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Corporate Profit and Race in Central African Copper Mining, 1946–1958

The focus in the literature on the political outcomes of decolonization has resulted in neglect of the business activities that took place from the mid-1940s to the mid-1950s. Missing from existing accounts are the occasions when business turned impending political change to economic advantage. One such shift occurred in the central African copper-mining industry as, first, the promise of racial "partnership" during the short-lived Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland and then the prospect of African majority rule in Northern Rhodesia redefined the political context within which businesses operated. Rather than emphasizing the ethical considerations that influenced business attitudes, this study describes how corporate policies toward the job color bar were shaped by the copper industry's changing cost structure and profitability.

In September 1958, Harold Hochschild, honorary chairman of the American Metal Climax Company (AMAX), presented a paper to the Harvard Business School Association's discussion group on Overseas Business, Economic Development and the Cold War. His topic was the copper-mining industry in Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia. While acknowledging that profitability was "the fundamental criterion for private capital attracted abroad," Hochschild argued that "amongst its essential safeguards" were "vision, tact and courage on the part of its representatives in dealing with problems arising from the racial and national sensibilities they will encounter." Indeed, he claimed that when Rhodesian Selection Trust (RST), the central African mining group in which the American Metal Company, AMAX's predecessor, was largely interested, had taken action to end racially discriminatory job practices in the waning days of British colonial rule, ethical considerations had predominated. "Will African advancement raise or reduce costs?" Hochschild asked rhetorically.

Business History Review 85 (Winter 2011): 749–774. doi:10.1017/S0007680511001188
 ISSN 0007-6805; 2044-768X (Web).

> No one knows. The companies hope that in the long run it will reduce them but they do not expect this to happen during the years of transitional friction and labor troubles. Beyond that the outcome is still doubtful because the wage structure of the advancing Africans is based on the abnormally high European [white] wage scale, in that every skilled African who can replace a European will get that European's wage. But the RST companies realized that regardless of the effect on profits this change had to come.[1]

Both at the time and subsequently, the motives of, and the roles played by, big business during the postwar era of retreat from overseas empire have been much debated. Taking issue with an older historiography in which multinational companies and metropolitan powers were portrayed as having collaborated to frustrate postcolonial ambitions, recent studies of foreign-owned corporations in Asia and Africa have concluded that where business tried to influence the process of decolonization, governments rarely listened.[2] But if the range and complexity of corporate attitudes toward decolonization defy easy categorization, the focus of the literature on political outcomes has caused scholars of the subject to lose sight of core business activities during those same decades. Missing from the picture are occasions when business turned impending political change to economic advantage. One such moment in central Africa was precisely the one identified by Hochschild as, first, offering the promise of racial "partnership" during the short-lived Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, and then redefining the political context within which business operated as the prospect of African majority rule loomed in Northern Rhodesia. Yet, by emphasizing the "ethical" considerations shaping corporate policies, Hochschild's presentation arguably skimmed too lightly over the "fundamental criterion" of profitability. While the former perspective dominates the historiography of central Africa's copper-mining industry, close attention to the sector's profitability invites consideration of the significance of a quite different dynamic.[3] In what follows, I will suggest that corporate policies

[1] Harold K. Hochschild, "The Copper Mining Industry of Northern Rhodesia," Overseas Business, Economic Development and the Cold War, Harvard Business School Association 50th Anniversary Conference, 5 Sept. 1958, 17–18, 15, 16. For Hochschild himself, see especially Adam Hochschild, *Half the Way Home: A Memoir of Father and Son* (New York, 1986).

[2] Robert Tignor, *Capitalism and Nationalism at the End of Empire: State and Business in Decolonizing Egypt, Nigeria, and Kenya, 1945–1963* (Princeton, 1998). Among others, see especially Maria Misra, *Business, Race and Politics in British India, c.1850–1960* (Oxford, 1999); Sarah Stockwell, *The Business of Decolonization: British Business Strategies in the Gold Coast* (Oxford, 2000); and Nicholas White, "The Business and Politics of Decolonisation: The British Experience in the Twentieth Century," *Economic History Review* 53 (2000): 544–64.

