and Sir William Slimmings, CBE, CA (Inspectors Appointed by the Department of Trade), HMSO, 1976.
- 21) See "White Paper on State Participation in Mining Industry", in Ghana, Speeches and Interviews by Col. I.K. Acheampong, Head of State and Chairman of the NRC, vol. I, Accra-Tema, 1973, pp. 314-20; and IMF, Surveys of African Economies. Ghana, Washington D.C., 1975, p. 116 ff.
- 22) See also Marshall, J., "The State of Ambivalence: Right and Left Options in Ghana", in Review of African Political Economy, no. 5, Jan.-April, 1976, pp. 60-61.
- 23) Compare Leys, R., "South African Gold Mining in 1974: The Gold of Migrant Labour", in African Affairs, vol. 74, no. 295, 1975, p. 197.
- 24) West Africa, 16 June 1975, p. 692.
- 25) African Development (London), 3(1974) A, pp. 29-35.
- 26) West Africa, 24 January 1977, p. 149.
- 27) West Africa, 30 May 1977, p. 1063.
- 28) Daily Mail, Freetown, 29 June 1970.
- 29) Cited in Cliffe, L., op.cit., 1977, p. 132.

CHAPTER II. THE TOWN OF OBUASI

The AGC is located in Obuasi, a new urban area situated in the heart of the tropical rain forest, some 100 miles from the coast and 45 miles south of Kumasi, the capital of the Ashanti Region. (1)

Until the AGC arrived, Obuasi was only a small village. Local history has it that the village had been founded by a hunter, and consisted of himself, several farmers and their families. There was African gold mining in the area long before the establishment of the AGC, and several shafts from the pre-colonial era remain.

Since 1931, the population of Obuasi increased by 4% a year (see table 3).

Table 3. Population of Obuasi

| Year | Number |
|------|---------------------|
| 1911 | 5,626 |
| 1931 | 7,598 |
| 1948 | 15,724 |
| 1960 | 22,818 |
| 1970 | 31,018 ^x |

^xNote: The Obuasi Urban Council area has 42,077 inhabitants.

Source: Ghana Population Censuses, 1948, 1960 and 1970; and
Cardinall, A., The Gold Coast, 1931, Accra: GP, 1931.

Obuasi is now the second largest town in the Ashanti Region (after Kumasi), and the ninth largest one in Ghana. The surrounding area is primarily agricultural, with the addition of some logging still being carried on. Connection with Kumasi and the coast by paved roads and railway line is good.

Obuasi is not only a relatively new urban town, it is also an ethnically heterogeneous one. As a large proportion of the labour force at the AGC has always been drawn from the other regions of Ghana and former French West Africa, a relatively large proportion of the population is born outside Obuasi (see table 4).

Table 4. Population of Obuasi in 1970

| POPULATION | NUMBER | PERCENTAGE |
|--|--------|------------|
| Males | 21,988 | 52 |
| Females | 20,089 | 48 |
| TOTAL | 42,077 | 100 |
| Born in the locality | 17,381 | 40.5 |
| Born in another locality, same region | 9,269 | 22 |
| Born in another region, in Ghana | 13,104 | 31.5 |
| Born in another African country | 2,028 | 5 |
| Born in another country | 295 | 1 |
| TOTAL | 42,077 | 100.0 |

Source: Ghana Population Census 1970

Except for the predominantly Muslim Zongo, there is little association between ethnicity and residential areas. And even the Zongo, which is primarily inhabited by Muslims, includes a diversity of ethnic groups as well as some scattered non-Muslims.

Obuasi lies in the Adansi traditional area; however, there is at the moment no local Adansi chief (Odikro) in Obuasi. In part this is because of the power struggle between the Adansihene (regional chief) and his subchief, the Akrokerrihene. According to custom, Obuasi is located in the Akrokerrihene's stool lands, and he should have the right to appoint a local chief (Odikro) in Obuasi, as indeed he does in several villages bordering Obuasi. However, given the size of Obuasi and the implications regarding payment of the lease for the area, the Adansihene and the other Adansi subchiefs refuse to permit this. Conversely, when they tried to select and install a local chief (Odikro) in Obuasi over the Akrokerrihene's objections, he protested and took it to the courts, where it has intermittently been ever since. Besides the question of the size of the town, if the other chiefs acknowledge that the Akrokerrihene is the traditional owner of the Obuasi stool lands, then he is entitled to a much larger share of the lease than he currently receives, and would have greater influence in the allocation of the remainder.

The power struggle between the Adansihene and the Akrokerrihene was temporarily resolved, however, by Nkrumah's accession to power. He elevated the Akrokerrihene from subchief to regional chief and placed Obuasi under his rule. At this time the Akrokerrihene nominated an Ashanti resident of Obuasi as local chief, and also selected a queen mother. The arrangement was terminated shortly after the 1966 coup, when all stools were returned to their pre-independence status. But the absence of a traditional Adansi ruler in an ethnically heterogeneous town like Obuasi hardly has any impact on the town. Every ethnic group has its own "elders", of whom one is considered the senior elder or "chief". All residents in Obuasi sharing that ethnicity are considered by the chief and elders as "members" of the group, and subject to relevant discipline as well as eligible for group aid when appropriate.

Obuasi has been an important administrative centre from an early date. It was the seat of the Provincial Commissioner in charge of the southern section of Ashanti soon after the British supremacy in Ashanti was established after the Yaa Asantewa war.(2) Around 1935, Obuasi became the seat of a senior District Commissioner, who was especially charged with the political control of the poor migrant population in Obuasi concentrated in the gold mine. Obuasi is still a District Seat, as well as the seat of an urban council. Very little has been done by the urban council to resolve or even ease the multitude of problems facing Obuasi. The lorry park and the markets are in a mess-muddy and in shambles, and they need expansion; sanitation facilities are entirely inadequate in several neighbourhoods; piped water, supplied by the AGC, is both erratic and often fouled with mud. Though Obuasi is the home of one of the richest goldmines in the world, whose "compound" occupies as much area as the town itself, it is still predominantly a shanty town with its ageold winding and narrow streets and decrepit buildings. The very rudimentary compounds in the "Zongo" and "suburbs" and the AGC's good old housing estates from the colonial era contrast sharply with the well-built, spacious bungalows picturesquely illuminating the peaks of the Obuasi hills, houses with modern amenities and facilities. Living in these modern houses are expatriates and a few of the Ghanaian top managerial staff. There are some few other showpieces like the new Ghana Commercial Bank and Barclays Bank as well.(3). The failure of the urban council to act in these areas is not only a result of the rather miniscule authority that the central

government delegates to it nor only a consequence of its lack of financial resources or skill, but is also attributable to the absence of mass participation in local government, which is almost completely controlled by the dominant Ghanaian classes.

Obuasi is essentially a mining town. The AGC is by far the most important employer (employing about 80% of the wage labour). As most adult men in Obuasi do the same sort of work, they share similar grievances about the low wages, tedious work and poor living conditions. A substantial number live together in accommodation provided by the company, making for easy communication and the sharing of leisure time. Besides mining, there are the usual service and retail jobs of any African town of this size, as well as some employment in construction and logging, in the schools and in government offices. A small percentage of the men (19%) are employed in agriculture, and the usual number of women are employed as petty traders, bread bakers, and Pito and palmwine brewers in the town (see table 5).

Table 5. Occupational structure in Obuasi

| EMPLOYMENT | PERCENTAGE |
|------------------------|------------|
| Agriculture | 19 |
| Petty Trade | 21 |
| Ind., Commerce, Profs. | 60 |

Source: Wunsch, J.S. "Voluntary Associations in a Secondary-Industrial Town: The Case of Obuasi Ghana", paper delivered at the 1973 Annual Meeting of the ASA, Syracuse, New York, October 31 to November 3.

The presence of industrial opportunities is not the only factor accounting for the low proportion of men employed in agriculture, for the absence of farmland is equally relevant in this regard. For instance, the hundred square mile mining concession surrounding the mine is partly used for the growing of timber for underground shoring, thus withdrawing land from cocoa and food production. And as a consequence, the cost of food has risen enormously in Obuasi; and the AGC workers cannot acquire land in Obuasi to cultivate foodstuffs for themselves.

(4)

The Labor Office estimates a continuing pattern of about 10-20% unemployment. The unemployed represent a potential labor force of primarily recent arrivals to the town, either awaiting vacancies at the mine or looking for work elsewhere; they generally wait from 1 to 3 months.

The AGC is not only the predominant employer in the area (for the most part, even the farmers in the country-side around the mine work for the mine in some capacity), it also provides social, recreational and health services. The AGC maintains a free hospital and maternity clinic for mine employees and their dependents who represent more than half of the Obuasi population (there is also a subsidized government hospital available to townspeople). Moreover, it has provided Obuasi with a multi-purpose African Club House, a swimming-pool, and has subsidized the building of churches and mosques in the town. No wonder that during a memorial service in the Anglican Church in Obuasi for Lady Spears, wife of the AGC's chairman, a Ghanaian clergyman could refer to "Our Father, General Spears". (5) Indeed, what strikes a visitor to Obuasi most is the unashamedly paternalistic atmosphere of the mine and the omnipresence of the AGC in the town.

NOTES

- 1) This description is largely based on Wunsch, J.S., Voluntary Associations: Determinants of Associational Structure and Activity in Two Ghanaian Cities, Ph.D.-Thesis, Indiana University, 1974; Wunsch, J.S., "Voluntary Associations in a Secondary-Industrial Town: The Case of Obuasi Ghana", paper delivered at the 1973 Annual Meeting of the ASA, Syracuse, New York, October 31 to November 3; Department of Social Welfare and Community Development, A Social Survey of Obuasi, Ashanti, November 1953; Darkoh, S.A., op.cit., 1962; and Ashanti Times Press, Ashanti Goldfields Corporation. A Brief Description of the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation Obuasi, 1962.
- 2) See for the Yaa Asantewa war and the establishment of British supremacy in Ashanti, Boahen, A., Ghana: Evolution and Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, London, 1975.
- 3) See Amankwa, O.B., Obuasi - "Rich but Poor", in Daily Graphic, November 1975.
- 4) See Cameron Duodu's report in The New Statesman, 8 June 1973, p. 842.
- 5) West Africa, 15 March 1969, p. 291.

CHAPTER III. THE AGC-PROLETARIAT

3.1. The Development of a labour force at the AGC.

The AGC has gradually expanded its labour force in the course of the years. When the AGC started its operations in Ghana it was faced with a serious shortage of labour. The shortage was not apparent as far as surface labour went, as it was generally recruited locally on daily basis. However, the company was confronted with considerable problems in recruiting the large numbers of underground labour that it required:

- (1) The cocoa boom. Cocoa provided Southern Ghanaians with a considerable measure of economic independence, enabling them to subsist without having to sell their labour power for low wages in the dangerous mines.
- (2) Cultural obstacles. Southern Ghanaians were not inclined to do unskilled (underground) work in the mines which had in the past been associated with slave labour.
- (3) Competition between employers for African labour. The fundamental problem arising out of this competition was that it could cause a rise in labour costs and wage rates.

For these reasons the AGC had to rely heavily on imported labour from the French colonies, Liberia and Nigeria: "It may safely be stated that practically all labour employed in the Gold Coast is immigrant from the Kru Coast, French Territory, and the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast". (1)

In 1906 the mining companies officially started inquiries into the possibility of recruiting labour from the Northern Territories. Of course, until that time a few labourers had been going south, to the mines in the forest belt, but recruitment started in earnest in the Northern Territories in 1907. (2) A close collaboration arose between government, mines and chiefs to secure labourers from these Territories for the mines - if necessary, by force. To gain the support of the northern chiefs for the recruitment of mine labour from their areas, head-money was paid, and just after World War I this amounted to 5 s. for each man who reported to the District Commissioner, and 7s. 6d. on his return after completing a nine month contract of service.

However, recruitment was not very successful; by the middle of 1909, the labour shortage in the Gold Coast was described as "acute". Many recruits deserted on the way to the south and even on the job itself. A variety of measures were suggested to counter the large scale desertion, most of which were rejected by the authorities. The suggestions included the introduction of the South African mining compound system (where mineworkers were locked up for the night), and the introduction of the pass card system (which forces a worker to be only in the area of work for the period stipulated in the contract). One recommendation which was accepted was the introduction of a form of compulsory savings for the miners.

The period between 1919 and 1924 witnessed a heavy competition for labour between government, mines and farm owners. In November 1919, the new governor, Guggisberg, introduced his Ten Year Development Plan, which included a number of public works projects which placed heavy demands on the labour market. These projects were partly due to the vast increase in government revenue, and the buoyant economy was above all built on a spectacular rise in cocoa production, which itself implied a tightening of the labour market. There was a growing dislike of mining among Northern Territories men because of degrading methods of recruiting by legal and illegal recruiters, appalling conditions at the mines, and knowledge of the labour market. Governor Guggisberg wrote in 1920: "(The Northern Territories native) wants to know where he is going and what he is going to do. In fact, he has learnt to pick and choose and to know his own value on the labour market". (3) Farmers were paying wages as high as 10s. a day for carrying cocoa to market centres, while the mines were offering a basic underground wage of 1s.6d. to 1s.9d. a day, and up to 2s.9d. to 3s.3d. for trained labour such as "rockdrillboys". (4)

Under pressure from the mines governor Guggisberg had to assist mine recruitment in the period 1920-24. Government assistance was, however, withdrawn when the high death rate among labourers at the mines was revealed. (5) According to Thomas this high death rate was not only due to poor health conditions at the mines, but also to forced recruitment in a situation where there was already considerable voluntary labour migration. Under these circumstances the chiefs were obliged to supply the weaker members of the community. (6) Between April, 1925, and March, 1926, with the chiefs relieved of any feelings of obligation, the mines were able to recruit only eighty contract labourers; this was in fact the end of indentured labour.

The depression in the early thirties and the growing need and desire of northern young men for cash in hand resulted in a swelling supply of "voluntary" labour (7). After the serious decline in the mining industry in the years following World War I (8), effective expansion finally occurred during the thirties. Labour employed in 1938/39 represented a 400 per cent increase over the years 1920-30, while gold production during this period increased by over 300%. In 1838-39 there were 22 companies engaged in gold mining, of which thirteen were fairly large, employing a total of 27,593 workers (see also table 6). The AGC employed in this period between 3500 and 4000 African workers (9). The annual labour department report, 1938-39, reports: "Work in the various mines is still the most popular for immigrant labour and the companies had had no difficulty in obtaining locally all the labour they have needed".

Table 6. Mines: general statistics, 1900-70

| YEAR | No. of companies producing | Non-African employed | African employed |
|------|----------------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| 1910 | (12) | 672 | 18,500 |
| 1920 | 11 | 205 | 9,800 |
| 1930 | 5 | 166 | 7,940 |
| 1940 | 16 | 767 | 33,837 |
| 1950 | 11 | 784 | 31,072 |
| 1960 | 7 | 628 | 20,589 |
| 1970 | 7 | 264 | 24,336 |

Source: Kay, G., The political economy of colonialism in Ghana, London, 1972.

The swollen shoot disease in the forties and the subsequent felling of cocoa trees caused a sudden loss of income on such a massive scale that an exodus of the regional peasants followed to the mines. It should be noted, however, that these regional peasants tried to obtain "cushy" jobs. This is significant, because it explains why foreign labour at the mines was not ultimately displaced and why there was no conflict between regional workers and foreign workers over job openings at the mine. (10)

The AGC has expanded its labour force in the last decennia: in the fifties the AGC employed around 6000 African labourers, in the sixties around 7000, and in the seventies, because of high gold prices a period of great expansion, around 8200. In 1978 AGC workers numbered 8181 (4912 underground workers; 3269 surface workers). My survey among the AGC workers in 1975 tried to find out the socio-demographic characteristics of this labour force, its job securement and job satisfaction, its living conditions and consciousness.

3.2. Socio-demographic characteristics of the AGC workers

Peil reports from her study of sixteen factories in Ghana that Ghanaian workers tend to be relatively young and literate. (11) Table 7 shows that a substantial proportion of the mining population is above 40 years old, especially skilled workers tend to be quite old. (12) However, most workers in the mining industry are located in the 26-40 age group (53%).

The majority of AGC workers have at least attended elementary school. This is not only due to the enormous expansion of educational facilities in the years after independence, but also to contemporary managerial recruitment practices: except for the most menial jobs, management prefers literates to illiterates. The educational gap between Northern and Southern Ghana, a result of the colonial development strategy, has not yet been bridged. Of those recruited for underground labour, 82% of all illiterates originated in Northern Ghana and other neighbouring African countries.

A great change has occurred in the tribal composition and region of recruitment of the mining labour force. Comparing table 7 with table 8, it may be noted that the foreign component of the labour force has become less significant.

Table 7. Socio-demographic characteristics of the AGC workers (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| AGE | | | | | |
| 15-25 | 38 | 12.5 | 6 | 18 | 26 |
| 26-40 | 49 | 62.5 | 55 | 58 | 53 |
| above 40 | 13 | 25 | 39 | 24 | 21 |
| TOTAL | 100 | 100.0 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| EDUCATIONAL LEVEL | | | | | |
| Illiterate | 40 | 37.5 | 27 | | 31.5 |
| Semi-literate | | | 6 | | 1.5 |
| Elementary | 60 | 50 | 52 | 41 | 55 |
| Lower Commercial/ technical | | 12.5 | 9 | 35 | 7.5 |
| Secondary | | | 6 | 24 | 4.5 |
| TOTAL | 100 | 100.0 | 100 | 100 | 100.0 |
| ETHNICITY | | | | | |
| Akan | 45 | 50 | 70 | 71 | 55 |
| Ga/Adangbe | 4 | 12.5 | 3 | | 14 |
| Ewe | 11 | 12.5 | 9 | 29 | 13 |
| Northern Tribes | 33 | 12.5 | 12 | | 22 |
| Non-Ghanaian Tribes | 7 | 12.5 | 6 | | 6 |
| TOTAL | 100 | 100.0 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| ORIGIN | | | | | |
| This region | 35 | 37.5 | 46 | 53 | 40 |
| Other Southern Ghana | 25 | 37.5 | 36 | 47 | 32 |
| Northern Ghana | 33 | 12.5 | 12 | | 22 |
| Outside Ghana | 7 | 12.5 | 6 | | 6 |
| TOTAL | 100 | 100.0 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| LENGTH OF RESIDENCE | | | | | |
| less than 1 year | 5 | 12.5 | 3 | 6 | 5 |
| 1 - 3 years | 35 | 12.5 | 9 | 17 | 25 |
| 4 - 6 years | 23 | | 9 | 12 | 16.5 |
| 7 - 10 years | 11 | | 24 | 12 | 13.5 |
| 11 - 20 years | 12 | 62.5 | 21 | 47 | 22 |
| more than 20 years | 13 | 12.5 | 34 | 6 | 17 |
| No Answer | 1 | | | | 1 |
| TOTAL | 100 | 100.0 | 100 | 100 | 100.0 |
| LENGTH OF TIME IN PRESENT JOB | | | | | |
| less than 1 year | 9.5 | 12.5 | 9 | 6 | 9 |
| 1 - 3 years | 49 | 12.5 | 12 | 12 | 33 |
| 4 - 6 years | 23 | 12.5 | 18 | 23 | 21 |
| 7 - 10 years | 5 | 12.5 | 21 | 6 | 10 |
| 11 - 20 years | 9.5 | 37.5 | 15 | 47 | 17 |
| more than 20 years | 4 | 12.5 | 25 | 6 | 10 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

Table 8. Workers' origins in the mining industry around 1940 (percentages)

| ORIGIN | Mining Industry as a whole | Ashanti Gold- fields Co. |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Colony | 24.5 | 10 |
| Ashanti | 13 | 23.5 |
| Northern Territories | 18.5 | 23 |
| Southern Togoland | 2.5 | 1 |
| Neighbouring African countries | 41.5 | 42.5 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Source: GNA, File 4069, Labour Adviser to the Secretary of State-
Visits to the Gold Coast; and Tamale Archives, File 1/24.