[3] For the former perspective, see Richard Sklar, *Corporate Power in an African State: The Political Impact of Multinational Mining Companies in Zambia* (Berkeley, 1975), 105–6.

concerning the job color bar were shaped by the copper-mining industry's changing cost structure and profitability. I break my consideration of the topic into four sections: profits and corporate structure; wages and technological changes; costs and African advancement; and prices and the color bar. In my brief conclusion, I note the implications for local and global historiographies.

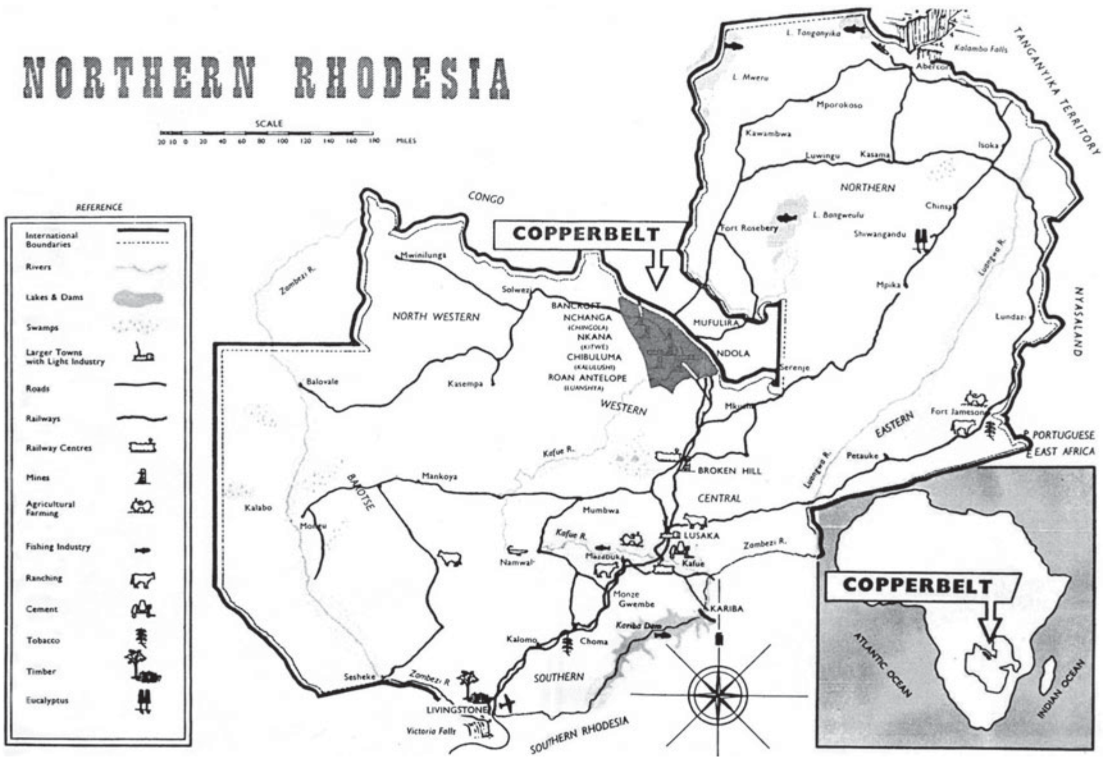
Profits and Corporate Structure

Toward the end of 1949, Hochschild toured the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt. Dotted along the Zambezi–Congo watershed were four large mines and their adjacent townships: Roan Antelope and Mufulira, owned and operated by the London-registered RST; and Nkana and Nchanga, controlled by the Johannesburg-based Anglo American Corporation. Both companies—in Anglo's case, its Rhodesian subsidiary—for a time changed their domicile to central Africa, and each company brought smaller copper mines into production in the latter part of the 1950s. These were Bancroft for Anglo American, and Chibuluma for RST. Although "most favourably impressed" by management organization on RST's mines, Hochschild was less enamored of the employment conditions enjoyed by white miners. These he deemed to be excessively generous. Initially attracted to the region by the lure of high wages, white workers, primarily from South Africa and Britain, had entrenched their position during the war by winning recognition of a job color bar from companies keen to avoid interruptions to production. "The [Northern] Rhodesian standard of living, which appears to have risen to its present level during the few years before the war," confided Hochschild to a fellow company director, "seems to me more than amply high . . . . It is hard to break from such traditions, however, as long as companies are making money and are so firmly in the grip of a union as are those on the Copperbelt."[4]