There are various reasons for this change:

- Intensive recruitment and advertising in the North for underground labour. (13) Northerners made up 55% of the miners in the country in 1956. (14)
- Southern Ghanaian school leavers looking for the sparse job openings in the "modern sector" of the economy are now prepared to do unskilled work in the mines. (15)
- The 1969 Aliens Compliance Order made alien workers, though allowed to stay and work in the mines, feel so insecure (because of the then prevailing hostility of the Ghanaian population and the mass departure of their countrymen), that they preferred to leave in large numbers. (16)

Ethnic differentiation tends to coincide with occupational differentiation. Surface/skilled/clerical work is monopolized by Southern Ghanaian tribes, whilst unskilled/underground work is mainly done by Northern and non-Ghanaian tribes, exacerbating sectional jealousies and vitiating labour solidarity. Some workers complained of the gap between surface and underground workers: surface workers, and in particular clerical workers, considered underground workers as "dirty", tried to order them about and demanded bribes for favours.

Thus there is a substantial non-Ashanti group living in Obuasi, but a rather well established one, with 52.5% having more than 7 years of residence. (17) There is, indeed, an increasing process of proletarianisation: the process of peasants' "liberation from the land", their growing dependence on wage labour for their

subsistence and the increasing length of time spent in wage labour ("stabilization"). The AGC workers became stabilized, especially those with a specific skill (see table 7). (18) Whilst tenure tended to be associated with skill level as early as the forties (23% of the blast boys, for example, having served five or more years continuously in the mines in the 1940's), annual turnover in the mines in the forties amounted to 80% of the labour force and up to 90% of the underground labour force (and about 40% of those leaving the mines had been employed for less than six months). (19) Kitching gives an annual turnover rate of 50.6% in 1952. (20) In the seventies the AGC has an annual turnover of only around 10-11%.

I have outlined elsewhere the various reasons for the process of proletarianisation in Ghana. (21) The AGC now encourages this process of proletarianisation by providing training courses, especially to middle school leavers, by expanding accommodation and medical facilities, and by granting loans to workers - who often run into debt - as well as by various other managerial practices. For example, the AGC does not employ anyone who has already been employed by the company more than three separate times. Furthermore, gratuities are not paid until an employee has been in the service of the company for five years. Those who stay that long generally bring their wives to live with them. After five years there is the added incentive of more pay as a result of promotion. (22)

The majority of the miners (96.5%), however, do not want to stay in Obuasi all their lives; they intend to go home after retirement, pension or old age (57%), or after securement of enough capital or education to set up a farm or business at home (often wishful thinking in the present inflationary situation in Ghana). Moreover, the socio-cultural ties with the place of birth are maintained by regular visits. Most workers went home at least during leave (once every year or two years) to visit their relatives and to inspect their property (land).

Thus the mining population in Obuasi consists of workers who are mainly in the age group of 25-40 years, literate, and if not entirely proletarianised, then at least intending to stay for quite some time before returning to their birthplace.

3.3. Job securement and job satisfaction

3.3.1. Job securement

Unemployment is difficult to measure in the developing countries. The Ghanaian population censuses of 1960 and 1970, using a very questionable definition of unemployment (23), record an unemployment rate in Ghana of only about 6%. (24) In Obuasi Labour Office estimates and social survey results indicate an unemployment rate of about 10-20% at any time. While this latter figure suggests that urban unemployment is a serious problem in Ghana, one should keep in mind, that the exigencies of urban poverty are such that most job seekers are soon forced (after having relied on the "first aid" of their urban relatives) into combining some unproductive work in the informal sector with their job search.

The AGC workers experienced great difficulties in the past in securing a job: around 60% has been unemployed for a certain period. Not unexpectedly, unskilled workers experienced greater difficulties in finding a job than workers with a specific skill (see table 9). During the unemployment period 88% relied on relatives and friends for their livelihood; 12% went back to the land to take up farming, or had marginal jobs in the informal sector.

The majority of AGC workers (68%) secured their jobs by application; 21% were referred to the AGC by the Labour Office; 11% admitted that they had been taken on after giving bribes to the personnel department of the AGC. A poor labourer had to pay £ 70 to the personnel manager before being taken on.

In a country where roughly 60% of the population is active in farming, it can be expected that farmers' sons will be predominant in the various skill levels at the AGC. However, it should be noted that farmers' sons are significantly less represented among the skilled and clerical workers. The fathers of these skilled and clerical workers were often active in skilled and clerical work as well; skilled and clerical workers remain in their relatively well paid job during their working career, and would like to see their children aspire to the same kind of job (see tables 9 and 10). Although some unskilled and semiskilled workers still maintain close connections with the land (having been active in farming in the past, they would prefer to return to farming because of the relatively low wages and the high cost of living in the city), the large majority of workers prefer industrial work, even dangerous and relatively poorly paid underground work,

Table 9. Miners' occupational background (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|--|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| FATHER'S OCCUPATION | | | | | |
| Farming/fishing | 64 | 62.5 | 43 | 47 | 56.5 |
| Unskilled Labour | 1.5 | | | | 1 |
| Skilled Labour/Artisan | 20 | 37.5 | 21 | 23.5 | 22 |
| Trading/business/transport | 6.5 | | 15 | 6 | 9 |
| Lower professional/clerical | 5.5 | | 15 | 17.5 | 9 |
| Higher professional/clerical | | | 3 | | 1 |
| Other | 2.5 | | 3 | 6 | 1.5 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| PREVIOUS JOB | | | | | |
| Farming | 24 | | 12 | 6 | 17 |
| Unskilled labour | 20 | 37.5 | 21 | 23 | 22 |
| Skilled labour/Artisan | 1.5 | 12.5 | 27.5 | 6 | 9 |
| Trading/business/transport | 1.5 | | 3 | | 1.5 |
| Lower professional/clerical | 12 | 25 | 3 | 29.5 | 13 |
| No previous work | 10.5 | 12.5 | 6 | 6 | 9 |
| No answer | 30.5 | 12.5 | 27.5 | 29.5 | 28.5 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| UNEMPLOYMENT | | | | | |
| Yes | 68 | 37.5 | 48.5 | 53 | 59.5 |
| No | 32 | 62.5 | 45.5 | 47 | 39 |
| No answer | | | 6 | | 1.5 |
| TOTAL | 100 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100 | 100.0 |
| OWNERSHIP/USE OF LAND IN BIRTHPLACE | | | | | |
| Yes | 75 | 62.5 | 76 | 88 | 76 |
| No | 25 | 37.5 | 24 | 12 | 24 |
| TOTAL | 100 | 100.0 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

Table 10. The AGC Workers' job preferences for themselves and their children
(percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|---|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| PREFERRED JOB FOR THEMSELVES | | | | | |
| Skilled labour/artisan | 49 | 62.5 | 45.5 | 41 | 48 |
| Trading/business/transport | 17.5 | 12.5 | 21 | 17.5 | 18 |
| Lower professional/clerical | 8 | | 21.5 | 12 | 11 |
| Farming | 13.5 | 12.5 | 3 | | 9 |
| Higher professional/clerical | | | 6 | 29.5 | 5.5 |
| No capacity/possibility for another job | 12 | 12.5 | 3 | | 8.5 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| PREFERRED JOB FOR CHILDREN | | | | | |
| Skilled labour/artisan | 20 | 12.5 | 18 | 23 | 19.5 |
| Trading/business/transport | 4 | 12.5 | 6 | 6 | 5 |
| Lower professional/clerical | 20 | 25 | 21.5 | 12 | 19.5 |
| Farming | 8 | 12.5 | 12 | 12 | 10 |
| Higher professional/clerical | 8 | | | 6 | 5.5 |
| According to own choice | 13.5 | | 12 | 29 | 14 |
| According to capability/schooling | 2.5 | | 3 | 6 | 3 |
| Can't tell/any gainful employment | 16 | 37.5 | 24.5 | 6 | 18 |
| No answer | 8 | | 3 | | 5.5 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

to traditional farming. Especially those workers who have been to school constantly look for (technical) training to take up the skilled work they prefer both for themselves and their children.

In general we may say that farming has played little or no part in the miners' lives. To a large extent they are "freed" from the land - some even have no longer any rights to the land in their place of birth. Thus "freed" from the land, they are generally very committed to their jobs (especially skilled and clerical workers) - though some of them are still looking forward to becoming self-employed.

3.3.2. Job satisfaction

Almost all the AGC workers interviewed (95%) intimated that they were satisfied with their present jobs. This does not necessarily mean that they really liked their jobs (only 5% of those who were satisfied specifically said that they liked the job), but rather that the present job provided them with a secure income in a situation of few job openings in the modern sector, and the absence of any more interesting or rewarding jobs.

57% of the workers believed that the AGC was exploiting its labour, and that it could and should reward its workers better because of the high profits made and the difficult and dangerous work at the mine; other workers, however, pointed out that, although the AGC could indeed pay more, it was the government which set the wage structure and prevented the AGC from granting wage increases.

The majority of miners (64%) had good hopes that they would in time be promoted; in particular, the skilled and clerical workers were full of confidence that they would be duly promoted. (see table 11) According to the AGC workers promotion was largely dependent upon hard work, seniority, education and favouritism or bribery. Payment of bribes appeared to be a more important factor in promotion than a long and good service record at the AGC.

A substantial proportion of the workers (39%), and in particular the skilled workers, approved of the way the firm was managed. Management was re-investing some capital in the enterprise and was replacing old machinery; and foreign management was quite sound, as demonstrated by the huge profits of the AGC. Those who were dissatisfied with the way the company was run specifically pointed to the common practice of bribery and the corruption of black

Table 11. Jobs and job satisfaction for AGC workers (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|---|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| WHICH WORKERS GET A BETTER DEAL? | | | | | |
| State enterprises | 38 | 37.5 | 33.5 | 29.5 | 35.5 |
| Mixed enterprises | 34.5 | 37.5 | 33.5 | 29.5 | 34 |
| Foreign enterprises | 14.5 | 12.5 | 24 | 35 | 19.5 |
| Ghanaian private enterprises | 2.5 | 12.5 | | | 2 |
| No answer | 10.5 | | 9 | 6 | 9 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| FIRM RUN AS EFFICIENTLY AS POSSIBLE? | | | | | |
| Yes | 33 | 25 | 61 | 29.5 | 39 |
| No | 20 | 37.5 | 18 | 17.5 | 20.5 |
| Don't know | 35 | 37.5 | 18 | 47 | 32.5 |
| No answer | 12 | | 3 | 6 | 8 |
| TOTAL | 100 | 100.0 | 100 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| PROMOTION CHANCES? | | | | | |
| Yes | 52 | 50 | 76 | 100 | 64 |
| No | 37.5 | 50 | 21 | | 29 |
| Not sure | 9 | | 3 | | 6 |
| No answer | 1.5 | | | | 1 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

managers.

The conditions of service in mixed enterprises like the AGC (state and foreign capital) were considered by the AGC workers to be almost as satisfactory as in state enterprises (see table 11).

According to the AGC workers, workers in state enterprises enjoy permanent jobs, and are not easily dismissed, but workers in foreign enterprises, although having less secure jobs than workers in state enterprises, against victimization and bribery. Conditions of service in Ghanaian private enterprises are considered bad. Some AGC workers appreciated government participation in their enterprise, as co-operation between foreign and state capital would promote efficiency as well as favorable conditions of service. There would be a neat division of labour: foreign management would secure high profits and high productivity and the government would check foreign "exploiters" and look after the workers' welfare. However, as we shall indicate in par. 3.5.1., today most AGC workers are disappointed in state participation in foreign enterprise, because it has not given rise to the expected improvement in the workers' lot.

We may conclude that the AGC workers are quite satisfied with their job (in the sense of its providing them with a secure source of income), with the way the company is managed by foreigners and with the conditions of service at the AGC in comparison with those in most other enterprises in Ghana.

3.4. Living conditions of the AGC workers

It has been a matter of debate among scholars whether Ghanaian workers, and especially (semiskilled and skilled) workers in large-scale foreign and state enterprises, constitute a "labour aristocracy". (25) Peter Waterman has rightly distinguished between the economic, social and political elements of the "labour aristocracy" thesis, which do not necessarily coincide: a relatively privileged position in society does not necessarily imply social segregation from the rural and urban masses and a politically conservative stand. (26) The relatively highly skilled and highly paid Sekondi-Takoradi railway workers have given a clear proof of this. (27)

In dealing first exclusively with the economic and social elements of the labour aristocracy thesis, we should note that the minimum wage in Ghana was equal to ₵ 54 a month during the period of my fieldwork in 1975. Table 12 shows that only 1,5% of the mi-

Table 12. AGC workers' income (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|------------------------|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| WAGES | | | | | |
| Below minimum | 2.5 | | | | 1.5 |
| Ø 54 - Ø 70 | 75 | 37.5 | 15 | 6 | 49 |
| Ø 71 - Ø 100 | 21 | | 58 | 30 | 30.5 |
| Ø 101 - Ø 150 | 1.5 | 50 | 12 | 58 | 14 |
| Ø 151 - Ø 200 | | 12.5 | 3 | 6 | 2 |
| above Ø 200 | | | 12 | | 3 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100 | 100 | 100.0 |
| SUPPLEMENTARY | | | | | |
| FORMS OF INCOME | | | | | |
| Yes | 42.5 | 62.5 | 54.5 | 29.5 | 45 |
| No | 50.5 | 25 | 39.5 | 70.5 | 49 |
| No answer | 7 | 12.5 | 6 | | 6 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

Table 13. Consumer price index (CPI) and indices of average nominal and real earnings of skilled and unskilled workers (1964-74)

| YEAR | CPI | Skilled Workers | | Unskilled Workers | |
|------|-------|------------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------|
| | | nominal earnings | real earnings | nominal earnings | real earnings |
| 1964 | 119.7 | 100.0 | 83.5 | 100.0 | 83.5 |
| 1965 | 151.3 | 100.0 | 66.1 | 100.0 | 66.1 |
| 1966 | 171.4 | 102.3 | 59.7 | 100.0 | 58.3 |
| 1967 | 157.0 | 109.7 | 69.9 | 107.7 | 68.6 |
| 1968 | 169.7 | 117.9 | 69.5 | 115.4 | 68.0 |
| 1969 | 181.8 | 127.0 | 69.9 | 115.4 | 63.5 |
| 1970 | 188.8 | 134.0 | 71.0 | 115.4 | 61.1 |
| 1971 | 206.0 | 140.1 | 68.0 | 115.4 | 56.0 |
| 1972 | 226.5 | 173.7 | 76.7 | 153.8 | 67.9 |
| 1973 | 274.7 | | | 198.4 | 72.2 |
| 1974 | 315.3 | | | 307.7 | 97.6 |

Source: Lisk. F., "Inflation in Ghana. Its effects on employment, incomes and industrial relations", in International labour review, 113, 3 (1976).

ners earned less than the minimum wage, and all of them were casual labourers; all other workers earned at least the minimum wage. Indeed it is a common feature of the Ghanaian industrial scene that unskilled workers in foreign, state and mixed enterprises earn at least the minimum wage, and a substantial number of them, especially the most senior unskilled workers, somewhat more (AGC workers worked 6 days a week during the period of my research and were paid accordingly); however, unskilled workers in Lebanese, Indian and small and medium Ghanaian private enterprises have often to be satisfied with wages below the minimum wage.

Though unskilled miners are often better off than unskilled workers in Lebanese, Indian and Ghanaian private enterprises, and also better off than most, though not all workers in the informal sector (like petty traders and producers), it should be kept in mind that even the minimum wage of £ 2 a day (£ 54 a month), announced by the government in 1974, was generally considered as a "starvation wage". The Ghana Trades Union Congress (GTUC) clearly demonstrated on the basis of price increases calculated by the governmental statistical departments that the minimum wage of £ 2 a day (£ 54 a month) was too low to provide for a worker and his family, and proposed a minimum wage of £ 4 a day (£ 108 a month) as a "bare minimum". (28) Taking into account the 100-200% inflation rate in 1976/77, (29) every wage below £ 150-£ 200 is today probably insufficient to cope with the high cost of living. Moreover, it should be noted here, that although the rates of increase for both skilled and unskilled workers lagged behind those of retail prices throughout the period 1964-74, indicating an undercompensation for inflation through wage increases, on the whole the average earnings of unskilled workers increased more slowly than those of skilled workers throughout the period (see table 13).

Taking £ 150-£ 200 as "a mere subsistence" wage, it can be seen from table 12 that only a few of the most senior semi-skilled, skilled and clerical workers could be considered as enjoying a really "aristocratic" income in comparison with the unskilled workers (and the majority of skilled and clerical workers). In fact, we are dealing here with "headmen" and foremen, belonging to the lowest grades of the supervisory staff, the "senior staff", separated from the "junior staff" by high wages and a prohibition against trade union membership. (30)

Indeed, while the majority of the skilled and clerical workers are surely better off than the unskilled workers, it would really go too far to call them "labour aristocrats" from the economic and social point of view, considering £ 150-£ 200 as a "mere subsistence" wage in present

Ghana. It would be better to place them alongside other social groups such as certain self-employed members of the upper strata of the lower income groups (like the 'well-to-do' petty traders and producers). They remain living among the unskilled workers and other urban low-income groups, sharing their social life and value-systems.

Moreover, the income gap between skilled and unskilled AGC workers and between the AGC workers and the "informal sector" workers is only minimal in comparison with the income gap between the urban poor (including most AGC workers) on the one side, and the Ghanaian middle class and bureaucratic bourgeoisie on the other (see table 14). (31).

Table 14. The lowest and highest rates in the public service in Ghana.

| PERIOD | Minimum Wage | Maximum of the Highest Range | Ratio |
|---|---------------------------|------------------------------|-------|
| Mills-Odoi Commission (1967) | ₵ 0.75 p.d. ₵ 243 p.a. | ₵ 10,500 p.a. | 1:43 |
| January 1972 | ₵ 1.00 p.d. ₵ 324 p.a. | ₵ 10,500 p.a. | 1:32 |
| White Paper on Salary Review Committee's Report (1974) | ₵ 2.00 p.d. ₵ 648 p.a. | ₵ 16,332 p.a. | 1:25 |

Source: TUC Newsletter, vol. 2, no. 8, 1974, p. 1.

The dominant classes in Ghanaian society enjoy many privileges in this society (easy loans, low rents, and so on) and because of their different expenditure patterns, even the present high rate of inflation affects them less than the low income groups. Whereas high income groups can afford to buy basic consumer goods in bulk, especially food and thus often save on unit prices as well as shielding themselves from further price-rises, low income groups are obliged to make their purchases in more or less daily smaller quantities, with corresponding market price disadvantages. Moreover, in Ghana, as in most countries, the high income groups hold a good part of their wealth in the form of assets - real estate (rents on urban dwellings have gone up, conferring windfall gains on landlords at the expense of the tenants), and fixed capital and commercial investments (surrounded with low taxes) - which appreciate in

value or at least retain their value in an inflationary situation. On the other hand, the 'wealth' of the poor is often made up of current disposable incomes and small, rapidly depleting cash balances. (32)

As is well known, it is difficult to evaluate the miners' economic position in comparison with other social strata because extended family obligations deplete their incomes. 79% of the miners were married and 76% had children. Skilled miners had an especially large number of children (table 15), whose education makes serious demands on miners' budgets. Of course, wives and children do not necessarily mean heavy food, clothing and education expenses; such dependents can also gold to miners' incomes. However, only 39% of the miners' wives worked, mostly as small traders, which provided a few cedis profit a month and an even smaller percentage of children were in any form of gainful employment (14%)

Table 15. The AGC worker's household (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semi-skilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|------------------------------|-----------|--------------|---------|----------|-------|
| WIFE WORKING? | | | | | |
| Yes | 30.5 | 37.5 | 51.5 | 53 | 39 |
| No | 41.5 | 25 | 33.5 | 23.5 | 36 |
| Not applicable/ No answer | 28 | 37.5 | 15 | 23.5 | 25 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100 |
| NUMBER OF CHILDREN | | | | | |
| 1-3 | 44 | 50 | 33.5 | 23.5 | 39 |
| 4-6 | 16 | 25 | 21 | 53 | 22 |
| 7 and above | 8 | | 33.5 | 6 | 14 |
| Not applicable/ No answer | 32 | 25 | 12 | 17.5 | 25 |
| TOTAL | 100 | 100 | 100.0 | 100.01 | 100 |
| NUMBER OF DEPENDENTS | | | | | |
| 1-2 | 19 | 25 | 9 | 12 | 16 |
| 3-4 | 32 | 37.5 | 27.5 | 35 | 32 |
| Above 4 | 29 | 12.5 | 54.5 | 35.5 | 35 |
| Not applicable/ No answer | 20 | 25 | 9 | 17.5 | 17 |
| TOTAL | 100 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

In addition miners' incomes are seriously affected by their responsibility for a number of dependents in town as well as in the rural areas. Table 15 shows that Berg's dictum "increments of income are followed by increments of kinsmen to share it" (33) is born out by Ghanaian miners. Skilled and clerical workers, having a larger income than unskilled workers, also bear the burden of more dependents. The strain of dependents on workers' budgets makes for selectivity: all workers affirmed that dependents were selected from the closest relatives and that they could not afford to take care of more remote relatives.

The AGC workers feel responsible not only for dependents in town, but also for close relatives in their place of birth. Whilst only 6% of the miners received help from rural kin in the month of reference (mostly in the form of food), 85% of the miners had given help to rural kinsmen, sometimes remitting quite substantial amounts (see table 16).

Because of the existence of traditional family obligations and the relatively low wages of a considerable number of AGC workers, some workers try to supplement their incomes. In general, miners have no specific skills (like carpenters or fitters), and are too tired after a day's work to be active in self-employment but often they try to raise productivity at work to qualify for special bonuses or do some overtime from time to time - very irregular sources of supplementary incomes (table 12).

Table 16. Help given by miners to rural kin in a single month (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|------------------------------|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| AMOUNT GIVEN | | | | | |
| Help in kind | 5 | | | 12 | 4 |
| £ 0 - £ 10 | 44 | 37.5 | 42.5 | 35 | 42 |
| £ 11 - £ 20 | 12 | 37.5 | 39.5 | 47 | 25 |
| £ 21 - £ 30 | 1.5 | | 3 | | 1.5 |
| £ 31 - £ 50 | 1.5 | | 3 | | 1.5 |
| Nothing | 8 | 12.5 | 6 | | 7 |
| Not applicable/ no answer | 28 | 12.5 | 6 | 6 | 19 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100 | 100.0 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

Table 17. Owing money to somebody or to a specific institution (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|--------------|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| OWING MONEY? | | | | | |
| Yes | 56 | 62.5 | 51.5 | 35 | 52.5 |
| No | 40 | 25 | 45.5 | 65 | 43.5 |
| Sometimes | 1.5 | | | | 1 |
| No answer | 2.5 | 12.5 | 3 | | 3 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100 | 100.0 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

Yet, despite this additional income many workers cannot reach the end of the month without having to borrow money (see table 17). Most workers borrowed from friends or relatives (24%), and from the corporation (15%); but some (13%), in order to meet financial obligations, were forced to borrow from money-lenders who demanded high rates of interest, ranging from 20 to 40%. Only 6% of the workers had actually lent money to co-workers in financial difficulties.

More than half of the miners were members of voluntary associations that enabled workers to survive in periods of crisis (see table 18).

Table 18. Miners and membership in voluntary associations (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|------------------------------|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| MEMBERSHIP IN ASSOCIATIONS | | | | | |
| Yes | 50.5 | 75 | 63.5 | 59 | 56.5 |
| No | 42.5 | 25 | 33.5 | 41 | 39 |
| No answer | 7 | | 3 | | 4.5 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100 | 100.0 | 100 | 100.0 |
| NAMES OF ASSOCIATIONS | | | | | |
| susu/credit unions | 18.5 | 37.5 | 24 | 30 | 22.5 |
| religious organisation | 1.5 | 12.5 | 3 | | 2 |
| regional/tribal association | 29.5 | 25 | 39.5 | 35 | 32.5 |
| Not applicable/ no answer | 50.5 | 25 | 33.5 | 35 | 43 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

Regional and tribal associations flourish in Obuasi. (34) Around 23% of the AGC workers were members of "susu" groups, rotating credit associations, (35) and credit unions which at the moment are strongly promoted by the GTUC with the assistance of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Ghana Cooperative Credit Union Association - all institutional aids to saving. (36) These institutions make a large sum of money available to the individual worker who cannot save it on his or her own in order to buy some costly goods or to pay children's school fees or to discharge other obligations. (37)

The effects of a life below subsistence level, which has been the lot of a large number of miners, are well known: poor, overcrowded accommodation, malnutrition, lack of transportation, inadequate medical attention, and a lack of educational opportunities for children to move up the social ladder. (38)

It was pointed out during the hearing by the Ata-Bedu Commission (1969) investigating the causes of the 1969 Obuasi strike that the AGC had provided a working population of 6500 with only 987 rooms; the last series of houses was built as far back as 1937. (39) Workers who have not obtained company accommodation are given ¢ 1.50 monthly for grossly insufficient accommodation - especially considering the exorbitant rents charged by Obuasi landlords. It is not unusual to find a family of ten or more in one relatively small room. After the publication of the Ata-Bedu report the AGC decided to spend ¢ 1.25 m. on housing for its employees (40); of this 1 m. cedis was to be used to build 280 new houses, and the remainder to convert single room dwellings into double rooms. And then these few houses, which were designed for low income wage-earners, were given to high income wage-earners (distribution was often based on bribes).

Workers living in villages about 4 or 5 miles away from Obuasi must get to a motor road before boarding a lorry to work. In the past there was no transport provided by the corporation (only the local branch of the Mineworkers' Union operated a few buses paid by the workers). Work started at 7 a.m., and a worker was turned out if he reported late; consequently, he lost the day's wage.

While the AGC provided the workers with a hospital, I heard many complaints of inadequate treatment and the medical staff's rude treatment of the "junior staff", as well as rumours of pilfering of drugs

from the hospital's dispensary.

Chances for low income children to obtain secondary school education were very small (41); at best most low income children hoped to enter an apprenticeship leading to skilled work or self-employment.(42)

The workers' feeling that there were few prospects for any improvement in their situation, and their awareness of the avenues leading to social mobility (better skills, education, and self-employment) are clearly demonstrated by table 19.

Contrary to the labour aristocracy thesis, we may conclude that most miners are economically and socially separated, not from the urban masses, but rather from the dominant classes. Their incomes are not much higher than those earned by workers in the smaller capitalist enterprises and in the informal sector. Moreover, they tend to live amongst the urban masses, sharing their incomes with others (caring for unemployed relatives), and maintaining similar social patterns and value systems. Many miners hope that after having acquired some capital or skills in the capitalist sector they can in the future become self-employed in the informal sector. Whilst all this appears to refute the economic and social implications of the labour aristocracy thesis with regard to Ghanaian miners, we must still consider whether the political implications of the labour aristocracy thesis do apply to them. Are miners politically conservative, upholding the status quo and rejecting anything radical or revolutionary? How do the miners perceive their own class position in the system of production and in society in general? Or, in other words: what is the political consciousness of the AGC workers?

Table 19. Improvements after ten years (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|--|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| IMPROVEMENTS AFTER TEN YEARS | | | | | |
| No hope/no further prospects | 65.5 | 25 | 45.5 | 47 | 55.5 |
| A (better) skill/education/job/income | 20 | 37.5 | 30.5 | 35.5 | 26 |
| Self-employment (business/trade/farming) | 6.5 | 37.5 | 15 | 17.5 | 12 |
| Pension/living with working children | 2.5 | | 3 | | 2 |
| No answer | 5.5 | | 6 | | 4.5 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

3.5. Political consciousness of the AGC workers

The political orientation of the AGC workers cannot be understood in isolation from the state's developmental policy. Since the achievement of independence in 1957, the various governments in Ghana have attempted to solve the problem of underdevelopment along more or less capitalist lines. (43) The gap in modernization and industrialization between Ghana and the western capitalist countries should be bridged as soon as possible. Governmental development strategies in Ghana varied from a more statist (Nkrumah and the Convention People's Party (CPP), 1957-66; National Redemption Council (NRC), 1972 to the present) to a more liberal-capitalist type (National Liberation Council (NLC), 1966-69; Busia/Progress Party (PP), 1969-72). Ideally, the economic characteristics of such a capitalist development strategy would be the following: a conception of development at least in the short run, as maximizing production rather than ensuring social equality; a decision that a development in this sense can best be stimulated through the profit motive and the related institution of private property; considerable reliance upon foreign capital and expertise to modernize the economy; and the official encouragement of indigenous ownership in both the urban and rural areas. (44)

Workers have a specific role to play in this capitalist development strategy. The state has continuously appealed to workers to make "sacrifices" for "nation-building"; workers should no longer play a "consumptionist" role, but a "productionist" one. They should raise productivity without corresponding wage increases, and they should avoid strikes as their contribution to the development of the nation.

However, this capitalist development strategy has failed to stimulate economic growth in the sixties and seventies. (45) Ghana's economy with its outward-centered orientation, remains essentially a 'colonial' economy largely dependent on the export of a few products (cocoa, gold and timber), and the import of raw materials for a small industrial sector still largely dominated by foreign capital. Moreover, this development strategy has created large income disparities between those classes that produce the 'wealth' of the nation (peasants and workers) and those classes enjoying the fruits of the workers' labour (bureaucratic bourgeoisie; national and foreign capital). Whilst the share of the dominant classes in the consumption of the national surplus has increased since independence, the workers' share has decreased. (46)

Various ideologies have been propagated by the state to mask the emergent class structure and large income disparities, and to stress the solidarity of all Ghanaians in the struggle for development: African socialism, "developmentalism" (47) and various nationalist ideologies (like nation-building). The present military government, the National Redemption Council (NRC) - subordinated to a Supreme Military Council (SMC) since 1975 - advocates a "national revolution" aiming at "a complete and systematic transformation of our peoples into a "SELF-RELIANT NATION. (48) To make this revolution a success, the NRC has constantly emphasized an unquestioned national solidarity with the existing class structure: "We are engaged in a revolution in which everyone is important. No one is left out for reasons of age, wealth, education or status. We must move forward as one people, each making his contribution in accordance with his training, expertise and ability". (49) In practice, however, the NRC is not carrying out a "national revolution" but a "national-bourgeois" revolution, actively stimulating the rise of a national bourgeoisie in the rural and urban areas by a combination of controversial decrees and financial support. It thus even exacerbates existing inequalities. (50) The NRC has not really attacked the position of foreign capital in Ghanaian society; state protection (through its participation in vital foreign enterprises in Ghana) ensures that foreign enterprises obtain higher profits from capital invested in Ghana than elsewhere - with cheap labour as the basis of these profits. The bureaucratic bourgeoisie had all the privileges restored which the Busia-regime had taken away in 1971; its salaries were increased; and today this group responds with great alacrity to the many opportunities in business, agriculture and industry.

However, petty commodity producers were severely hit by import restrictions and the high cost of transport. The NRC has taken various measures to transfer the distribution of scarce essential consumer goods from petty traders to wholesale traders. (51) Though cocoa prices reached record heights on the world market, the Cocoa Marketing Board (CMB) paid the producers very low prices. Moreover, workers were not sufficiently compensated for the economy's record inflation, while "wild-cat" strikes were sometimes bloodily repressed.

In analyzing this situation we are led to pose several questions: does the miner accept the "neo-colonial solution" or does he reject it?

What is the worker's perception of his class position in the capitalist system of production and in the society at large? Does the worker accept his class position or does he strive for a fundamental restructuring of the social and economic structure and the seizure of political power?

We shall first deal with the miners' perception of their class position in the capitalist system of production, and then with their perception of their class position in the society at large.

3.5.1. Miners' perception of their class position in the system of production

Miners are quite aware that owners and managers try to keep wages and other labour expenses (like accommodation and transport) to a minimum in order to increase profits. Addressing workers in 1953 at the AGC, union leader A.K. Buachie noted that the

Union was going to face intelligent and difficult, cunning capitalists... Employers were all the time fooling the country and miners that they had no profits. The mines had in all £ 23 million profit in 1951-52... Only £ 2 million was used for both European and African labor. The rest of the £ 21 million went to the Gold Coast government and the shareholders, Sir Edward Spears and Co. (52)

Feelings of exploitation have from time to time given rise to individual and collective protest activities. Workers have manifested their protest against exploitation by a wide range of activities like sabotage, restriction of output, high labour turnover, absenteeism, "malingering", gold stealing, theft of company stores and company property. And they have regularly overcome ethnic differences to unite around wage claims and other grievances relating to workers' welfare and interests (see table 20) and to confront "the exploiter" collectively.

Though miners feel exploited in the system of production, and have in actual practice regularly protested individually and collectively against their exploitation, the majority do not appear, at least verbally, to support sustained class conflict and struggle.

The large majority of miners (94%), almost daily imbued by the ideology that co-operation between management and workers is necessary to achieve the ultimate aim of national development (constantly propagated by government, management and trade union leadership), do

Table 20. What kind of things (other than money) do workers want?
(percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semi- skilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|--|-----------|------------------|---------|----------|-------|
| THINGS WORKERS WANT | | | | | |
| Amenities (housing/trans- port/education/loans | 82.5 | 100 | 85 | 64.5 | 82 |
| Better health/safety inspection | 8 | | 3 | 17.5 | 7.5 |
| Industrial peace/cooper- ation with management | 8 | | 9 | 6 | 7.5 |
| Respect from employers/ treatment as human beings | 1.5 | | | 6 | 1.5 |
| Happiness/satisfaction at work/good atmosphere | | | | 6 | 1 |
| Interest in the country's development/hard work | | | | 3 | 0.5 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100 | 100 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

wish to maintain normally cordial relations between management and workers, providing that management shows respect for workers and demonstrates a willingness to listen to and accede to justified workers' demands. (53) The 1969 Annual Report of Lonrho which contained some reference to the March 1969 strike added that labour relations "are now excellent". (54) Only in periods of crisis do latent class feelings become manifest, though even then collective action is often more directed against those managers and employers who look down upon workers and humiliate them in the workplace.

While actual management of the corporation is still in the hands of whites who are backed by a government committed to the status quo because of its interest in profits and efficiency, and while a "white" paternalistic atmosphere pervades the whole mine "compound", workers nevertheless seem to prefer white management to black management. Indeed, workers' enthusiasm for a rapid acquisition of the mine by native Ghanaians, and the emergence of a local managerial class, (55) is often very restrained for two reasons:

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| Industrial peace/cooper- ation with management | 8 | | 9 | 6 | 7.5 |
| Respect from employers/ treatment as human beings | 1.5 | | | 6 | 1.5 |
| Happiness/satisfaction at work/good atmosphere | | | | 6 | 1 |
| Interest in the country's development/hard work | | | | 3 | 0.5 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100 | 100 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
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- 1) The miners share government's view that white management is more competent than black management. Higher efficiency at the mine will give rise to higher profits and higher wages. (56)
- 2) The Miners constantly experience abusive and humiliating treatment and corruption by those newly placed into "expatriate" positions. (57) Though it is often heard in Ghana, that Ghanaian workers prefer Ghanaian management, (58) because the latter better understands their problems, workers at the AGC definitely prefer the opposite. While the Ghanaian "senior staff" is often very sensitive to racial inequities, and often assumes that foreigners deliberately elevate those Ghanaians to managerial responsibility whom they know will do as they are told and not pose a threat, the subordinates of the Ghanaian successors compare their superiors unfavourably with their white predecessors, who are now glorified as "less severe", "fairer" and competenter. In a meeting with young miners I heard the following: "We, young workers, are not in favour of Ghanaian management which is unjust and much harsher than expatriate management; Ghanaian management punishes workers on the job for grievances not related to the workplace. They do not mind the workers and they would "chop" the wealth of the mine, if they were in control". (59)

The glorification of white management at the present time does not mean that workers wholeheartedly accept white management. For example, the workers very strongly oppose the practice of searching Ghanaians but not foreigners for smuggled gold from the mines. In addition, workers resent the white management's resistance against their participation in any aspect of the management. While most miners do not support self-management (see table 21), as they do not have a high esteem of their own managerial skills, they would like to participate in it.

Union members participated in the management of some enterprises, including a furniture factory under the CPP. (60) They were influenced in this regard by Israeli, West German, and Yugoslav models. And although the effort was short-lived, the principle continues to interest the workers. Workers at the AGC are pressing for representation on the Board of Directors, and some workers for the establishment of "work councils".

Table 21. Self-management of factories (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semi- skilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|-----------------|-----------|------------------|---------|----------|-------|
| SELF-MANAGEMENT | | | | | |
| Yes | 21.5 | 37.5 | 15 | 41 | 23.5 |
| No | 76 | 50 | 85 | 53 | 73.5 |
| Don't know | | 12.5 | | | 1 |
| No answer | 2.5 | | | 6 | 2 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100 | 100 | 100.0 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

Though the NRC has sometimes given rise to expectations that work councils would be introduced, the realization of these expectations has not yet taken place. (61) After all, the NRC is not likely to oppose the mine management's resistance to workers' participation in management and thus risk a conflict with white management. A good understanding with white management, ensuring continuously high output, high profits, and a plentiful supply of foreign exchange, is in the last instance a more important factor than the workers' interests and welfare.

Government's continuous support of management after the partial takeover of the mine has been a great disappointment for the AGC workers. Government's decision to take a majority share in mining operations, interpreted as a major step towards taking charge of the economy and protecting workers, 'who have been exploited for so long' (62), was praised by the miners; and promises of raised productivity and hard work were made to make the "revolution" a success. AGC workers cheered the Acheampong regime, particularly when the Commissioner for Labour, Major Kwame Asante, urged them to be "watchdogs against foreign sabotage". (63) After having had experience with government participation in mining, (partial) nationalization is now considered by many miners as a means for an alliance between management and the government against the workers. (Partial) nationalization has given rise to few changes in the company's labour policies. Moreover, political controls have even been increased: the presence of the military on the Board of Directors is considered by miners as a constant warning against "unrevolutionary" behaviour (the refusal to play a "productionist" role). Despite

the rhetoric, it is not the workers, but the managers who have government protection. (64)

It is entirely possible that the disappointment with (partial) state ownership of the mine is one of the main reasons that only a minority of the miners supported the transfer of (foreign) private ownership of vital foreign companies to state ownership (see table 22). It is certainly worth remarking that the AGC workers' lack of enthusiasm for state ownership of vital foreign companies contrasts sharply with the large support given to the transfer of ownership of vital foreign companies to the state by other (industrial) workers interviewed in Ghana. (65)

Table 22. Who should own the large foreign companies, banks, etc?
(percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semi-skilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|---------|----------|-------|
| OWNERSHIP OF LARGE FOREIGN COMPANIES | | | | | |
| Present owners | 56 | 12.5 | 64 | 53 | 55 |
| Government | 33.5 | 62.5 | 27 | 35 | 34 |
| Workers themselves | 6.5 | 25 | 6 | 6 | 7.5 |
| Don't know | | | 3 | | 0.5 |
| No answer | 4 | | | 6 | 3 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100 | 100 | 100.0 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

In short, miners in Ghana are quite aware of exploitation by owners and managers in the system of production. Yet they are not engaged in sustained class conflict and class struggle, but favour normally harmonious relations with owners and managers (on the condition that the latter show respect for workers and demonstrate at least a willingness to listen to justified workers' demands). They try to extract their share of the profits made through collective bargaining with the management. Any outburst of latent class conflict is today often coloured by race: miners consider the black management rather than the white one as "exploitative" and oppressive.

Workers are not against the institutions of management and private ownership. The majority of the AGC workers neither favour a fundamental restructuring of the social relations of production (the disappearance of the manager-worker distinction), nor supports self-management, but advocates rather a form of participation in management. Most miners are not against private ownership, though a significant minority of them would prefer a transfer of private ownership of strategic and vital foreign companies to state ownership.

3.5.2. Miners' perception of their class position in Ghanaian society

Superficially it would appear that miners are quite satisfied with their present position both as to their particular place of residence and in Ghanaian society in general (see table 23), and especially miners with a specific skill seem to be content.

Most miners, however, did not attribute their satisfaction with their present position in Obuasi and Ghanaian society to high incomes or a decent job, but rather to help received from wives, children, and other contacts (patronage or favouritism), and to economizing and living within their means (see table 24)

Table 23. Miners' perception of their present position in Ghanaian society (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semi-skilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|-------------------------|-----------|--------------|---------|----------|-------|
| PRESENT SOCIAL POSITION | | | | | |
| Doing quite well | 48 | 62.5 | 70 | 82 | 53.5 |
| Suffering | 22.5 | 25 | 21 | 6 | 20.5 |
| Doing not badly | 29.5 | 12.5 | 9 | 12 | 21 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

Table 24. To what factors do you attribute your satisfaction with your present position in place of residence and Ghanaian society? (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semi-skilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|---------|----------|-------|
| ATTRIBUTION OF SATISFACTION TO | | | | | |
| Help/contacts/patronage | 46.5 | 37.5 | 27.5 | 47 | 41.5 |
| Good job/salary | 8 | 25 | 30.5 | 23 | 16.5 |
| Economizing/living within one's means | 13.5 | 12.5 | 9 | 6 | 11 |
| Hard work/perseverance | 5.5 | | 12 | 12 | 7.5 |
| Education | | | | 6 | 1 |
| Not applicable/no answer | 26.5 | 25 | 21 | 6 | 22.5 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100 | 100.0 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

Miners, especially unskilled miners, who felt dissatisfied with their position in Obuasi and Ghanaian society, attributed their lack of success in this society to the erosion of their relatively low wages by the cost of living, as well as to the number of dependents they had to sustain and their lack of education.