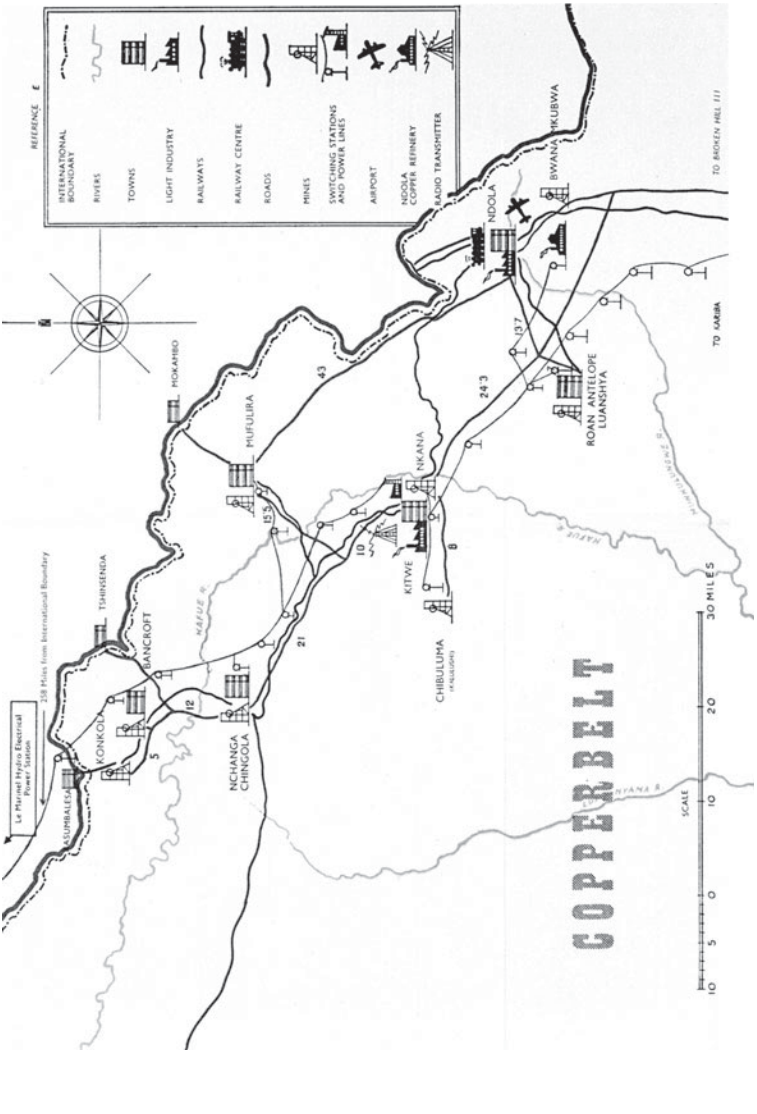
RST and Anglo American certainly were "making money" at the end of the 1940s. They were about to make very much more, as the mining industry was entering a period of rapid growth and high copper prices.

See also Elena Berger, *Labour, Race, and Colonial Rule: The Copperbelt from 1924 to Independence* (Oxford, 1974), 232; Guy Mhone, *The Political Economy of a Dual Labor Market in Africa: The Copper Industry and Dependency in Zambia, 1929–1969* (East Brunswick, 1982), 141; Simon Cunningham, *The Copper Industry in Zambia: Foreign Mining Companies in a Developing Country* (New York, 1981), 84; and L. J. Butler, *Copper Empire: Mining and the Colonial State in Northern Rhodesia, c.1930–1964* (Basingstoke, 2007).

[4] Harold K. Hochschild to Henry de Witt Smith, Tsumeb Corporation, New York, 2 Nov. 1949, H. K. Hochschild correspondence, file 1, 1940–1949, box 1, RP [Ronald Prain] collection, American Metal Company, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming (hereafter, RP collection).



Map of Northern Rhodesia (Zambia from October 1964 to present), 1962. (From *Northern Rhodesia Chamber of Mines Year Book, 1962* [Kitwe, 1963], end papers.)



Map of the Copperbelt, 1962. (From *Northern Rhodesia Chamber of Mines Year Book, 1962* [Kitwe, 1963], end papers.)