Whilst at first glance the AGC workers appeared to be more or less satisfied with their present position in Ghanaian society, further questions indicated that they only felt satisfied with their present position in comparison with low income groups, but relatively deprived in comparison with those groups profiting in Ghanaian society. Social groups that profit are in Ghanaian parlance those social groups that lead an affluent life at the expense of others. Table 25 shows that the AGC workers are quite aware of those groups in Ghanaian society that are privileged.

From table 25 we see that the majority of miners perceived the Ghanaian social structure in strictly class terms. Most miners referred to specific classes in Ghanaian society, especially the bureaucratic bourgeoisie and sections of Ghanaian middle class-wealthy top bureaucrats, managers, traders, and middlemen who are able to exploit the

present shortage of food and other consumer goods to their advantage. Only relatively few workers referred in more populist terms to a vague notion that "the rich" or "big men" advance themselves at the expense of "the poor" "small men"

Table 25. Privileged social groups in Ghanaian society (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| PRIVILEGED GROUPS | | | | | |
| Top government officials/ managers | 56 | 62.5 | 58 | 59 | 57 |
| High income groups/ the "big men" | 30.5 | 25 | 24 | 23.5 | 28 |
| Traders/Middlemen | 12 | 12.5 | 18 | 17.5 | 14 |
| TUC-leaders | 1.5 | | | | 1 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100 | 100.0 | 100 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

Whilst miners feel relatively deprived in comparison with the dominant classes or "the big men" of Ghanaian society, they seem to identify "downwards" with those groups that are underprivileged in Ghanaian society (see table 26). The underprivileged social groups in Ghanaian society are in Ghanaian parlance those social groups that are materially the worst off because of "exploitation" by the privileged groups of Ghanaian society.

Again, a large number of miners referred to specific classes in Ghanaian society: the unemployed, the labourers and workers and the (poor) farmers. However, some of them still talked in populist terms of "the poor" in general; only few perceived the social structure in tribal terms. That miners identify with the underprivileged classes in Ghanaian society is not surprising if we remember our discussion about the economic position and social relations of workers in par. 3.4.

There is a strong resentment amongst AGC workers against the growing inequality in Ghanaian society, and a clear awareness that the present government, who sets the wages (directly in the public sector, and indirectly in the private sector), keeps the large income

inequalities in Ghanaian society intact despite all the rhetoric of "national revolution" and "bridging the gap between the low and high income groups" and displays itself a glittering affluence. Although the NRC had just raised the minimum wage in the year preceding my fieldwork (1974), and although it still enjoyed some prestige among the miners for that reason, most miners accused the government of favoring the dominant classes or "big men" more than the workers (see table 27)

Table 26. Underprivileged social groups in Ghanaian society (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|--|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| UNDERPRIVILEGED | | | | | |
| SOCIAL GROUPS | | | | | |
| Low income groups/poor | 33.5 | 37.5 | 18 | 23.5 | 23.5 |
| Unemployed | 25 | | 27.5 | 41 | 26.5 |
| Labourers/workers | 17.5 | 12.5 | 21.5 | 12 | 17 |
| Everybody (because of high cost of living) | 5.5 | 25 | 3 | 12 | 7 |
| Remote tribes/regions | 6.5 | | 6 | | 5 |
| Disabled/handicapped | 2.5 | 12.5 | 3 | 6 | 4 |
| Poor farmers | 1.5 | | 6 | | 2 |
| No answer | 8 | 12.5 | 15 | 5.5 | 10 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

Table 27. Who profits from the development policy of the NRC? (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|----------------------|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| WHO PROFITS? | | | | | |
| Dominant classes/ | | | | | |
| "big men" | 57.5 | 37.5 | 30.5 | 76.5 | 52 |
| Workers | 24 | 37.5 | 51.5 | | 28.5 |
| Everybody | 16 | 25 | 12 | 23.5 | 16.5 |
| Don't know/uncertain | 2.5 | | 6 | | 3 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

According to the miners, the dominant classes or "big men" are able to have priority even under this "revolutionary" government; they bribe their way in government circles, they have easy access to loans, and obtain plenty of allowances and fringe benefits. All these benefits only serve to widen the gap between rich and poor. As one underground miner remarked: "Big men do not sweat, yet they get everything free from the government".

However, workers do not strive for a complete restructuring of the social structure, nor do they wish to seize political power to bring about an improvement in their position in society. They do not champion revolution, but only certain reforms within the present status quo.

Although AGC workers strongly resent the present social inequality in Ghanaian society, they do not advocate social equality. They want the present income gap, which is in the range of 1:25 between the lowest and highest paid in public service (see table 14), to be brought to a more acceptable level; the GTUC has often proposed a ratio of 1:10 between the lowest and highest incomes in the years after the 1966 coup. (66) Miners accept the legitimacy of "reasonable" income disparities, as long as these correspond to education, initiative, hard work, and responsibility. Miners often admire the "self-made" men who have "arrived" in a top position because of their own efforts or qualities, and especially those who enable workers to share in one way or the other in the benefits of their high office or successful ownership. Often the miners hope to become a small businessman in the informal sector themselves. Workers' resentment is mostly directed against those members of the dominant classes who have reached the top by "foul" means (corruption and bribery) or political machination, those who do not appear to be concerned with the workers' lot but only with their own "progress", who look down upon workers and "do nothing for them".

Likewise, miners are not against the state, but against politicians who are corrupt and dishonest, who use "politics" to benefit only themselves and their clients, who are authoritarian and demonstrate no restraint in displaying their glittering affluence. There is much evidence that the considerable labour unrest during the Busia regime was a manifestation of the disillusionment of Ghanaian workers with the government's lack of concern for the demands of social justice and its conspicuous life-style. (67) As The Spokesman noted with regards to the

1969 AGC strike: "...How can a government which appropriates over N¢ 1.5 million to itself in salaries and allowances ask the workers restrain themselves in their demands for better working and living conditions. The workers of Obuasi Goldfields hooted and boomed at Mr. R.R. Amponsah, the Minister of Lands and Mineral Resources, when he went there to appeal to them to withdraw their strike threat because the workers knew that the man talking to them earned in one month more than the annual salaries of three underground workers. They knew that he worked in a beautifully air-conditioned red-carpeted office, rode a massive Mercedes 280, a supreme representative of a new breed of pleasure loving, ostentatious and diffident men at the top". (68)

Miners do not want to seize political power; they do not even possess a vision of an alternative socio-political order, except for some vague notions of a more egalitarian, more democratic and more prosperous society. Quite a few workers and union leaders told me that workers in Ghana do not bother much what kind of government Ghana has, socialist or capitalist or anything else, as long as the politicians are honest, prepared to listen to workers' grievances and demands and "to deliver the goods". The history of the Ghanaian labour movement seems to prove them right, as every change of government raised high expectations amongst workers that the workers' lot would be improved under the new government. Indeed, miners show a high dependence on the government and governmental agencies to alleviate their plight, ones like Social Welfare which is exceptionally active in Obuasi. (see table 28) And they appeal to the government to bring about certain reforms in society that can improve the workers' lot. (see table 29).

All this shows the emergence of a working-class perspective on social reality, as well as the limitations of such a working-class consciousness. Most striking is the ambivalence of workers' consciousness; its "contents" shows a strange mixture of radical and conservative ideas. On the one hand, miners demonstrate strong feelings of exploitation in the system of production, a rejection of the present status quo of large income disparities and a great resentment against the state's maintenance of the status quo. On the other hand, however, they normally uphold cordial relations with management and government (with the exception of those managers and politicians who are not concerned with the workers' lot and look down upon them), and demonstrate

a great deference to those who have "arrived" in society through individual efforts, a belief in social mobility (sometimes even against their own better judgement in a situation of serious inflation), and a great dependence on the state and the dominant classes in society to improve their lot. Strong feelings of exploitation and dissatisfaction with the present status quo have not given rise to the emergence of a revolutionary, but to a reformist consciousness: workers do not pursue a fundamental restructuring of the status quo and seizure of state power, but only certain reforms within the present status quo, in particular a more egalitarian, more democratic and more prosperous society.

Whilst all this clearly suggests the limitations of workers' consciousness, it also demonstrates a political potential that can be used to advantage by a radical mass movement or organisation. In the absence of any radical political party or movement in Ghana, what is the influence of trade unionism on workers' consciousness and action?

Table 28. Names of poor workers' friends (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|----------------------------------|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| FRIENDS OF POOR WORKERS | | | | | |
| Government/governmental agencies | 36 | | 36.5 | 47 | 37 |
| TUC-local branch | 32 | 50 | 33.5 | 17.5 | 31.5 |
| No help/self-help | 22.5 | 25 | 18 | 29.5 | 22.5 |
| Voluntary Societies | 1.5 | | 9 | 6 | 4 |
| Farmers | 4 | | | | 2 |
| No answer | 4 | 25 | 3 | | 3 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

Table 29. What should the government do to improve living conditions?
(percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|--|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS | | | | | |
| More amenities (accommodation/education etc.) | 29.5 | 37.5 | 33.5 | 12 | 28.5 |
| Establishment of industrial/agric. enterprises | 22.5 | 12.5 | 27.5 | 29 | 24 |
| Improvement of payment/conditions of service | 24 | 12.5 | 3 | 35 | 19.5 |
| No interference in workers' affairs/demands | 14.5 | 12.5 | 24 | 6 | 16 |
| Reduced prices/taxes | 5.5 | | 6 | | 4.5 |
| Checking profiteering/bribery and other vices | 2.5 | 12.5 | 3 | 12 | 4.5 |
| Improvement of rural areas | | 12.5 | | 6 | 1.5 |
| Checking workers' exploitation | 1.5 | | | | 1 |
| Credit facilities to workers | | | 3 | | 0.5 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100 | 100.0 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

NOTES

- 1) CNA, File 1481/30, Conditions of Labour in the Gold Coast.
- 2) See Kimble, D., op.cit., 1963; Greenstreet, D.K., "The Transport Department - The first two decades", (1901-20), in The Economic Bulletin of Ghana, X, 3(1966), pp. 33-45; Greenstreet, M., "Labour Conditions in the Gold Coast during the 1930s with particular reference to Migrant Labour in the Mines", in The Economic Bulletin of Ghana, II (second series), 2(1972), pp. 32-46; Greenstreet, M., "Labour Relations in the Gold Coast with special reference to the Ariston Strike", in The Economic Bulletin of Ghana, II (second series), 3 (1972), pp. 30-40; Prah, K., "The Northern Minorities in the Gold Coast", in Race and Class, XVI, 3(1975), pp. 305-13; Thomas, R.G., "Forced Labour in British West Africa: The Case of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast 1906-1927", in Journal of African History, XIV, 1 (1973), pp. 79-103; and Konings, P.J.J., op.cit., 1977.
- 3) Governor Guggisberg to Lord Milner, 21 May 1920, PRO CO 96/612.
- 4) Minutes of Interview between Governor and Secretary for Mines, Enc. A. in Governor Guggisberg to Lord Milner, 21 May 1920, PRO CO 96/612.
- 5) Report to the Secretary of State for the Colonies on the Sanitary Conditions of the Mines and Mining Villages in the Gold Coast Colony and Ashanti. Sir William Simpson to C.O., 24 Nov. 1924, PRO CO 96/652.

The first figures supplied, for the period April to September 1923, that is for labour recruited in the 1922-23 recruiting season, show death rates from disease for underground indentured labour of 3.5 per cent per annum for the Abbontiakoon Mine, 12.8 per cent for the Tarquah and Abosso Mines, and 4.4 per cent for the Prestea Mine, and total (underground and surface) death rates of 3.7 and 2.8 per cent respectively. The Colonial Office officials used as benchmark for assessing these figures those for total death rates among Transvaal miners, which had been reduced to 1 per cent per annum. See Thomas, R.G., op.cit., 1973, p. 100; and Greenstreet, M., op.cit., 1972.

Many of the miners became incapacitated by various forms of tuberculosis and silicosis after a spell of work in the mines (Ghana,

Chamber of Mines, Reports). See also the following documents in the archives of the Ghana Chamber of Mines, Gold Coast Preliminary Report by Sir W.J. Simpson on Investigation regarding the high death-rates of Mines Labourers, Accra: GPO, 1925; Murray, A.J., and Crockett, J.A., An Interim Report on the Prevalence of Silicosis and Tuberculosis among Mineworkers in the Gold Coast (1941); and Report on Silicosis and Tuberculosis among Mineworkers in the Gold Coast (1946); and Irvine, I.G. and Simpson, F.W., Report upon an Inquiry into the Incidence of Silicosis amongst Native Labourers employed in the Gold Mines of the Gold Coast Colony.

- 6) Thomas, R.G., op.cit., 1973, p. 103.
- 7) Thus by 1931 Cardinall was able to note that: "labour in the Gold Coast is plentiful, fluid and in the fullest sense voluntary". See Cardinall, A.N., The Gold Coast 1931, London, 1932, p. 248. See also Berg, E., "The Development of a Labour Force in Sub-Saharan Africa", in Economic Development and Cultural Change, XIII, 1965, pp. 394-412.
- 8) Compare van Onselen, C., Chibaro. African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933, London, 1976; and Johnstone, F.A., op.cit., 1976.
- 9) Secretary for Mines, Letter to the Colonial Secretary, 23rd October 1933, no. 45/1164/33, in GNA, File 716/33, Labour Conditions in (i) The Mines; (ii) in The Colony Generally.
- 10) Kumekpor, T.K., and Amakyo-Ansah, A., Konongo and its Alien Miners, Legon: University of Ghana, n.d.
- 11) Peil, M., The Ghanaian Factory Worker: Industrial Man in Africa, Cambridge, 1972, p. 39.
- 12) Compare Date-Bah, E., Societal Influences on Work Behaviour and Interaction of Ghanaian Workers: a case study, Ph.D.-Thesis, University of Birmingham, 1974, pp. 70-71.
- 13) Sir Edward Spears said at the annual general meeting of AGC on May 21, 1952, that his company had combined with a number of other mines to organise recruitment in the Northern Territories and to arrange transport to the mining areas, this being the largest source from which recruits are available. See West Africa, May 31, 1952, p. 449. For recruiting camps in the North in the fifties, see Songsore, J., Wa Town as a Growth Centre 1897-1973, Ph.D.-Thesis, University of Ghana, 1975, p. 325.

- 14) Herskovits, M.J., The Human Factor in Changing Africa, New York, 1962, pp. 272-73.
- 15) Peil, M., "Middle School Leavers: Occupational Aspirations and Prospects", in Ghana Journal of Sociology, II, 1 (1966), pp. 7-17; and Peil, M., "Aspirations and Social Structure: A West African example", in Africa, XXXVIII, 1 (1968), pp. 71-79.
- 16) Kumekpor, T.K., and Amakyo-Ansah, A., op. cit., n.d.; and Addo, N.O., "Immigration into Ghana: Some Social and Economic Implications of the 18th November 1969", in Ghana Journal of Sociology, VI, 1 (1970), pp. 20-42; and Addo, N.O. "Foreign African Workers in Ghana", in International Labour Review, 169, 1 (1974), pp. 47-68.
- 17) No less than 55% of miners had been employed for over 10 years in Sierra Leonean diamond mines and there were quite a few long service workers (7.2% with over 25 years service). See Swindell, K., "Mining Workers in Sierra Leone: their stability and marital status", in African Affairs, vol. 74, no. 295, 1975, pp. 180-191.
- 18) For the stabilization of skilled workers in an Accra garment factory, see Date-Bah, E., op. cit., 1974.
- 19) Heigham, J.B., Chief Labour Officer, Some Notes on Labour in the Gold Coast, Accra, 1952; Gold Coast Department of Labour, Memo-randum on Migratory Labour, 1952, p. 13.
- 20) Kitching, O., "Progress of Trade Unions in the Gold Coast", Lecture held during the Easter Trade Union School of the Extra-Mural Department, p. 2; see also Gold Coast, Report of the Gold Coast Mines Board of Inquiry, Accra: GP, 1956, p. 36.
- 21) Konings, P.J.J., op. cit., 1977, pp. 66-70.
- 22) See Ampene, E. "Obuasi and its Miners", in Ghana Journal of Sociology, III, 2 (1967), pp. 76-77.
- 23) Unemployed was "a person who did not work at any time during the reference month and had no fixed job and who was looking actively for work, by visiting employment agencies, writing applications, etc." See Census Advance Report, 1960, p. XVI. There is, according to Steel and Mabey, no reliable study on unemployment in Ghana. See Steel, W.F., and Mabey, S.J., Unemployment and Income in Ghana since 1960. An Annotated Bibliography, Bibliography Series, Manpower and Unemployment Research in Africa, no. 4, August, 1973, p. 70.
- 24) See Konings, P.J.J. op. cit., 1977, p. 82.

- 25) Birmingham, W., "An Index of Real Wages of the Unskilled Labourer in Accra, 1939-1959", in the Economic Bulletin of Ghana, IV, 3, 1960; Isaac, J.E., "The National Minimum wage", in The Economic Bulletin of Ghana, VII, 3, (1963), pp. 3-12; Fitch, B., and Oppenheimer, M., Ghana: End of an Illusion, New York, 1966; Murray, R., "Second Thoughts on Ghana", in New Left Review, no. 42, 1967, pp. 25-34; Ewusi, K., "The Minimum Wage Issue Reconsidered", in Ghana Social Science Journal, 1, 2 (1971), pp. 80-84; Jeffries, R.D., "The Labour Aristocracy: Ghana Case Study", in Review of African Political Economy, no. 3, 1975, pp. 59-70; and Konings, P.J.J. op. cit., 1977.
- 26) Waterman, P., op. cit., 1975.
- 27) See Jeffries, R.D., "Populist Tendencies in the Ghanaian Trade Union Movement", in Sandbrook, R., and Cohen, R., op. cit., 1975.
- 28) TUC Newsletter, vol. 2, no. 8, August, 1974, p. 1. Minimum wage of ₵ 4 a day was eventually granted in 1977.
- 29) The local food price-index, 100 in March 1963, rose to 264 in 1972, to 384.6 in 1974, to 575 in January 1976, to 1027 in December 1976 and rose even more dramatically in 1977.
- 30) In 1968 the question of membership of "supervisory staff" of trade unions came up for discussion between the GTUC, GEA, and government. The then secretary-general of the GTUC, Mr. B.A. Bentum, stated that "Managers should be excluded from Collective Bargaining Coverage in Unions in which employees who are under their supervision are organised". Letter from Ag. Chief Labour Officer to the Principal Secretary, Ministry of Labour, Social Welfare and Co-operatives, entitled "Senior Staff Associations", Accra, July 1975.
- 31) Ewusi, K., The Distribution of Monetary Incomes in Ghana, Legon, 1971, p. 11, and table 2, p. 15.
- 32) Lisk, F., "Inflation in Ghana. Its effect on employment, incomes and industrial relations", in International Labour Review, 113, 3 (1976).
- 33) Berg, E.J. "Major Issues of Wage Policy in Africa", in Ross, A.M., (ed.), Industrial Relations and Economic Development, London, 1966.
- 34) Wunsch, J.S., op. cit., 1973, p. 20.
- 35) Geertz, C., "The Rotatory Credit Association: A Middle Rung in Economic Development", in Economic Development and Cultural Change, X, 3 (1961).

- 36) See Ashiley, E.T., "Trade Unions and Credit Unions - The Ghanaian Case", in Review of International Co-operation. vol. 67, no. 2, 1974, pp. 71-76.
- 37) See Warmington, W.A., "Saving and Indebtedness among Cameroon Plantation Workers", in Africa, vol. 28, pp. 329-42.
- 38) See Gold Coast, Report of the Gold Coast Mines Board of Enquiry, Accra: GP, 1956.
- 39) Republic of Ghana, Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Obuasi Disturbances 1969, Accra-Tema: GPC, 1971.
- 40) West Africa, 14 October 1974, p. 1266.
- 41) See Clignet, R., and Foster, P., The Fortunate Few, Evanston, Ill., 1966.
- 42) Peil, M., "The Apprenticeship System in Accra", in Africa, XL, 2 (1970), pp. 137-50.
- 43) See Konings, P.J.J., op. cit., 1977; and Marshall, J., op. cit., 1976.
- 44) Sandbrook, R., Proletarians and African Capitalism: The Kenyan Case 1962-70, Cambridge University Press, 1975, p. 4.
- 45) Due, J.M. "Development without Growth - The Case of Ghana in the 1960s", in The Economic Bulletin of Ghana, III (second series), 1 (1973), p. 5.
- 46) Ewusi, K., op. cit., 1971.
- 47) See Spalding, H.A., "Ideologies and Mechanisms of Labor Control in Latin America", unpublished paper, 1973; and Spalding, H.A., "The Parameters of Labour in Hispanic America", in Science and Society, XXXVI, 2 (1972), pp. 202-17.
- 48) The Charter of Redemption, p. 5.
- 49) Guide to the Study of the Charter of Redemption, pp. 5-6.
- 50) Sandbrook, R., and Arn, J., op. cit., 1977, p. 39.
- 51) West Africa, 1 August 1977, p. 1576.
- 52) Report of Speeches at Rally, Letter from Labor Inspector, Obuasi, to Labor Officer Ashanti, "Mines Union - Obuasi", September 6, 1953, Department of Labour, Ghana, File LACO, 10/SF.1/45.
- 53) See Damachi, U.G., "Government, Employers and Workers in Ghana: A Study of the Mutual Perception of Roles", in British Journal of Industrial Relations, XIV, 1 (1976), pp. 26-34.
- 54) Lonrho, Annual Report for 1969, p. 5.

- 55) While general Spears still claimed in 1969 with regards to Africanisation in the mine: "No man has got a job here, because he's got a white face, but no man is going to get a job here, because he's got a black face", in 1976 the Ghanaian senior staff increased from 245 to 275 and expatriate senior staff was reduced (marginally) to 91. See West Africa, 15 March 1969, p. 291; and West Africa, 24 May 1976.
- 56) Compare Burawoy, M., "Another Look at the Mineworkers", in African Social Research, no. 14, December 1972, pp. 239-88; and Burawoy, M., The Colour of Class on the Copper Mines. From African Advancement to Zambianization, Zambian Paper no. 7, University of Zambia, 1972.
- 57) See Republic of Ghana, Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Recent Disturbances at Prestea, parts I and II, Accra, 1969, p. 34: "It is significant that not a single expatriate was attacked by workers during the riot whereas all the Ghanaian members of the Senior Staff whom they came across were either attacked or beaten up". See also Republic of Ghana, Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Obuasi Disturbances 1969, Accra-Tema: GPC, 1971.
- 58) See Damachi, U.G., op. cit., 1976.
- 59) Meeting with Young Christian Workers (YCW) at Obuasi, 27 June, 1975.
- 60) Konings, P.J.J., op. cit., 1977.
- 61) Gray, P.S., "The Role of the Trades Union Congress in the Economy of Ghana: Prospects for the next decade", paper presented at the Seventeenth Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Chicago, October 30-November 2, 1974.
- 62) "White Paper on State Participation in Mining Industry", in Speeches and Interviews by Col. I.K. Acheampong, Head of State and Chairman of the NRC, vol. I, Accra-Tema, 1973.
- 63) West Africa, 25 December 1972, p. 1735.
- 64) Compare Cronjé, S., Ling, M., and Cronjé, G., op. cit., 1976, p. 58.
- 65) Konings, P.J.J., op. cit., 1977; and Konings, P.J.J., "Political Consciousness and Action of Industrial Workers in Ghana. A Case Study of VALCO-workers at Tema", in African Perspectives, 1978/2.

- 66) See for example GTUC, Towards a Viable National Planning and Ways to Increase Productivity. Submitted by the TUC (Ghana) to the Salary Review Commission, Accra: GTUC, n.g.
- 67) Jeffries, R.D., Class Power, and Ideology in Ghana: The Railwaymen of Sekondi, Cambridge University Press, 1978; and Konings, P.J.J., op. cit., 1977.
- 68) The Spokesman, 7 July 1970, vol. 1, no. 22, p. 1.

CHAPTER IV. THE IMPACT OF TRADE UNIONISM ON THE CONSCIOUSNESS
AND ACTION OF AGE WORKERS.

4.1. The ideology and strategy of the Ghana mineworkers' union

Until the legal recognition of trade unionism in Ghana in 1941 (and even after legal recognition), the attitude of colonial government and mine management towards any form of organisation for miners was one of severe repression. Miners had no other (legal) means of redress than to bring their grievances to "headmen", village masters or local chiefs who in turn could raise them with management. But miners did not put much faith in tribal and semi-tribal authorities (1) who were closely connected with the colonial control system of labour and often took excessive "rake-offs" (bribes) (2), in the area of industrial relations. This may be seen from the following letter by the Chief Secretary for the Gold Coast to the Governor in March 1927:

"The evidence before us suggests that our recent labour unrest is the result of a sharp change of attitude of Native workers in the mines, in commerce and government. These natives seem to have little understanding that there must be a relationship between the pay received and the work performed. Various officers have reported that Native Labour is now more demanding and that various self-appointed leaders have been able to maintain considerable influence at the expense of the tribal authorities". (3)

Despite serious repression of any form of organisation by colonial government and mine management, miners have shown a capacity to organise to defend their interests when exploitation and racism were at their worst. Such miners' organisations were mostly ad hoc bodies of short duration: miners came together to struggle against a common grievance, and disbanded when the matter was settled. For example, Isaac Wallace-Johnson, a Creole, who attempted to create a socialist and anti-imperialist mass movement in West Africa in the 1930s, by combining an anti-imperialist ideology with the actual praxis of taking up specific grievances by workers and other low income groups, does seem to have organised the Obuasi miners in 1934. The situation

was especially pressing after a serious mine disaster when the need for better safety conditions and helping the bereaved relatives of the many victims was obvious. (4)

These ad hoc bodies were formed to give direction to the frequent strike actions and slow-downs in the twenties and thirties, (5) or to offer petitions to the colonial government and management. A strong petition was placed before the Labour Commissioner of the Gold Coast by the Association of Protesting and Demanding Gold Coast Miners of Obuasi on 27 July 1938. The petition demanding better wages and working conditions read in part:

"We are the working class. We suffer but there are no rewards. We demand justice and equality. We do not find any justification why we should not be paid the same as our Brother Miners in England or the United States of America. We are the same as they. But our time will come when we will rise up and take what is our rightful due". (6)

Even after the official recognition of trade unionism (1941), miners experienced difficulties in the establishment of a permanent organisation because of the predominant existence of a labor force consisting of migrants who were ethnically heterogeneous and illiterate, the lack of effective leadership, and the paternalistic and (continuously) hostile attitude of mine management towards trade unionism and workers' leaders. As Blay remarks:

"Before I severed my connection with the mines or vice versa, conditions there were appalling: the white boss looked upon every enlightened employee as an "eye-opener" of the several "yes men" in his employ and hounded and dismissed them to prevent their ideas from spreading". (7)

Despite all these difficulties, under the leadership of J.N. Sam (president) and S.M. Bissah (secretary), workers were able to establish the Gold Coast Mines Employees' Union in 1944, in a situation of acute conflict, culminating into two strikes in 1945. They were able to organise around 30% of the labour force within a few years (33.5% in 1951; 44.4% in 1956; and 50.7% in 1958). While the colonial government and Labour Department tried to organise (or better, split) workers on a company level by promoting "house unions", the constant target of the mineworkers' union leadership has been to organise all miners in one industrial union in order to face management with a united front.

Throughout its existence the Ghana Mineworkers' Union has been characterised by consistency of goals and strategy and the tenacity with which it adhered to them. These goals were:

- To establish an organisation that could defend workers' interests against management (and government).
- To accomplish the first goal, a self-reliant autonomy should be maintained, with "party politics" and "political stands" to be avoided as much as possible.
- (And in particular after the achievement of independence) trade unionism in a developing country should also contribute to national development by establishing harmonious relations with management (and government), by exhorting workers to raise productivity and to avoid strikes, and by emphasizing collective bargaining with management. The recourse to collective strike action, however, had to be counted upon if all else failed. (8)

During the period of colonial government the union was one of the best organised and demonstrated a high degree of militancy within that period, despite its emphasis on the pursuit of harmonious industrial relations. It was able to score important successes in a situation of severe repression on the part of management and government who aimed at the maximalisation of profits in the colonial economy (see par. 4.3.2.2.). Its wage demands were based on the general and regional cost of living index (to preserve real income in the period of rapid price increases after World War II), the level of income in other sectors of the economy, and increases in productivity (appealing to the rank and file to increase productivity). It did not develop a strategy based on an ideology of (more) equal distribution of the corporation's income. As a result of the Gorman Tribunal's findings (after the 1947 strike), a joint Negotiating Committee was set up in 1950, with representatives of both the union and the Chamber of Mines represented.

The Mineworkers' Union leadership has been greatly influenced by advice from the colonial Labour Department and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), with whom it maintains close relations; it has thus always attempted as much as possible to refrain from political connections and to avoid taking a political stand, considered a deviation from the essence of trade unionism (which should rather restrict itself to the economic sphere). It was

felt that this would ultimately have been detrimental to the members' interests. When national feelings in Ghana ran high after World War II, J.N. Sam addressed the Annual Conference of the Mining Employees' Union at Obuasi on 22nd and 23rd March 1947 as follows:

"People without knowledge of the working of a union, view and misinterpret unionism as a revolutionary organisation, but it is a preservative movement. It does not create class feelings, but on the contrary reduces it". (9)

Berg and Butler note that the identification of African trade unions with the nationalist effort has often been exaggerated, and point to the fact that the most solidly entrenched unions were the least political. (10) Though to a large extent this generalization applies to the Mineworkers Union, which did not join the 1950 "positive action" strike (11) and eschewed close relations with the nationalist parties, one should keep in mind:

- that the majority of miners in 1950 were northerners and foreigners, more interested in the preservation of their real income than in "southern politics". The leadership of the Mineworkers' Union was perceptive enough to know that to call a "purely" political strike (which was, moreover, badly prepared) would not be welcomed in the mining towns in the same way as it had been in Sekondi-Takoradi and other southern towns.
- that even the militant economic actions by miners surely had political implications in the colonial situation (as well as in the period after independence): they threatened the colonial system geared at the acquisition of cheap minerals and the supply of cheap labour.
- that the union was well aware that the pursuit of their economic demands often required political pressure. We have already pointed out that the union put pressure on the government after 1947 to lower taxes on mining operations in the country. D.K. Foevie, general president of the union, addressed a mineworkers' conference in 1955, as follows: "We have made (the) issue of miners' wages and conditions a matter of public importance. We have obliged the Government to act in defense of proper conditions". (12)
- that the Mineworkers' Union, being a relatively well organised industrial union, was less dependent on the CPP (and its seizure of power) to serve its members, and so felt less need to ally themselves with

the CPP than did the other unions.

- that some leaders did not eschew politics altogether, but wished "to escape the divisive consequences of the political rivalry between the CPP and UGCC". (13) October, 1950, saw the momentary appearance of a Gold Coast Labour Party formed by S.H.K. Cleland of the Obuasi branch of the Mineworkers' Union, Fred Loo of the PWD Employees' Union and John Tsiboe, managing owner of the Ashanti Pioneer. (14)
- that the young leaders who seized power in the Mineworkers' Union in 1951, D.K. Foevie and J.K. Arthur, - generally considered as two of the chief spokesmen for economic unionism between 1951 and 1953, - were CPP-members (as indeed were many miners). (15) Although they believed that it was in the best interests of union members, that trade unionism be free from party links and control, they were sympathetic to the CPP.

The goals the union had championed since its foundation were especially threatened after 1954, when CPP-stalwarts were in full control of the GCTUC and the Mineworkers Union was about to lose its accustomed influence within the GCTUC. TUC leaders like John Tettegah advocated the destruction of the "capitalist-inspired" trade union model and the introduction of a new model more suited to the changed circumstances of approaching independence. For that purpose, Tettegah designed a trade union model which would serve the interests of the members and the exigencies of national development. To safeguard both aims he proposed (i) the amalgamation of small "house" unions into large industrial unions able to bargain effectively with the employers; and (ii) the creation of an all-embracing trade union centre (GTUC) with close ties with the party (CPP) and in control of the national unions: the GTUC should restrain national unions from playing a "consumptionist" role (which was "an expression of a colonial mentality"), and transform them into "productionist" organisations to educate the members to raise productivity and avoid strikes in order to speed up "national development".

In the period 1954-58 was Foevie amongst the most passionate opponents of Tettegah's proposed "new structure". Although he supported the principle of organising along industrial lines, previously established by the Mineworkers' Union, and accepted a productionist role for the unions after independence, he rejected the

national unions' loss of autonomy and the increasing political control and interference in the unions. Despite various attempts by the GTUC to split the largest union in the private sector, Foevie's capable leadership was able to preserve unity and autonomy in this period. In 1958, a few months before the Industrial Relations Bill was passed, one of the resolutions adopted by the 14th Annual Delegates Conference still was:

that the conference in session... do reaffirm that the Ghana Mines' Employees Union while remaining independent shall not indulge in active politics and rule that all full-time paid officers of the union should refrain from playing politics while in office of the union in order to serve interest of all the members of the union who may belong to different parties. (16)

The 1958 Industrial Relations Act (and the subsequent 1959 and 1960 Amendment Acts) (17) hardly brought any benefits to the union (the Mineworkers' Union was already an industrial union and had won the right to introduce the check-off system on 15 March, 1958, after many years of resistance by management (18)). In fact, this legislation was distinctly disadvantageous: legally, strikes became almost impossible, and there was growing political control over the union and interference in its affairs.

After the February, 1966, coup, a "new" trade union model was introduced in Ghana, which was quite close to the original Mineworkers' Union's goals and strategy. This "new model may be summarized as "free, but responsible unionism", that is, the establishment of unions which are responsive to the rank and file; autonomous, avoiding "party politics" and "political stands"; and pledging co-operation with government and employers, implying opposition to strikes (though the right to strike should be maintained as a last weapon); emphasis on collective bargaining and education of the rank and file to hard work as their contribution to national development. In exchange for such a "responsible" stance, the government was to support certain goals of the trade union movement (like paying greater attention to minimum wage-earners and narrowing the gap between high and low incomes), as well as union participation in the country's administration through representation on the relevant public boards and committees. Surely, after the coup the Mineworkers' Union could feel at home again in the Ghanaian trade union movement now that, the "bitter" experience of the Nkrumah-days were over. It could re-dedicate itself to its goals, which Foevie eloquently described at the Third Miners' Day:

With tenacity of purpose and fidelity to its aims and objects the Unions should continue to be one of the exemplary Trade Unions in the country and also be an invaluable asset in the fight to raise the standard of living of workers not only in the mines, but in this country. This we stand for and vow to do more by these celebrations - our slogans to be - increased productivity, higher efficiency, more discipline and stronger unity. (19)

All this shows that the Mineworkers' Union has constantly advocated an a-political, economistic trade union model, and has desisted from further politicization of the workers, thus setting strong limitations to the growth of working-class consciousness and actions. And while the Mineworkers' Union pursued a militant economic strategy during the colonial period, resorting to (or threatening) collective strike actions to force management and government to listen and give in to justified workers' demands, it has largely identified with the role attributed to it by the state in the developmental process since independence. It has adopted a moderate economic strategy after independence trying to improve the workers' lot through collective bargaining without strike threats or strike actions. The national union leadership - partly out of conviction (the necessity of "nation-building"), partly out of constraint (government pressure) - now preaches class harmony and "the historical role of workers as builders of the new nation" (20); it sees the need for education of the workers to raise productivity, to avoid strikes and to foster cordial relations with management and government as the workers' contribution to national development.

The question is: what is the impact of this a-political trade union model and moderate trade union strategy and ideology (raising productivity and avoiding strikes as a contribution to national development) upon the consciousness and action of the rank and file. Various studies have pointed out that the identification of the national union leadership with developmental intentions of the state has not necessarily resulted in the acceptance of a developmental role by the rank and file. (21) We shall first deal with the rank and file's perception of the a-political trade union model propagated by the national union, and then with the rank and file's perception of the moderate ideology and strategy of the national union.

4.2. The a-political trade union model of the national union: its perception by the local branch of the AGC

Most AGC workers are unionized and show a strong interest in union affairs. Almost all the miners interviewed (92.5%) belonged to the local branch of the Ghana Mineworkers' Union. This high percentage of membership is not surprising considering the established check-off system in the mines. The remaining 7.5% were excluded from membership, because they either belonged to the "senior staff" or were casual labourers. Miners demonstrate a strong interest in union affairs, which is evidenced by the high attendance at union meetings: 84% of the miners attended "rallies" regularly. Workers even complained of the infrequent occurrence of these meetings, emphasizing their need to know what the union was doing or planning to do, and the need for close contact with the local union leadership.

Workers were asked to relate which were the problems most often discussed at the meetings (see table 30).

Table 30. Matters discussed at union meetings

| MATTERS DISCUSSED | % |
|---|-----|
| Conditions of service | 59 |
| Internal organisational problems | 19 |
| Provision of certain amenities | 7 |
| Productivity at work | 4 |
| Co-operation between union and management | 1 |
| Not applicable/no answer | 10 |
| TOTAL | 100 |
| N | 133 |

Table 30 shows that those matters which have been the continued concern of the Mineworkers' Union since its foundation command most attention from the local branch as well. Most time is spent on discussing conditions of service and other matters directly related to the production process. Generally speaking, local branch leaders seldom pay attention to political matters during those meetings.

Even political issues which directly affect the workers, like the large income inequalities existing in the mine and in Ghanaian society, are seldom discussed. After the 1968 takeover of the AGC by Lonrho, there was no protest against the company's close economic and political links with Rhodesia and South Africa, but there was one against the company's refusal to pay an ex-gratia award, sparking off the 1969 AGC strike. However, in 1973, the local branch registered a strong protest against general Spears's continuous resentment of the partial takeover of the mine and his re-offense of the Ghanaian government, stating that it "would not tolerate any longer conservative ideas of the imperialist management of the corporation". (22)

Indeed, the rank and file seems to support the union's predominantly "instrumental orientation", evaluating the union upon the criterion of "delivering the goods" - especially better conditions of service, better amenities (like better accommodation, transport and health and educational facilities), and the solution of problems or cases (such as arbitrary dismissals). (see table 31)

Table 31. What should unions do for the workers?

| UNIONS' TASKS | % |
|---|-------------|
| Protection/representation of workers' interests | 51 |
| Negotiations for better pay/conditions of service | 17.5 |
| Achievement of better amenities | 17 |
| Promotion of harmonious industrial relations | 4 |
| Solving cases/problems with management | 3 |
| Don't know | 1.5 |
| No answer | 6 |
| | TOTAL 100.0 |
| | N 133 |

The majority of the rank and file (43%) explicitly said that it did not like any "political" involvement on the part of the union. (see table 32) Most of them argued, just as the Mineworkers' Union itself did, that union activities should be restricted to the economic sphere (71%). Others feared that "politics" would result in

Table 32. The Union's political role (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|---------------------|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| ANY POLITICAL ROLE? | | | | | |
| Yes | 26.5 | 12.5 | 21 | 29.5 | 25 |
| No | 37.5 | 62.5 | 49 | 47 | 43 |
| Not sure | 32 | 25 | 18 | 23.5 | 27 |
| No answer | 4 | | 12 | | 5 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100 | 100.0 | 100 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

tribal and partisan activities within the union (13%) and, as the history of the Ghanaian trade union movement proves, either in confrontation with the government, or in close links between union leadership and government and political parties to the detriment of the workers (16%). As one miner remarked: "If the union is going to play politics, it will neglect the welfare of the workers".