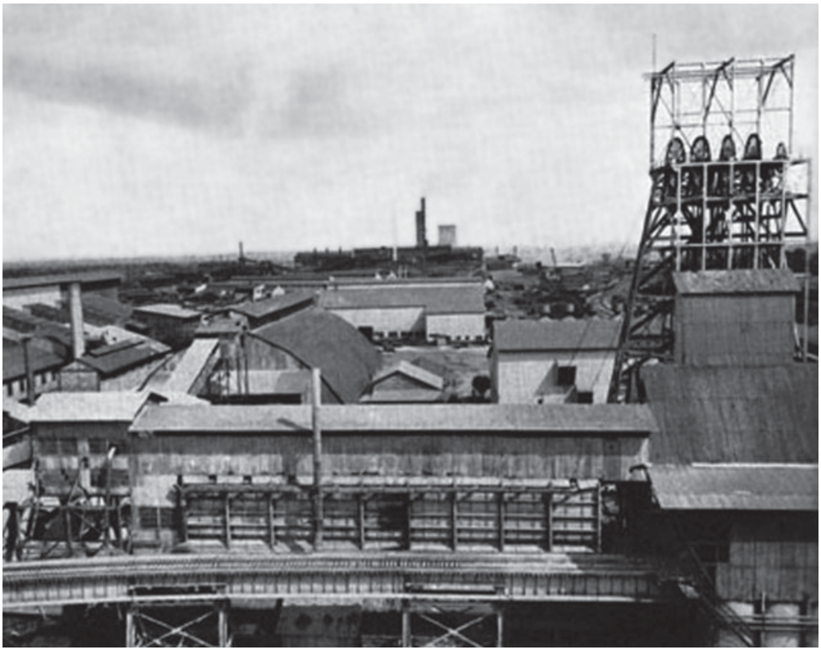
> By 1955 Copperbelt production was twice the volume of 1945, and still rising. Freed from wartime restrictions, the price of copper more than doubled between 1945 and 1947, redoubled during the next six years, and subsequently soared to over £430 per [electrolytic and blister] ton in 1956, seven times higher than it had been ten years earlier. That year, 1956, the Roan Antelope Company paid a 100 per cent dividend, Mufulira 125 per cent, Nchanga 150 per cent and Rhokana 200 per cent.[5]

Massively boosted by Britain's September 1949 devaluation of sterling by 44 percent against the dollar, the price of copper went on rising as demand increased during the Korean War. Between 1950 and 1953, the dollar price of copper rose by half again, even as output increased by about 40 percent. In the course of 1951, profits generated by the Rhokana Corporation's Nkana Mine leaped from £6,687,165 to £10,483,687. This return from one mine alone was part of the wider industry's increase in profitability. Between 1949 and 1953, an estimated £102,000,000, excluding undistributed profits, was remitted abroad in the form of dividend and royalty payments.[6]

When the price of copper collapsed in 1956, dividend and royalty payments fell dramatically. By 1958, the dividend paid by Mufulira Copper Mines Ltd. (MCM) and Roan Antelope Copper Mines Ltd. had slumped, respectively, to 16 percent, and 8 percent. Yet these reduced returns, the lowest for the Copperbelt's major mines, were well above the average paid by the Rand gold-mining industry, and, by 1959, dividend payments had resumed their upward trajectory. In 1960, Mufulira and Roan Antelope paid dividends of 39 percent and 25 percent, respectively. Returns to Nkana and Nchanga shareholders averaged 35 percent. In an address to the New York Society of Security Analysts, RST's chairman, Sir Ronald Prain, revealed that, during the twenty-eight years of RST's operations, "the gross profits of our companies totalled £234 million." After taxes amounting to almost £89 million had been deducted, this left £145 million in net earnings, of which "stockholders . . . received £75.2 million in cash as net dividends, representing 51.8 per cent of earnings, and the resulting balance of £70.1 million of earnings [was] retained in the business for replacements expenditure and other purposes." Over much the same period, Anglo American's Rhokana Corporation Ltd. alone distributed nearly £73 million in dividends. A

[5] Johan F. Holleman and Simeon Biesheuvel, *White Mine Workers in Northern Rhodesia, 1959–60* (Leiden, 1973), 11.

[6] Figures derived from Andrew Roberts, "Notes towards a Financial History of Copper Mining in Northern Rhodesia," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 19 (1982): 355–56; *Economist*, 27 Oct. 1951; and William Barber, *The Economy of British Central Africa: A Case Study of Economic Development in a Dualistic Society* (London, 1961), 110.