Conforming to the Mineworkers' Union model of trade unionism, even the 25% of the miners who preferred a political role for the union did not wish to establish formal or informal links with the government or the party (parties), and even less did they desire a more radical or revolutionary stand. They wished rather to obtain economic gains, check government, and counteract anti-worker policies, in conformity with Lenin's conception that "trade union consciousness" entailed political pressure on the government as wage-setter and major share-holder in the company. (23)

As one miner boldly stated: "The union should play a political role; it should keep government and employer in check and make them feel that the workers are the wealth of the nation. It should step in when workers' rights are being trampled upon".

The majority of those who felt unable to give an opinion about the political activities of the union (27%), raised some objections both to a political as well as an a-political role for the union. After weighing the pros and cons of both roles they felt unable to make a choice.

Not only did a majority of the AGC workers opt for a non-political role for the union, 55% was also convinced that the union was not actually involved in politics at the moment. (28% was unsure,

and 16.5% believed that the union was indeed involved in political matters.) While union leaders often experience difficulties in making government believe that their activities are not politically motivated, they at least try to uphold this image. For example, Mr. R.A. Yeboah, general secretary of the Mineworkers' Union (and ex-secretary of the Obuasi local branch, appealed to the Obuasi miners during the political upheaval in 1977 "to steer clear from the prevailing political turmoil". (24)

Although the GTUC demanded more participation for the trade union movement in the country's administration after the 1966 coup (and was often disappointed with its share in the national decision-making process), only few AGC workers favoured more say or power for the unions in the administration of the country (see table 33). Again, miners shrink from any larger involvement in politics, not only because of their economic conception of trade unionism but also because of historical reasons (the memory of the Nkrumah-period). They fear that such involvement would ultimately result in workers' suffering.

Table 33. Should Unions have more voice or power in the government?
(percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|---------------------|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| MORE VOICE/POWER? | | | | | |
| Yes | 13.5 | | 21.5 | 12 | 14 |
| No | 46.5 | 62.5 | 48.5 | 59 | 49.5 |
| Don't know/not sure | 34.5 | 37.5 | 15 | 17.5 | 28 |
| To some extent | 1.5 | | 3 | | 1.5 |
| No answer | 4 | | 12 | 11.5 | 7 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

Like the Zambian copperminers, (25) AGC workers have evidently developed a strong trade union consciousness. They realize that they cannot individually fight against the superior power of an employer-management backed by government (as the major shareholder in the AGC), and they appreciate organisation in a trade union as the

only means to defend their interests against management and government. But while some radical ideas can be found among the AGC workers (see par. 3.5.), they dislike the union's involvement in political or radical actions. That the majority of AGC workers consider "economistic" unionism as the only, the "true" form of trade unionism, is easily understood, because this trade union model has been and is still constantly held up to the rank and file by the trade union leadership. No alternative radical or revolutionary model is ever presented to the (unknowing) rank and file by the (often very knowledgeable) trade union leadership. Yet, the question is whether economistic unionism is able to bring about a substantial improvement in the miners' lot within the present status quo; it may be that radical or revolutionary trade unionism, aiming at radical or revolutionary changes in the present power structure in Ghanaian society, is more likely ultimately to lead to qualitative changes in workers' living conditions. The AGC workers and union leaders have not until now tackled this fundamental question.

4.3. The national union's moderate ideology and strategy: its perception by the local branch of the AGC

While most AGC workers are in principle quite prepared to make a contribution to national development and to support the predominantly economic strategy of the national union leadership, in actual practice they often reject the moderation of the national union's ideology, strategy and leadership. It is a strategy adapted to an inegalitarian society and involves the constant appeal workers to raise productivity and to avoid strikes as their contribution to national development.

We shall deal successively with:

- 1) the AGC local branch's perception of the national union's developmental ideology.
- 2) the AGC local branch's perception of the national union's moderate economic strategy.
- 3) the AGC local branch's perception of the national union leadership in comparison with the local branch leadership.

4.3.1. The national union's developmental ideology: its perception by the local branch of the AGC

The rank and file appears in principle to accept the developmental ideology of hard work and increased productivity as its contribution to national development, an ideology voiced by government, management and the national union alike. Almost all miners (97%) explicitly stated that they were quite prepared to make sacrifices for the benefit of "nation-building" by making special efforts to raise productivity.

However, although miners appear to accept the developmental ideology in principle, in actual practice they are not very impressed when exhorted by politicians, management and union leaders to work harder, especially since those doing the exhorting are also the ones who appear to thrive on the proceeds of the miner's labour. Even if hard work is praised not only as a patriotic duty, but also as an obligation to relatives in the poor villages, the miner is not impressed. Miners have not yet seen any significant rural development, nor any dramatic improvements in the welfare of their kinsmen in the village; nor have improvements occurred in the towns. There has been no real sacrifice on the part of the dominant classes in society on behalf of their poor brothers and sisters in the countryside. (26)

Workers are prepared to accept responsibility for the economic growth of the country, on condition that their aspirations toward a fairer and more equal distribution of income does not go unheard, and that the fruits of their hard labour no longer be principally enjoyed by others, but by themselves:

Few enjoy all basic things in life such as abundant food, shelter and clothing. Really there are few who live in luxury. They have more than they require to live with. They live in pleasure as against the majority who are not living but merely existing or struggling to exist... Before the Ghanaian society as a whole could make any possible headway, there should really be social equality or justice in the true sense of the word and it is now evident that without social equality or justice there would be no progress because majority are on the ladder struggling for a mere existence. They cannot feed, cloth and educate their children because they cannot meet up such obligations. They grumble and as such cannot put in more production thus retarding the economy as whole. Without social equality or justice there would be no development and progress, for the workers would not put in their maximum effort for higher productivity. (27)

According to workers, union leaders should not only exhort workers to perform their patriotic duties, but should also exhort those who appear to benefit from the workers' hard labour.

Most miners even doubted if they could raise productivity at all (28), because after a day's work in the mine, toiling under tropical conditions, they were exhausted - and this was particularly true for the underground miners. Most miners rejected with indignation the government and management's portrayal of the Ghanaian miners as lazy, but it was viewed as betrayal when such accusations came from the trade union leadership. In 1973, for example, Mr. R.A. Yeboah, the then secretary of the Obuasi local branch of the Mineworkers' Union, expressed concern about the increasing rate of lateness, absenteeism, laziness and apathy among some of the workers at the AGC, and warned "that unless they eradicated these attitudes, they would place the union officials in a very difficult position... Such behaviour slowed down production which must be on the increase at this stage of the country's economic fight... Much as the union officials would not like to see the workers' rights trampled upon by the management, they would also not like to sit down for the workers to cheat the management... Workers should work harder than before to justify their demand for better working conditions". (29)

The majority of miners (71%) claimed that they worked hard, at least hard enough to merit their relatively low wages. And those who did think of themselves as lazy attributed their laziness to the bad example of their foremen and supervisors, their low incomes, and the ostentatious display of wealth by the managerial class: "Workers are lazy. Yes, because they sit back and see "big men" who do not feel for them drive in posh cars. They don't feel their work merits such high salaries".

In short, miners who are generally unskilled and work underground for relatively low wages, when confronted with large income inequalities both at the mine and in Ghanaian society, and when they are also denied any form of participation in management, are not prepared to raise their present level of productivity - notwithstanding all exhortations by management, government and trade union leadership. Burawoy writes quite correctly:

Under the present distribution of responsibility within industry, management must primarily be held accountable for productivity... Only in a system of genuine worker

participation... can the worker be held equally accountable for productivity. Given the paternalistic and at times autocratic heritage in industrial relations and the intensive division of labour, it is precisely this type of worker participation which encounters uncompromising opposition from management and unconcern and suspicion from workers. (30)

4.3.2. The national union's moderate economic strategy: its perception by the local branch of the AGC

While the national union has often threatened strike action, and has indeed initiated strike actions during the colonial period to back justified workers' demands and "to bring management and government on their knees", since independence it has largely abandoned such threats and actions. Strikes are now almost completely outlawed, and the state has meted out severe punishment to the instigators of strikes and sometimes even to the rank and file. Where strikes are almost completely outlawed, (illegal) strikes, while they are primarily motivated by economic interests, tend to acquire a political dimension as well: they are interpreted as collective actions against the government's development strategy and the government itself; and indeed, such strikes are sometimes spontaneous expressions of the workers' resentment of the present inegalitarian status quo.

The national union leadership is quite aware that the government's repression techniques are directed even more against those working in industries central to the nation's economy than against those in peripheral industries. What is more, convinced that a developing country cannot afford strikes, the union leadership is attempting to improve the workers' lot since independence through collective bargaining with management and government rather than by resorting to strike threats and strike actions.

But what is the rank and file's perception of this moderate economic strategy? Does it accept or reject the national union's abandonment of strikes since independence, and has it actually refrained from striking? We shall first examine the rank and file's perception of strike actions, and then review its strike history in order to assess whether attitudes towards strike action correspond with actual behaviour.

4.3.2.1. Strike action: its perception by the local branch of the AGC

In the period just before and during my field work (1974-75), various 'wildcat' strikes took place in Accra, Tema and Legon which were bloodily suppressed by the NRC.(31) Yet, trade union leaders proclaimed that "their faith in collective bargaining was unshakeable" and while registering an official protest against this bloodshed, refused to call out a general strike.

I attempted to discover the opinion of the AGC workers regarding these strikes. Most miners appeared to be so badly informed about the reasons for the strikes, however, that they were neither able to agree with nor to deny the justification of the strikes (see table 34).

Those who agreed with the justification were able to give the true reasons for the strikes: delay in the implementation of the measures of the Salary Review Commission, (32) the feeling by the workers that they were not getting what was due them, and that they were being cheated, the lack of concern by authorities and management with workers' grievances, and the weak representation of workers' interests by union leaders. Those who denied the justification of the strikes argued that a developing country could not afford strikes, that workers should exercise patience and restraint and go through the right channels to solve problems, and that union leaders should deal with workers' grievances.

According to the majority of the AGC workers, strike action is only justified if all other means to settle conflicts have failed. However, a small minority of miners (13%) claimed that strike action is the only means to "bring management and government on their knees"; and history seems to prove them right, as most economic gains have only been won after strike action which was sometimes protracted and bloody. (see table 35)

Most miners stated that they were more likely to join a strike action if organised by the union than if organised by informal leaders (see table 36). This is not surprising, because a strike called by the union with the whole membership taking part is less risky than one called by informal leaders in a situation in which large industrial reserve-army can be daily watched at the gate. Moreover, workers are well aware that government and management generally deal more severely with strikes called by informal leaders than with those called by the union.

Table 34. Were recent strikes in Ghana justified? (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|------------|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| JUSTIFIED? | | | | | |
| Yes | 25.5 | | 33.5 | 47 | 29 |
| No | 28 | 50 | 36.5 | | 28 |
| Sometimes | 2.5 | | | | 1.5 |
| Not sure | 42.5 | 37.5 | 30 | 53 | 40 |
| No answer | 1.5 | 12.5 | | | 1.5 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100 | 100.0 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

Table 35. When are strikes justified? (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|---|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| When negotiations fail/ workers' problems not looked into | 28 | 12.5 | 21.5 | 12 | 23 |
| Exploitation of workers | 19 | 12.5 | 24.5 | 35 | 22 |
| Strike action is the only means to get things done | 12 | 25 | 15 | 6 | 13 |
| When suffering is too much/ no hope for improvement | 16 | 12.5 | | 17.5 | 12 |
| When there are justifiable reasons/when workers are right | 10.5 | | 15 | 12 | 11 |
| In case of weak leadership/ no defense of workers' rights | 2.5 | 12.5 | 9 | | 4.5 |
| No strikes are justified | | 25 | | | 1.5 |
| No idea/can't tell | 1.5 | | 6 | | 2 |
| No answer | 10.5 | | 9 | 17.5 | 11 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

Table 36. Miners and strike action (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|---|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| JOINING A STRIKE AS A SYMPATHIZER? | | | | | |
| Yes | 12 | | 15 | 17.5 | 13 |
| No | 85.5 | 87.5 | 82 | 82.5 | 84 |
| No answer | 2.5 | 12.5 | 3 | | 3 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100 | 100.0 | 100 |
| JOINING A STRIKE IF ASKED BY LABOUR FRIENDS? | | | | | |
| Yes | 21.5 | 12.5 | 18 | 29.5 | 21 |
| No | 77.5 | 75 | 76 | 70.5 | 76 |
| Don't know | | | 3 | | 1 |
| No answer | 1 | 12.5 | 3 | | 2 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100 | 100.0 | 100 |
| JOINING A STRIKE IF ASKED BY THE UNION? | | | | | |
| Yes | 57.5 | 25 | 48.5 | 88 | 57 |
| No | 41.5 | 62.5 | 45.5 | 12 | 40 |
| Don't know | | | 3 | | 1 |
| No answer | 1 | 12.5 | 3 | | 2 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100 | 100 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

A good many workers explicitly stated that they would not join any strike because they feared being killed (the memory of the 1969 Obuasi strike!), and because their job in the mine did not allow them to take part in one. (33)

Most workers consider collective bargaining as the most important means to improve their lot. Others prefer appeals and petitions to government and management either by the union leaders or the workers themselves (see table 37).

Table 37. Other means than strikes to improve workers' conditions
(percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|---|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| Peaceful negotiation/ collective bargaining | 57.5 | 37.5 | 36.5 | 53 | 50 |
| Petitions/appeals to management and government through union leadership | 12 | 25 | 24.5 | 6 | 15 |
| No other means than strikes | 14.5 | | 12 | 29.5 | 15 |
| Hard work to impress government and management | 9.5 | 25 | 15 | 11.5 | 12 |
| Presentation of grievances directly to the government | 2.5 | 12.5 | 3 | | 3 |
| Patience | 2.5 | | 6 | | 3 |
| Slow-down method | 1.5 | | | | 1 |
| No idea/can't tell | | | 3 | | 1 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

We may then conclude that, like the national union leadership, most Obuasi miners consider collective bargaining as the "normal" procedure to settle conflicts and to improve their lot. However, while the national union has abandoned (and condemns) strike action since independence, the rank and file is prepared to resort to strike action in the last instance, providing government and management neither wish to listen nor accede to justified workers' demands. The union rank and file are prepared to strike in such situations, knowing full well that all strikes are considered as political in nature, and often brutally suppressed.

4.3.2.2. The strike history of the AGC workers

The strike history of the AGC workers seems to demonstrate that AGC workers, particularly the underground workers, are conscious of their position in an industry vital to Ghana's economy, and have therefore always resorted to strike action in the last instance. We may divide this strike history in three periods:

1. The period from the opening of the Ashanti Goldfields up to the establishment of trade unionism in the mine (1898-1944). Even in this period of severe suppression of any form of workers' organisation and collective action, the AGC workers did resort to strike action in the last instance to protest the degrading working and living conditions at the mine. Records of strike actions of the AGC workers go back at least to the twenties.

The twenties and thirties were years when management tried to raise productivity without corresponding wage increases. (34) In 1924, a strike occurred at the AGC with the introduction of punch clocks to record working times. (35) In 1934, there were strong rumours current in Obuasi that the African labour employed by the AGC intended to strike for pay increases and other amenities. Police reinforcement soon followed, but no strike took actually place. (36) However, a strike of AGC fuel "boys" took place on 26 December 1934; they refused to load a train with wood unless they were paid 1s.9d. a day. (37)

On 2nd March 1935, a strike initiated by the Jackhammer Machine Drivers and Spanner boys occurred which was soon followed by other AGC workers. It lasted until 12th March 1935. (38) The AGC workers taking part in the strike had many grievances:

- Overtime fees were not paid, and workers alleged that very often they began work at 6 a.m. and were kept until 4 or 5 o'clock in the afternoon, whereas the usual time to stop should have been 2 p.m.
- A person injured on the job and admitted to hospital was deprived of his daily wage while in hospital.
- Workers had reason to believe that the home office had agreed to increase their pay, but that the local representative resented implementing the increase.
- Intimidation by managers and European staff, i.e. the Jubilee-Karna example was held before them if there was any disagreement as to whether or not they were working (Jubilee and Karna were leaders in previous strikes who were imprisoned for rioting).

Special C.I.D. men were sent to Obuasi with a view to reporting any meetings or unrest among the employees. (39) The strike was satisfactorily settled after the headmen of the labourers had requested the District Commissioner to intervene. (40)

2. The period of the foundation of the Mineworkers' Union up to independence (1944-57). This was a period in which the Mineworkers' Union initiated strikes in order to press for certain improvements in the appalling working conditions, improvements which could not be obtained by collective bargaining with a recalcitrant management. During this period the AGC workers joined the strikes, which, although initiated by the national union, were resorted to only in the last instance.

In 1945, a strike involving 7000 workers occurred at the AGC. The new Labour Officer, Mr. Oswald Kitching, together with general Spears and other influential persons, tried various ways to convince the strikers to go back to work, but no compromise was reached. The strikers demanded certain improvements in their conditions of service, but on this occasion, the newly founded Mineworkers' Union, trying to gain recognition from the mine management as being a "responsible" organisation, played a conciliatory role and urged the strikers to go back to work. (41) However, the union subsequently demonstrated greater economic militancy, as it became clear that management would neither listen nor accede to the justified demands of the new union. Because of the uncompromising attitude by the mine management, gold miners showed a greater tendency to strike than any other workers during 1945-57, and thus contributed a disproportionately high percentage of strikers and man-days lost each year (see table 38).

In 1947 and 1955/56, Obuasi miners joined strikes that had been called by the Mineworkers' Union for all the Ghanaian mines. The 1947 strike was an example of a last resort to gain acknowledgement by mine management, as well as better wages and conditions of service. (42) The discipline among the striking workers in 1947, which accounted for the absence of disorder, was praised by the Labour Department. (43) The 1947 strike ended only with the appointment of an arbitration panel, and in the wake of what was to be considered a most successful strike, the strikers were awarded substantial improvements in pay and working conditions in an early collective agreement with the Chamber of Mines. (44) It is also significant that even the large Mineworkers' Union began its 100 day strike in 1955/56, the longest in the Ghanaian labour history, with reserves of only £ 571. Nkrumah intervened directly several times in this 1955/56 strike, meeting

and pleading unsuccessfully with Foevie, the general secretary, to send his workers bac to work. Ultimately, the Mineworkers' Union won its 15% pay increase, probably at least in part because the Nkrumah government decided that it would be cheaper to subsidize the Chamber of Mines by £ 200,000 to help pay for the increased wage costs and keep the mines open rather than to let the strike continue. (45)

3. The period after independence. After independence the national union controlled strikes rather than initiating them, for it accepted the developmental ideology of the post-independence regimes. The available evidence, however, suggests that the national union leaders have largely failed to evoke the workers' agreement to abandon the strike weapon. Workers want to retain the possibility to strike as a last resort if peaceful means to settle industrial conflicts have failed.

Table 38. Strikes in Ghana by sector (percentages)

| SECTORS | 1945- 1951 | 1951- 1957 | 1957- 1960 | 1960- 1965 | 1966- 1969 | 1970- 1971 | 1972 1976 |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| Agriculture | 5.4 | 3.8 | 3.0 | 1.4 | 10.6 | 0.7 | 12.9 |
| Timber | 10.9 | 11.1 | 7.3 | 17.4 | 3.7 | 5.8 | 8.1 |
| Mining | 27.9 | 20.8 | 11.0 | 4.3 | 9.9 | 5.1 | 2.4 |
| Manufacturing | 3.4 | 3.8 | 11.0 | 18.8 | 19.3 | 24.1 | 47.6 |
| Construction | 16.3 | 23.6 | 23.2 | 13.2 | 14.9 | 17.5 | 8.9 |
| Electricity/water/ gas/sanitation | 12.9 | 6.3 | 4.9 | 8.7 | 5.0 | 12.4 | 9.7 |
| Commerce | 4.1 | 6.6 | 18.9 | 14.5 | 4.3 | 2.2 | 1.6 |
| Transport/Commu- nication | 12.2 | 16.7 | 11.5 | 13.0 | 16.1 | 29.9 | 5.6 |
| Service | 2.7 | 7.3 | 7.9 | 4.3 | 16.1 | 2.2 | 3.2 |
| Several above | 4.1 | | 1.2 | | | | |

Source: Kraus, J., Strikes and Labour Power in a Post-Colonial African State: The Case of Ghana, paper presented at the Seminar on Third World Strikes at the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, September 12-16, 1977.