Nkana Mine, 1952. (From author's own collection.)

further £62 million was showered on shareholders by Anglo's other major Copperbelt operation, Nchanga Consolidated Copper Mines Ltd. Combined dividend and royalty payments in the decade preceding Northern Rhodesia's independence and subsequent renaming as Zambia, in 1964, amounted to £259 million.[7]

These were not the evenly secured profits of a uniformly successful industry. They varied by mining group, by mine, and over time. To begin with, the Anglo American Corporation was much larger than RST's major shareholder, American Metal Climax, as the American Metal Company had been relabeled following its 1957 merger with Climax Molybdenum. Estimates made at the end of 1969, following the Zambian government's decision to acquire a controlling interest in the

[7] Paragraph based on *Northern Rhodesia Chamber of Mines Year Book, 1958* (Kitwe, 1959), 80, 90; *Northern Rhodesia Chamber of Mines Year Book, 1960* (Kitwe, 1961), 64, 66, 72, 74; Ronald Prain, "Rhodesian Selection Trust Group of Companies: Its Place in the World Copper Industry," *Selected Papers*, vol. 2: *1958–1960* (London, 1961), 124; and Andrew Roberts, *History of Zambia* (London, 1976), 214. For the Rand, see S. Herbert Frankel, *Investment and the Return to Equity Capital in the South African Gold Mining Industry, 1887–1965: An International Comparison* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967).

copper-mining industry, put the size of the Anglo American Corporation at over $4 billion. By comparison, the assets of American Metal Climax were valued at about $950 million. While Anglo American was probably the "largest mining finance group in the world," American Metal Climax only ranked 110th among American industrial corporations. The book value of their respective Copperbelt subsidiaries was $343 million (Rhokana and NCCM Ltd.) and $230.7 million (RST).[8] However, this figure did not take into account the Rhokana Corporation's 34 percent holding in Mufulira Copper Mines Ltd. Although RST's "63.98 per cent holding . . . [in Mufulira] . . . represent[ed] the major source of its income," Anglo American's net contained bigger fish.[9] The enterprises controlled by Anglo American numbered among them the Copperbelt's richest and biggest mines. They were responsible for an increasing proportion of all the copper produced, and their rates of return were consistently higher than those of the RST group, especially once Mufulira's contribution is adjusted to reflect its divided ownership. Anglo American was much the wealthier of the two Copperbelt mining groups. RST simply could not call on the same range and depth of resources.

Wages and Technological Changes

By the time of Hochschild's visit to the Copperbelt, costs were a matter of concern to RST. "The Roan Mine continues to be a source of worry," Prain reported in April 1948:

> It is our opinion that our problems arise primarily out of a really difficult mining problem. . . . We must realise that it is probably destined for permanently higher costs than the other Copperbelt Mines, and its mine production is probably limited to a figure below its plant capacity. . . . I am afraid we shall never be free of problems at Roan in future, owing to the unexpectedly poor condition of the ground. We must face up to the fact that (at any rate speaking relatively for the Copperbelt) Roan is entering the category of a high cost producer.[10]

Nor were RST's concerns about Roan assuaged by the devaluation of sterling against the dollar in September 1949. No one knew whether

[8] Sklar, *Corporate Power in an African State*, 51, 40. See also, Thomas R. Navin, *Copper Mining and Management* (Tucson, 1978), 273–84, 347–56.

[9] Prain, "Rhodesian Selection Trust Group of Companies," 120.

[10] Prain to Hochschild, 30 Apr. 1948, H. K. Hochschild correspondence, file 1, 1940–1949, box 1, RP collection. See also Francis L. Coleman, *The Northern Rhodesia Copperbelt, 1899–1962: Technological Development Up to the End of the Central African Federation* (Manchester, 1971), 144.