Bates' thesis about the Zambian copperminers' rejection of the combined union, government, and management claim of high productivity and avoidance of strikes in the days since independence (46) is to a large extent also relevant for Ghanaian miners. It is especially applicable for the Obuasi miners (see tables 38 and 39). While the CPP/TUC were generally able to exercise control in the Mineworkers' Union in the period 1960-66, even on a local level (47), from 1966-72, the miners were much more likely to strike. This can be seen from table 39, where we use Mondays lost as an index of the readiness to strike in the more liberal period from 1966-72. The AGC workers contributed substantially to the total man days lost in this period.

On November 30, 1966, after the dismissal of four men alleged to have left their posts in an attempt to steal gold, between 2500 and 5000 AGC workers went out on a four day unofficial strike. The majority of the strikers were underground miners but the strike was not supported by the Mineworkers' Union. Colonel A.A. Afrifa of the National Liberation Council (NLC) appealed to the strikers to return to work, saying Ghana could not afford strikes in the present economic situation. (48) Settlement was reached at a meeting between representatives of the government, Labour Office, union officials and the mine management. The management agreed to the strikers' demands for reinstatement of the dismissed men and the transfer to an above-ground position of the security official who reported absences. Speaking at the AGC, Col. Afrifa thanked the miners for answering his appeal to call off their unofficial strike, and urged them and the employers to co-operate to ensure industrial harmony and raise production. The employers, he said, should understand the feelings of workers who had just been "liberated" from the restrictions on trade unionism and other activity under the old regime, and wanted to use their freedom to fight for their rights and express their views; but the workers should not strike unless all other means had failed. CPP supporters, he warned, might use strikes as proof that the workers were less well off under the new regime than the old, which, he said, would be a very wrong idea. (49) A few days later Obuasi and other Ghanaian workers were severely rebuked by general

Kotoka in a radio and television address for "resorting to illegal strikes and lockouts for resolving minor grievances". (50)

Table 39. Percentage of strikes by industries based on the total man-days lost each year (1966-72) in Ghana.

| | 1966 | 1967 | 1968 | 1969 | 1970 | 1971 (Jan.- March) | 1972 (Jan.- June) |
|--|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Timber workers | 4 | ..... | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | ..... |
| Indust. and Commerc. workers | 17 | 29 | 6 | 9 | 4 | 33 | 77 |
| Local government/ and municipal work. | 1 | 44 | 4 | 1 | 1 | ..... | 2 |
| General Agricultural workers | ..... | 3 | 39 | 46 | ..... | 31 | 17 |
| Health workers | ..... | 5 | ..... | ..... | ..... | ..... | ..... |
| Teachers and Edu- cational workers | ..... | 3 | ..... | ..... | 1 | ..... | ..... |
| Marine and Dock- workers | 35 | ..... | 35 | ..... | 2 | 3 | ..... |
| Building and Con- struction workers | 5 | ..... | ..... | 5 | 5 | 27 | 1 |
| Railway and Ports workers | ..... | 11 | 7 | 2 | ..... | 2 | 1 |
| General Transport and Petroleum Work. | ..... | ..... | ..... | ..... | 1 | ..... | ..... |
| Post and Telecom- munications Work. | ..... | ..... | ..... | ..... | ..... | ..... | ..... |
| Miners | 38 | 5 | 8 | 36 | 85 | 1 | 3 |
| TOTAL | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Total mandays lost | 26506 | 3825 | 112158 | 147482 | 127140 | 14782 | 3696 |
| Total number of workers involved | 15017 | 6437 | 35606 | 28369 | 20083 | 11069 | 2554 |
| Total strikes | 31 | 27 | 38 | 51 | 56 | 28 | 8 |

Source: Kraus, J., "Strikes and Labour Power in a Post-Colonial African State: The Case of Ghana", paper presented at the Seminar on Third World Strikes at the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, September 12-16, 1977.

On 3rd March, 1969, the AGC workers embarked upon another "illegal" strike to demand payment of an ex-gratia award by the AGC, consequent on the take-over of the shares of the AGC by Lonrho in the latter part of 1968. While management suspected that many of the new employees who had come from the state mines where there had already been industrial trouble in 1968, had encouraged militant activity, and while the government blamed outside agitators, there were other more fundamental factors behind the strike. Though the refusal of management to pay an ex-gratia award was the immediate cause of the strike, over the years a strong feeling had been built up amongst workers that management was insensitive to their welfare, and that it had not satisfactorily handled certain demands that had been long ago put before it by the local union (like providing accommodation and transport). (51) Moreover, the miners were quite aware of the benefits which the deal with Lonrho had brought to the "big men", the bureaucratic bourgeoisie and the chiefs, while they themselves, who actually produced the gold, appeared to be passed over. The apprehension among workers about the change from the paternalistic but familiar rule of Spears to new owners - unknown entities without local links - promoted an emotional atmosphere in which the disturbances took place. Whilst the management and government at the last minute agreed to pay to avoid a strike, by that time feeling was so high that the manner in which the award was offered as a "dash" caused a breakdown between union leaders and rank and file which directly promoted the disturbances of the 3rd of March. (52)

The strike degenerated into rioting and looting. As in the 1968 Tarkwa mine strike, the police used tear gas and fired on mineworkers killing and wounding several of them. Sympathy strikes were staged at the Konongo mine, in Tarkwa and Takoradi. The secretary-general of the GTUC, Mr. B.A. Bentum, who had blamed the strikers in the beginning of the strike, saying that "violent demonstrations and causing damage to property would not solve workers' grievances", and assuring miners that Lonrho had agreed to continuation of service for all workers, threatened a general strike if shooting of the strikers continued. (53)

The day after the shooting the government ordered the AGC workers to return to work in 48 hours, and promised full support for the

corporation in its efforts to keep full production at the mine if the workers did not return. It said the strike was 'uncalled for', as the management had made an offer of 15 days' pay before the strike. A second government statement gave an assurance of safety for all the AGC workers returning to work, and urged workers to accept the 15 days' pay offer which it said had been accepted by the Mineworkers Union. This union, however, criticized the government allegation that workers had attacked the police barracks, saying it had worsened the situation, and all efforts to bring strikers back to work had been in vain. At a meeting on the 6th of March, leaders of the miners decided not to resume work until all their demands had been met; they considered that a speech to them by an army officer amounted to a threat, and criticized the NLC for condemning their action. Next day it was reported that only about 500 of the miners had returned to work, and as these were not of the underground staff, the mines stayed closed. Six strike leaders were arrested.

After appeals to the workers by TUC secretary-general, Mr. Bentum, to end their strike, promising that the TUC would continue to help miners in all their legitimate demands, the AGC workers returned to work on 10 March, but announced that the strike would be resumed if their demands were not met by 1 April.

Bentum refused to cooperate with the NLC who had appointed a Committee of Enquiry and tried to play down the incident. He forced the NLC to make a full commission enquiry of it (54), and was able to obtain three months' basic pay as a goodwill award for the workers in negotiations with the AGC management and government in a period of great tension between the GTUC and the government.

Government failed to respond promptly to the TUC's call for a high-powered commission to investigate the Obuasi shootings; it clearly underestimated the emotional impact of the violence. When the Commission was formed, it contained no trade union representation and no one of high judicial rank. Feelings ran high and in June, 1970, another strike closed the mine in protest at the failure to publish the report of the commission of inquiry into the March, 1969, incidents. (55) Obuasi workers were rightly interested in the publication of the report, not merely for the purpose of establishing responsibility for the violence, but also because the whole affair would necessarily involve the payment of compensation for the murdered workers and

decision on the legitimacy of their earlier claims for severance pay.

Workers had made several demands for the publication of the report without any effective response from the government. A month before the eventual laying down of tools, they issued an ultimatum of their intention to strike if the report was not published by 10 June. Again, the Busia government underestimated the resolve of the workers in not acting sufficiently early to reassure them of their intention to publish the report. But it was not until a few days before the expiry of the ultimatum that the Minister of Lands and Mineral Resources first invited the union officials to his office to persuade them to call off their strike threat, and then proceeded to Obuasi to address the workers. As it turned out, the workers refused to relent unless the government committed itself to a definite date for the publication. The government found itself unable to make such a commitment under duress, and a strike resulted from the impasse. The Spokesman wrote:

This lack of direction in industrial relations is compounded by a pathological feeling of insecurity on the part of the government. This is the strangest aspect of the rule of the Busia administration... Can it be anything else when it is realised that the reaction to the Obuasi strike is on all fours with the Takoradi railway strike of 1961 for which the workers were described as "dispicable rats" and many of their leaders detained? None of such hard words have been used yet, but the similarity is impressive. As with the railway strike the government has been quick to declare this one, not only an illegal strike, but also a political strike. And again, as in Takoradi, external forces bear the blame. Of all people, the PM has named 3 countries, Guinea, Sudan and the United States of America as being behind it. (56)

During the strike the Minister of Lands and Mineral Resources promised that the Ata-Bedu Report would be published, but this did not halt the stoppage. As the strike went on the pumpmen joined the strikers, and troops were sent to Obuasi to man the pumps and prevent flooding of the mine. After a meeting of union leaders, local tribal leaders and two junior ministers had agreed to an appeal to the miners to return to work a week after the strike had begun; some resumed work but the majority stayed out.

Strike leaders at the AGC agreed to return to work after about two weeks of the unofficial strike. Five strike leaders apologised for their action; they promised not to initiate unofficial strikes

like this again. The statement was made after the 108 workers arrested early in the strike were freed, as the strikers had demanded. However, hardly any workers responded, and the strike continued.

After 3 weeks workers returned, but production did not really pick up again until September. The Ghanaian government lost an estimated £ 300,000 in revenue through the action, but neither Lonrho nor Ghana officialdom was ready to concede anything on this occasion to the workers. In fact, the AGC subsequently dismissed six men believed to have been the leaders of the strike, and who had also been expelled from the Mineworkers' Union because of their unofficial action. A company spokesman said: "We had to dismiss them as the company has an agreement not to employ non-union members". (57)

The Ata-Bedu report and the government's White Paper on the 1969 Obuasi shootings appeared in 1971. While it branded the strike as illegal and hailed the intervention of the police as saving lives and property, government agreed with the Mineworkers' Union that management had precipitated the walk-out by failing to live up to its promises. It even blamed itself for the poor communications between the various ministries, and stated that the police would be disciplined and that the individual who had killed a by-stander was to be prosecuted. (58)

Since October, 1977, two strikes have taken place at the AGC by workers who cannot any longer cope with the serious inflation and the lack of essential commodities. The new Minister of Consumer Affairs, Mr. Kofi Badu, who came to Obuasi to campaign for the "Union Government" proposed by the NRC, was given a very hostile reception. Workers made him understand that they did not care about Union Government - they were only interested in more money and a more equitable distribution of essential commodities in order to survive.

This short review of the workers' strike history shows that the AGC workers' behaviour corresponds with their attitudes: AGC workers consider strike action as the last weapon to be used against management and government, and have only used it if peaceful negotiations did not lead to the expected results, and if management acted in an arbitrary way. Clearly, attempts of the national union leaders to control strikes after independence have failed. Workers have resorted to strike action in the last instance despite the

the fact that collective strike action is inevitably considered as political action in the Ghanaian political economy, and is dealt with as such.

4.3.3. National union leadership compared with local branch leadership: its perception by the local branch of the AGC

If the national union leaders generally appear to identify closely with the governmental and managerial ideology of increasing productivity and avoiding strikes, and the rank and file to a large extent rejects this controlling function of the national union, does this imply that the rank and file considers the national union leadership as in league with government and management in the exploitation of labour?

It is indeed sometimes argued that not the (unionized) workers but rather the union leadership constitutes a "labour aristocracy". The union leadership in this view is not championing workers' interests, but is rather a privileged group attempting to control workers in exchange for personal benefits from government and management; it is closely linked with the dominant classes in society in income and life-style, politically conservative, and is far removed from the rank and file. (59) Burawoy, for example, argues that workers in the (partly nationalized) Zambian coppermines consider the union leadership as

a privileged class which is given political support from the government and management while deriving its wealth from the workers' subscriptions... The worker, therefore, perceives the co-ordination of three "power elites" - the union, the government and the companies - seeking to exploit him and suppress his demands and complaints. (60)

And Markovits writes in a recent book: "If the workers are an aristocracy in comparison with the peasantry, the trade union leaders are an aristocracy vis-à-vis the rank and file - a double aristocracy doubly privileged". (61)

Indeed, an enormous gap appears to exist between the AGC local branch members and the national leadership of the Ghana Mineworkers' Union. Only 1% of the AGC workers could name one or more national union leaders. National union leaders are not known, and their mainly bureaucratic services are often not immediately visible

to miners in the latter's daily working lives. The workers are more concerned with problems like arbitrary dismissals, corruption, abusive behaviour by supervisors which local union leadership is supposed to solve on the spot. Most miners (70.5%) did not even believe that the national union leaders were rendering any services to the rank and file; they demonstrated great mistrust of the national leadership, which is estranged from the rank and file by high incomes, elitist life-style and the increasingly bureaucratic complexity of union affairs on the national level. The miners accuse the national leadership of "exploiting" the rank and file, "smoothing" industrial conflicts and "selling out" workers to management and government. As one miner stated: "We do not know what they are doing. They are declared VIP's and we see them turn up from time to time in their big Mercedes for talks with management and (local) union leadership. However, our collective agreement dates back to 1969".

GTUC leaders, especially the secretary-general of the GTUC, seem to be better known than the national union leaders (see table 40); they frequently appear in the newspapers, and sometimes even in the mines to reach a settlement between workers and management in periods of crisis. The AGC workers also seem to have more trust in the TUC leaders than in their national leaders. Around 52% of the workers were more or less satisfied with the job done by the TUC

Table 40. Familiarity with names of TUC leaders (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| NUMBER OF TUC LEADERS KNOWN | | | | | |
| none | 52 | 37.5 | 48.5 | 12 | 45 |
| one | 48 | 62.5 | 48.5 | 88 | 54 |
| two | | | 3 | | 1 |
| TOTAL | 100 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100 | 100 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

leadership. Mr. B.A. Bentum's negotiating capacities after the 1969 strike are still well remembered by the AGC workers. Although the GTUC has normally identified with the successive governments' developmental intentions, and has normally controlled strikes, it has attempted to articulate the interests of the broadest stratum of labour, the lower-

paid and the minimum wage-earners, and has sought to extend benefits to this group. (62) As the pressure from below has built up into repeated unofficial, illegal strikes after the 1966 coup, it has tended to respond to and increase demands on government. It has sometimes even refused to control the workers if the ruling government did not demonstrate concern for the lowest-paid among them by not trying to bridge the gap between the lowest and highest paid. (63)

However, the majority of the AGC workers most appreciate their local branch leaders. 82% maintained that there was no gap between the local leadership and the rank and file, claiming that local leaders (with the exception of the secretary who is the only full-time paid officer) continue to live among them and work with them in the mine during their period of office-holding and don't behave like "union-bosses".

Indeed, 80% of the AGC workers could name one or more branch leaders (see table 41), and 81.5% seemed to be more or less content with the job done by the local leadership.

Table 41. Familiarity with names of local branch leaders (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|-------------------------------|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| NUMBER OF LOCAL LEADERS KNOWN | | | | | |
| none | 22.5 | 25 | 24.5 | | 20 |
| one | 44 | 12.5 | 36.5 | 17.5 | 37 |
| two | 30.5 | 50 | 30 | 82.5 | 38.5 |
| three | 3 | 12.5 | 9 | | 4.5 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

The general satisfaction with local leadership that is based on the workers' dependence on the local leadership's regular dealing with the multiplicity of problems facing workers in the production process (settling grievances and cases) does not preclude "rumour mongering" among the miners about the local leaders' behaviour ("buying" by management, participation in the general bribe-system in the mine, and embezzlement of union funds). These rumours have from

time to time been substantiated by facts, and there have also been individual disappointments in the leadership (if an individual case or grievance was not satisfactorily handled). However, notwithstanding some compromising behaviour on the part of the local leadership, the majority of workers believe that local branch leaders are generally more interested in serving the workers' welfare than serving their own pockets (and power-base). (see table 42).

Table 42. Are local branch officers more interested in gaining power of money than serving the workers' interests?. (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|--|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| INTEREST IN GAINING POWER OR MONEY? | | | | | |
| Yes | 12 | | 3 | 6 | 8 |
| No | 74.5 | 100 | 76 | 88 | 78 |
| Some/sometimes | 5.5 | | 6 | 6 | 5.5 |
| Don't know/not sure | 5.5 | | 3 | | 4 |
| No answer | 2.5 | | 12 | | 4.5 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100.0 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

Indeed, branch leaders' controlling activities with regards to the rank and file should not be too exaggerated, because the constant exhortations of branch leaders to work hard and avoid strikes (often under pressure by government, management and national trade union leadership) more often take the shape of a daily ritual and a display of "good behaviour" to impress government and management than of convincing control. Moreover, rank and file's control over branch leaders' behaviour should not be underrated. Leaders must live up to certain expectations of an "ideal" leader: leaders should keep close contact with the workers and not behave like officials; they should approach workers as human beings without discrimination (because of occupational or ethnic differences); they should not use their office for selfish ends, but serve the workers; they should be bold and outspoken in their relationship with management, "strong men" rather than "moderate negotiators". (64) (see table 43).

Table 43. Union leadership qualities (percentages)

| | Unskilled | Semiskilled | Skilled | Clerical | Total |
|--|-----------|-------------|---------|----------|-------|
| QUALITIES | | | | | |
| Closeness to workers | 25 | 25 | 24.5 | 23.5 | 25 |
| Unselfishness/service to workers | 23 | 12.5 | 24.5 | 23.5 | 22.5 |
| Bold/outspoken/fighting | 24 | 37.5 | 9 | 23.5 | 21 |
| Good organiser/speaker/ negotiator | 16 | | 15 | 17.5 | 15 |
| Tactful and polite with regard to workers | 8 | 12.5 | 21 | 12 | 12 |
| Unbiased/not discriminating | 1.5 | | 3 | | 1.5 |
| No answer | 2.5 | 12.5 | 3 | | 3 |
| TOTAL | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| N | 75 | 8 | 33 | 17 | 133 |

Leaders who do not deliver the expected goods, who are corrupt or who discriminate against certain occupational and ethnic categories (for example, unskilled northern workers) cannot count upon the willing co-operation of the rank and file, and have to face strong opposition from numerous ambitious contenders for office. (65) For example, local branch leaders at Obuasi who were chased during the 1969 strike, and suspected of being "bought" by management and betraying workers' interests, were not re-elected in the following branch elections. The pressure "to deliver the goods", and their living close to the rank and file (who may constantly take them to task informally), is even more likely to force them to identify with the rank and file and its "consumptionist" demands than with the "productionist" demands of government and management.

The gap between local leadership and rank and file is, according to the AGC workers, often exaggerated. However, there is a large gap between the rank and file and the national union leadership, who are far removed from the harsh miners' life, and the national leadership tends to control the miners rather than to serve their interests.

Yet, whilst neglect of workers' interests has clearly occurred in some instances (66), it would go too far to call the national union leadership a "labour aristocracy", implying that it does not at all

serve workers' interests but is only collaborating with government and management to control and exploit the workers to its own advantage. Such a view completely overlooks the historical evidence that the national union leadership has initiated certain strike actions during the colonial period that brought the workers substantial benefits. And although the national union leaders experience more pressures from above (government) than from below (rank and file), and since independence are more likely to discipline and control workers than the local leaders, and although they display managerial attitudes and life-styles (for which they are often criticized by the rank and file), the national leaders have tried - within the limits placed upon them to improve the workers' lot both by collective bargaining and certain bureaucratic services. Indeed, as our treatment of the AGC workers' strike actions after independence clearly shows, workers now resort to unofficial strikes and stoppages, but also leave the more moderate union leaders to negotiate a settlement. Indeed it is a strategy that seems to have led to considerable benefits for the AGC workers after the 1969 and 1971 strike. (67).