Britain's Ministry of Supply would pass on the benefit of devaluation to the copper producers. Hochschild's return to New York from the Copperbelt saw him fretting about the competitive producer price implications of a possible Chilean devaluation of the peso and confiding to fellow American Metal Company board members that, in the event of a "world-wide copper curtailment program outside the U.S.A.," the best course of action for Roan Antelope, "so recently . . . in danger of becoming a marginal producer," would be to "shut down and sell its quota if possible."[11] Of all the Copperbelt mines, he wrote, Roan "is and will always be . . . the lowest grade, the most difficult to mine and the highest cost operation."[12] In the event, Hochschild's fears were not realized. Prices and profits soared after devaluation and the outbreak of the Korean War. On the Roan Antelope mine, profits were restored and costs contained by reorganization of its underground practices and surface operations, albeit at the price of permanently raising beyond Copperbelt norms the ratio of skilled white to unskilled black miners.[13]

But Mufulira was performing below expectations. Even though it was a "wonderful mine," Prain conceded, "We have gone rather fast at it during the last few years and we may have disappointment on maximum production." By the end of 1951, the strain was showing. "Last year's output, as you know, was a record both in terms of ore and copper," he reminded Hochschild. "This year Mufulira will not make more than about 80,000 long tons of blister [copper]. We can no longer delay some essential repairs." The upshot was that Mufulira's costs would be "somewhat on the high side for the next year or two." While these problems could be managed, apparently more intractable ones loomed large. What shareholders really should be worried about, Prain noted, was "the way in which African living standards may have to be improved." In a report written the previous year, he had painted a bleak picture.

> Taking the worst view one might say that if the Mines had a long enough life, African standards will one day have to approximate European standards. The cost of this would be astronomic. The question is where during the life of the Mines will African standards finish up? Obviously somewhere between their present standards and present European standards. The possibilities here are unlimited and this is the great problem in front of the Copperbelt from a financial angle.[14]

[11] Confidential memorandum, "Visit to the Rhodesias," Nairobi, 22 Oct. 1949, unnumbered file, misc. 1949–62, box 1, RP collection.

[12] Hochschild to de Witt Smith, 2 Nov. 1949.

[13] John Philips, "Roan Antelope: Big Business in Central Africa, 1890–1953," PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2000, 302, 363, 365, 368; and Robert Baldwin, *Economic Development and Export Growth: A Study of Northern Rhodesia, 1920–1960* (Berkeley, 1966), 91.

[14] Prain to Hochschild, 26 Apr. 1950 and 17 Oct. 1951, H. K. Hochschild correspondence, file 2, 1950–51, box 1, RP collection.

Mufulira Mine Selkirk Shaft head frame and hoist house, 1960. (From *Northern Rhodesia Chamber of Mines Year Book, 1960* [Kitwe, 1961], facing p. 1.)

In 1951 and 1953, the wages of black mineworkers were boosted by successive arbitration awards, the second of which was the Guillebaud award. Precipitated by a strike in 1952, the estimated annual cost of this latter backdated award was £873,000.[15] This increase in the cost of African labor, coming at the same time as more black workers were staying for longer periods on the mines, has been taken by some studies as marking a watershed in company thinking about the job color bar.

> Before the increases in wages in the early fifties, the African advancement issue was not a major problem on the Copperbelt. Management thought it was not profitable to invest the sums necessary to train skilled African employees, because they would not remain long enough for the expenditures to be worthwhile. The turnover of European workers was also high, but these workers were already trained, and, even though they had to be paid much more, it was profitable to use them for most jobs requiring considerable skill. The rise in African wages and the drop in African turnover rates (from about 60 percent annually in the forties to around 35 percent by 1955) completely changed this view. It became evident around 1953 that it was profitable to train Africans and substitute them for skilled European workers.[16]

[15] *Economist*, 5 Dec. 1953.
[16] Baldwin, *Economic Development and Export Growth*, 100.

While the increased cost of black labor was one reason that the mining companies took greater interest in African advancement, there were other considerations, too. These turned on major changes in "factor inputs of production," that is, the shifting balance between the costs of capital, of skilled white miners, and of unskilled black laborers. Of these, higher pay for African workers turned out to carry the least weight. Until the end of the 1940s, the Copperbelt's expenditure on African wages and conditions of employment had been so low that it suffered by comparison with large mines elsewhere in the region. Thereafter, the copper-mining companies did not object particularly strenuously to paying wage increases determined by arbitration. Although the average earnings of all employees in the copper-mining industry grew by 291 percent between 1946 and 1956, this trend was more than offset by the increased price of copper. Over the same period, it shot up by 567 percent. For all that the total emoluments paid to black workers more than doubled between 1950 and 1954, expenditure on African labor made up a very small proportion of total production costs. In 1955, the industry's gross costs of production amounted to £44,850,000, of which £11,111,707 were expenditures on white miners. That same year, black workers received a total of £4,723,658.[17] By one calculation, an increase of 50 percent in African emoluments only raised production costs by about five percent.[18]