NOTES

- 1) Compare Epstein, A.L., Politics in an Urban African Community, Manchester, 1958.
- 2) See Major Gosling, D.C. Wasaw, to Colonial Secretary, "Employment of Labor in the Gold Coast", in GNA, File 1481/30, Conditions of Labour in the Gold Coast; and J.R. Dickinson, Chief Inspector of Labour, Gold Coast, "Report on Labour Conditions in the Gold Coast", July 1938, in GNA, File 716/33, Labour Conditions on (i) The Mines; (ii) In the Colony generally; and GNA, File 437/38, The "Rake-off" System.
- 3) GNA, C.S. 51/H. 371/P, Chief Secretary to Governor, 15 March 1927, cit. in Gutkind, P.C.W., The Emergent African Urban Proletariat, occasional paper no. 8, Centre for Developing-Area Studies, McGill University, 1974.
- 4) Shea, M.S.M., The Development and Role of Trade Unions in a Developing Economy: the Case of Ghana, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1968, p. 69.
- 5) See Greenstreet, M., op. cit., 1972.
- 6) GNA, File P. 7/1938.
- 7) Blay, B., The Gold Coast Mines Employees' Union, Devon, 1950, Preface.
- 8) Ghana Mines Employees Union, National Executive Council Report, April 1958, pp. 7-8: "... Our members be well advised to refrain from threats for strike when... negotiations are proceeding or likely to procede... We ... resort to strike action only when compelled to do so by forces and factors beyond our control". Moreover, strikes should be on the national level. See Daily Graphic, 16 February 1954, Arthur: Future Strikes Will Be On National Level: "... We advised all the various branches of the GCMEU that sectional strikes will not help us to achieve our aim".
- 9) Blay, B., op. cit., 1950, pp. 24-27.
- 10) Berg, E.J., and Butler, J., "Trade Unions", in Coleman, J.S., and Rosberg, C.G., (eds.), Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa, Berkeley, 1964. For a similar recent position, see Bretton, H.L., Power and Politics in Africa, London, 1973; and Markovits, I.L., Power and Class in Africa, Prentice Hall, 1977.

- 11) Both Bates' and Epstein's discussion of the attitude of the Zambian mineworkers towards the African National Congress, and later towards UNIP, illustrates the narrow economic perspectives in which they saw their position. This refusal to stage political strikes bears witness to the politically conservative and quiescent stand they have up to now adopted. See Bates, R.H., Unions, Parties and Political Development. A Study of the Mineworkers in Zambia, New Haven/London, 1971; and Epstein, A.L., op. cit., 1958.
- 12) Presidential Welcome Address by D.K. Foevie, General President of the Gold Coast Mines Employees Union to the 11th Annual Delegates Conference of the Union at Tarkwa, on 26th March, 1955.
- 13) Lynd, G.E., The Politics of African Trade Unionism, London, 1968, pp. 38-39.
- 14) Austin, D., op. cit., 1964, p. 139.
- 15) CPP-support is clearly shown by election results in Obuasi, see Austin, D., op. cit., 1964; and Kraus, J., Cleavages, Crisis, Parties, and State Power in Ghana: The Emergence of a Single Party System, Ph. D. Thesis, John Hopkins University, Baltimore, 1970, p. 162.
- 16) Ghana Mineworkers Union, TUC Ghana, National Executive Council's Report to the 15th Annual Delegates Conference at Tarkwa, Western Region, from 22nd to 25th May, 1959, p. 2, 4-5.
- 17) For the Industrial Relations Acts 1958, 1959, 1960, see Rimmer, D., "The New Industrial Relations in Ghana," in Industrial and Labor Relations Review. XIV, 2(1961), pp. 206-26; and Damachi, U.G., The Role of Trade Unions in the Development Process. With a Case Study of Ghana, New York/Washington/London, 1974.
- 18) See Büse, J.E., Gewerkschaften im sozialen Wandel in Entwicklungsländern, Bonn/Bad Godeberg, 1974. A check-off system is the system whereby the employer automatically deducts the union subscription from the workers' wages and transmits it to the union.
- 19) The Third Miners Day Message by the General Secretary D.K. Foevie, on behalf of the National Executive Council from the Headquarters of the Union on 20th November, 1963 to Members of the Union.
- 20) TUC Newsletter, vol. 3, no. 6, June 1975.
- 21) See Bates, R.H., op. cit., 1971; Burawoy, M., op. cit., 1972; and Sandbrook, R., op. cit., 1975.

- 22) See The Pioneer, May 15, 1973, p. 4. It was reported in the Ghanaian Press that General Spears had said that the takeover by the Ghanaian government would never have happened had he been at the helm: "Ghana's colonels and majors could not have looked a British major-general in the face and proposed the measures".
- 23) Lenin, V.I., What is to be Done?, Pekin, 1973.
- 24) West Africa, 18 July 1977.
- 25) See Epstein, A.L., op. cit., 1958; and Bates, R.H., op. cit., 1971.
- 26) See Burawoy, M., op. cit., 1972.
- 27) Legon Punch, Journal of the Junior Staff of Legon, no. 3, February-March, 1971.
- 28) For productivity rates in the mines, see Killick, T., op. cit., 1966.
- 29) The Pioneer, March 14, 1973, p. 6.
- 30) Burawoy, M., op. cit., 1972, p. 283.
- 31) See Ghana, Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Disturbances at the University of Ghana Campus, Legon, Accra-Tema, 1975; and "The NRC and the Unions", in Africa, no. 35, July, 1974.
- 32) Ghana, Report of the Salary Review Committee, Accra-Tema, 1975.
- 33) The categories mentioned below shall neither be called out on strike nor take part in one: Mines Security Police; Medical Staff; Ambulance Drivers; Health Inspectors; Conservancy men. See Metal Mines of Ghana, Conditions of Service for Daily Rated and Monthly Rated Employees and Members of the Junior Salaried Staff, June 1969.
- 34) Greenstreet, M., op. cit., 1972.
- 35) Kimble, D., op. cit., 1963, p. 44.
- 36) Chief Commissioner Kumasi to Colonial Secretary Accra, 9th May 1934, (292) 827/24, in GNA, File 256/34, Labour Employed by the Ashanti Goldfields Co. Ltd. Alleged Strike of -.
- 37) Ashanti District Commissioner, G. Hadow, Obuasi, to Chief Commissioner, Kumasi, 2nd January 1935, no. 5/20/1927, in GNA, File 162/34, Labour Disputes.
- 38) Acting District Commissioner Obuasi, to Chief Commissioner Kumasi, 19th March 1935, no. 347/20/27, in GNA, File 162/34, Labour Disputes.
- 39) Chief Commissioner's Office, 12th June 1935, Obuasi Workers Case, in GNA, File 162/34, Labour Disputes.
- 40) Arnold Hodson, Government's House, 29th March 1935, to Sir Philip Cunliffe-Lester, in GNA, File 162/34, Labour Disputes.

- 41) Blay, B., op. cit., 1950, p. 18.
- 42) See Cowan, E.A. "The Evolution of Trade Unionism in Ghana", Accra: GTUC, n.d., p. 31; Blay, B., op. cit., 1950; Davison, R.B., "Labour Relations in Ghana" in Annals, March, 1957, p. 140; and The Ghana Mineworkers' Union (TUC Ghana), 3rd Miners Day Celebrations 20th November 1963. Brief History, GTUC: Secretariat, Accra, 1963.
- 43) Gold Coast Colony, Report on the Labour Department for the Year 1947-48, Accra: GPD, 1949, p. 9.
- 44) Gold Coast Colony, In the matter of Trade Dispute between the Gold Coast Mines Employees Union and the Gold Coast Chamber of Mines - Award of the Arbitrator, Accra: GPD, 1947.
- 45) Fitch, B., and Oppenheimer, M., op. cit., 1966, p. 101; Daily Graphic, 11 February 1956, p. 1; Daily Graphic, 25 August, 1956; and Gold Coast, Report of the Gold Coast Mines Board of Inquiry, Accra: GPD, 1956.
- 46) Bates, R.H., op. cit., 1971.
- 47) See Ghana Mineworkers' Union, TUC Ghana, National Executive Council's Report for 1963 and 1964 to the 19th Delegates Conference at Nsuta-Wassaw, Western Region from 7th to 10th May, 1965. However, it should be added that control appeared never to be complete. See Ghana Mineworkers' Union, Letter of general-secretary, D.K. Foevie, to Mines Manager, Ghana State Mining Corporation, dated 5 December 1963: Demonstration at Bibiani Mines: "It must be noted that these anti-Party and anti-Government elements in Bibiani tried in the past to remove from offices the loyal, honest and sincere Party branch trade union officials and committee members...".
- 48) West Africa, 10 December 1966, p. 1434.
- 49) West Africa, 24 December 1966, p. 1495; and also The Pioneer, 5 December 1966, p. 1.
- 50) West Africa, 31 December 1966, p. 1528.
- 51) Republic of Ghana, Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Obuasi Disturbances 1969, Accra-Tema: GPC, 1971.
- 52) West Africa, 5 November 1971, p. 1291, Verdict on Ashanti Strike.
- 53) West Africa, 14 June 1969, p. 690; and West Africa, 15 March 1969, p. 310.
- 54) Ghana TUC Press Release File, 1969, Release no. 22, 11 March 1969.
- 55) Cronjé, S., Ling, M., and Cronjé, G., op. cit., 1976, pp. 59-60.

- 56) The Spokesman, 26 June 1970, pp. 2-3, "Obuasi Goldfields Strike"; and West Africa, 27 June 1970, p. 719; and West Africa, 4 July 1970, p. 750.
- 57) West Africa, 30 July 1971, p. 871.
- 58) Republic of Ghana, Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Obuasi Disturbances 1969, Accra-Tema: GPC, 1971.
- 59) For western industrialised countries, see for example Wright Mills, C., The New Men of Power, 1948; and Trotsky, L., The Unions in Britain, 1933, in Leon Trotsky on the Trade Unions, 1969; for Africa, see for example Bates, R.H., op. cit., 1971.
- 60) Burawoy, M., "The Colour of Class on the Copper Mines. From African Advancement to Zambianization", in Zambian Papers no. 7, 1972, pp. 29 and 81; see also Burawoy, M., "Another Look at the Mine-worker", in African Social Research, December, 1972, pp. 239-88.
- 61) Markovits, I.L., op. cit., 1977, p. 270.
- 62) See Kraus, J., "Strikes and Labour Power in a Post-Colonial African State: The Case of Ghana," paper presented at the Seminar on Third World Strikes at the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, September 12-16, 1977, p. 36.
- 63) See Waterman, P., and Thomas, H., "Labour Relations Theories and Trade Unions Realities: Report on an Experimental Seminar in Ghana", in Manpower and Unemployment Research, vol. 10, no. 2, November, 1977, pp. 90-91.
- 64) Sandbrook, R., op. cit., 1975, p. 149.
- 65) See Republic of Ghana, Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Obuasi Disturbances 1969, Accra-Tema: GPC, 1971; and Republic of Ghana, Report of the Committee of Enquiry into Recent Disturbances at Prestea, Accra, 1969.
- 66) See for example Republic of Ghana, Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Obuasi Disturbances 1969, Accra-Tema: GPC, 1971.
- 67) Waterman, P., and Thomas, H., op. cit., 1977.

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION

In this conclusion I shall return to the introductory question: what is the political consciousness and action of the AGC workers?

I did not find convincing evidence to support Arrighi and Saul's labour aristocracy thesis. The AGC workers are not economically and socially segregated from the "urban poor" and in league with the dominant classes in society. Their income, eroded by inflation and consumed by a large number of dependents in rural and urban areas, is not very much greater than that of most other sections of the urban poor; it only places them among the upper strata of this latter group. Moreover, although they are relatively well-off and secure in relation to most sections of the urban poor, the AGC workers feel deprived in comparison with the dominant classes in Ghanaian society the gap in living standards (and hence life-styles) between them and the dominant classes in society is already very large and is still growing, and they display a strong resentment against this highly inegalitarian status quo.

However, although AGC workers are economically, socially and culturally closely connected with other sections of the urban poor, I did not find much evidence of a "populist consciousness" either. Relatively few workers perceived reality in terms of a massive but vague gap between "the poor" and "the rich", a perception which might give rise to a sustained mobilization and common struggle of workers and other segments of the urban poor against the exploitative and oppressive "big men". Surely, while there are many factors making for identification of workers with other sections of the urban poor (the aspiration to become self-employed in the future), and it would be going too far to accuse workers of having no concern for other sections of the urban poor (for one, they generally care for unemployed relatives), there are divisive elements that are neatly exploited by the dominant classes in society. There is a continuous mistrust towards the "industrial reserve army" that competes for the sparse jobs in the capitalist sector and depresses wages, and a suspicion of petty traders and producers as well, who are accused of "cheating" workers by charging "exorbitant" prices. While petty-traders and market women seem to have supplied striking miners with gratuitous food during the long 1955/56 strike enabling the workers to sustain the strike, (1) in 1977, there were several clashes in-

stigated by the state between workers and petty-traders and market women who were selling consumer goods above controlled prices.(2)

The AGC workers have clearly developed an incipient working-class consciousness: they try to defend their interests against specific social classes considered as exploiting the working-class. As Sandbrook and Arn suggest, the obvious reasons for the emergence of an incipient working-class consciousness among the AGC workers are: (3)

- Workers who are dependent on wages earned in the "modern sector", are concentrated in large enterprises and working-class communities. This not only enhances communication and the development of a common consciousness (manifest in the absence of any marked differences in responses to questions posed among the various skill levels), but also aids the growth of a sense of solidarity against management or the common employer.
- There is a constant confrontation with the state which determines wages directly in the public sector and indirectly in the private sector. And as part of its policy of "capturing the commanding heights of the economy", since 1972 the state has also become the major shareholder in the mine; it continuously attempts to control and discipline workers. However, the state's participation in the mine has not brought about an increased concern for the workers' interests and welfare, as had been promised by the military government during the partial take-over of the mine in 1972. On the contrary, political controls within the mine appear to have increased since the take-over, and in order to speed up the "national revolution" further efforts are required without any corresponding wage-increases. Burawoy's characterization of the effects of the partial take-over in the Zambian coppermines applies to a large extent to the AGC as well: "While a relative softness has characterized the government's attitude to expatriates and management, a correspondingly tough approach has characterized its attitude towards the workers. The Zambian government developed a marked capitalist orientation towards the miners, an orientation symbolized by the banning of strikes, the incessant hammering of the workers for greater discipline and the insistence that wage-increases must be linked to increases in productivity".(4)
- compared to the workers in small and medium sized enterprises, workers in large enterprises have a relatively high educational level.

Despite all this, there is an "underdeveloped" working-class consciousness. We have noted the various ambiguities in workers' consciousness: besides the strong feeling of being exploited in the system of production, and the resentment against the high inegalitarian status quo preserved by the state, there is an absence of sustained class conflict; cordial relations are maintained with government and management (except with those managers and politicians who are corrupt, humiliate workers and are unconcerned with the workers' lot). Moreover, while there is a deference to those who, through honest effort, have "arrived" in society, there remains a curious combination of dependence on the state as responsible for improving their lot, together with a belief in social mobility. Strong feelings of being exploited in the system of production, and resentment against the present status quo, have given rise not to a revolutionary consciousness but to a reformist one: workers do not desire a total and fundamental restructuring of the status quo, but incremental changes within it. In particular they wish to see a more egalitarian and democratic society in which workers can criticize existing injustices without fear, a society in which they can organize freely and enjoy a more prosperous life. The "underdevelopment" of class consciousness can be explained as follows:

- the existence of various modes of production in Ghana. In addition to their employment in the capitalist sector, a few AGC workers were also active in the petty commodity sector, and most of them at least hope to become self-employed. It is evident that the petty-bourgeois aspirations of a large number of workers retard a more developed class consciousness.
- the constant confrontation of workers with the value system and ideologies of the dominant classes in society: a value system supporting individual competition and enrichment, social mobility, respect and admiration for those who have achieved power and wealth; and ideologies like nationalism, national revolution, "developmentalism", and African socialism, which have never questioned the emergent class structure.
- the absence of a radical or revolutionary leadership and ideology. Whilst the Sekondi-Takoradi railway workers similarly resent their being exploited in an inegalitarian situation, and have much the same

internal divisions (southern skilled workers versus northern and foreign unskilled workers), and also live in closelyknit working-class communities (with easy communication and solidarity), they have engaged in strike actions in 1961 and 1971 which went beyond economism to challenge the existing order. True, the railwayworkers are perhaps more articulate and explicit than the AGC workers, yet the conditions of life are very similar. Despite this similarity, collective action by AGC workers has never explicitly challenged the status quo. The AGC workers' collective actions were oriented first of all towards the defense and preservation of their real income, and were expressions of protest against specific injustices within the workplace (like arbitrary dismissals, humiliating behaviour, and so on). (5)

Therefore, it seems to me that the union leadership and its ideological influences may be the main reasons why the two groups differ. While the radical Sekondi-Takoradi leadership has always been strongly involved in politics, even since the early days of the struggle for independence, and has been able to translate the workers' economic situation into political terms, (6) the mineworkers' union leadership accepted the colonial labour advisers' admonishments to confine themselves to workers' problems and keep politics and trade unionism separate; it has always urged the rank and file to keep aloof from "politics" and restrict itself to short-term "economic" goals.

Although the Mineworkers' Union was not inclined to become involved in "party politics" and "pure" political actions during the colonial period, it did initiate some militant economic actions, and tried to extract some justified economic gains from the employers that could not be obtained through the "normal" procedure of collective bargaining. Since independence, however, it has to a large extent accepted the management's and the state's ideology of avoiding strikes and educating the rank and file to work hard as its contribution to national development. It is true that the Mineworkers' Union's a-political trade union model and its acceptance of a moderate developmental ideology and economic strategy has enabled the union to survive under the relatively repressive regimes since independence; but, on the other hand, there have also been frequent concessions to and compromises with the state, sometimes to the detriment of the members. It is therefore not surprising that the national union leadership is often considered by the rank and file as "collaborators" both with the regime in power and with management in the exploitation and oppression of workers. Whilst in principle, the rank and file seems to a large extent to accept the a-political trade union model

and "developmental" ideology propagated by the national union, in actual practice it regularly deviates from the model and challenges the ideology. The rank and file is not really prepared to increase productivity unless the state undertakes serious efforts to change the very unequal income distribution in society, and to refrain from strikes which, though mostly aiming at the preservation of real income in a staggering inflation are inevitably considered as political strikes in the Ghanaian political economy. It is indeed true that the workers did achieve some benefits from the "wildcat" strikes which they resorted to only after seeing that management and government would neither listen nor give in to justified demands. These benefits would not otherwise have accrued to the workers had they chosen to follow the "normal" procedures of collective bargaining with management and government, who were interested only in the maximalisation of profits.

Thus, whilst an incipient working-class consciousness exists amongst miners, the cumulative effect of these factors - the co-existence of various modes of production, the constant confrontation of miners with the value system and ideologies of the dominant classes in society, and the absence of a radical or revolutionary leadership and ideology - makes gradual and sustained mobilization of class consciousness exceptionally difficult, and thereby limits working-class actions. Collective action is likely to continue to take the form of local "wildcat" strikes, because economic actions often arise out of a deeply-felt resentment against the present inegalitarian status quo. Such action, however, can be broken by management through dismissals, and by the State through a show of force.

In the GTUC's May Day Declaration of 1977, while condemning the "advocates of confrontation" between unions and governments, and emphasizing that there was "no alternative to co-operation" between them, the GTUC urged the future necessity for "an unperverted socialist form of government" in Ghana. (7) Yet, it remains to be seen whether it will enter into an alliance with other groups and organisations in society who also champion the establishment of a socialist system, whether it will follow through on its proposal to create education programmes for trade union leaders and members in order to win them over to its socialist ideal, (8), and whether there will be a significant change in its present ideology and strategy.

NOTES

- 1) See Gold Coast, Report of the Gold Coast Mines Board of Enquiry, Accra: GP, 1956; and Kraus, J., op.cit., 1970.
- 2) See West Africa, 14 November 1977, p. 2328; and 20 November 1977, p. 2383.
- 3) Sandbrook, R., and Arn, J., op.cit., 1977.
- 4) Burawoy, M., op.cit., 1972, pp. 104-5.
- 5) Compare Francesco Zapata S., "Action Syndicale et Comportement Politique des Mineurs Chiliens de Chuquicamata", in Sociologie du Travail, no. 3, 1975, p. 225: "l'action syndicale des mineurs n'est pas une action de classe à forte orientation idéologique et politique; elle est tournée vers la défense et le maintien d'intérêts particuliers".
- 6) See Jeffries, R.D., Class, Power, and Ideology in Ghana: The Railwaymen of Sekondi, Cambridge University Press, 1978.
- 7) Cited in Waterman, P., and Thomas, H., op.cit., 1977, p. 91.
- 8) See Africa, no. 68, April, 1977, p. 35; and West Africa, 6 February 1978, p. 262.

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