Costs were contained by an accelerated program of mechanization and rationalization designed to substitute capital for black labor. The extent of the change in the use of unskilled labor was "indicated by the fact that if the same ratio of African labourers to output prevailed in 1959 as in 1949, African employment would have been 69,000 . . . instead of 35,000." In these circumstances, the pressure to move some black workers into jobs previously reserved for white miners came from elsewhere. Of greater import to Anglo American and RST than the wage levels of unskilled labor were the employment ramifications and cost implications of another set of postwar developments. These comprised the introduction of production methods that had the effect of promoting an increase in the ratio of skilled white to unskilled black labor. Prominent among these innovations was the tungsten-carbide drill. Apart from the improvement in productivity brought about by drill heads with an average life of thirty-five feet, as opposed to forty-two

[17] Charles Perrings, "A Moment in the 'Proletarianisation' of the New Middle Class: Race, Value and the Division of Labour in the Copperbelt, 1946–1966," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 6 (1980): 192–93; and *Northern Rhodesia Chamber of Mines Year Book, 1956* (Kitwe, 1957), 76.

[18] Michael Burawoy, *The Colour of Class on the Copper Mines: From African Advancement to Zambianization* (Lusaka, 1972), 98.

inches when made of forged steel, the new drills cut the size of a white miner's gang of black workers from sixteen to twelve, because fewer men were needed to carry replacement equipment. "Besides the direct effect of this to increase the European–African employment ratio, the proportionate decrease in the number of both Europeans and Africans employed underground acted to increase the ratio of Europeans to Africans in the industry as a whole, since this ratio [was] higher for surface than underground operations." When combined with the introduction of electric detonation permitting the coordinated blasting of a large number of holes, and the development of trackless loaders capable of removing ore directly from the foot of each working face, long-hole drilling made possible the block-caving systems on which expanded underground production came to depend. Although these developments reduced the number of all underground workers, the overall effect was again to raise the ratio of white to black miners.[19]

This tendency was aggravated by the development of open-cast mining from 1955 onward. At Nchanga, initial development was carried out by three eight-ton electric shovels. An overburden of soil and rock was removed from the pit by "trains consisting of eight trucks, each holding forty-five tons, hauled by diesel locomotives." A fleet of thirty-ton and twenty-two-ton trucks disposed of the balance. In 1958, a gigantic bucket-wheel excavator was imported at a cost of £210,000. "This enormous machine, with its eight buckets, each holding a ton of earth," was capable of stripping the overburden "at speeds of up to about half a ton per second." From there, the soil and rock was transported by conveyor belt to another gigantic machine some three miles away, where the waste was stacked. The overall result was a very large increase in labor productivity, as the excavator itself was operated by "only one European and four Africans."[20] By NCCM's own calculations, 220 white miners and 1,800 black workers were required to produce 150,000 tons of ore by underground mining methods in 1955. With open-pit mining, "only 40 Europeans and 400 Africans were necessary."[21] Here too, the ratio of white miners to black workers was the same as if the ore had been mined by underground methods, but because this ratio was lower than the one that existed for the entire operation,

[19] Paragraph based on Mhone, *Political Economy of a Dual Labor Market in Africa*, 162–63; Baldwin, *Economic Development and Export Growth*, 94–95, 99; and Perrings, "'Proletarianisation' of the New Middle Class," 191–92.

[20] Coleman, *Northern Rhodesia Copperbelt*, 162. See esp., Norman Wilkie and Walter Holt, "A Description of Open Pit Mining at Nchanga Consolidated Copper Mines Limited, Northern Rhodesia," in *Technical Proceedings of the Northern Rhodesia Section Seventh Commonwealth Mining and Metallurgical Congress, 1961*, ed. William Watts (Kitwe, 1962), 191–215.

[21] Hendrik Nelems, "Open Pit Mining at Nchanga," *Optima* 5 (1955): 6–14.

"the reduction in the number of workers involved in mining acted to increase the total European to African ratio."[22]

Combined with the outsourcing of labor-intensive construction projects, and the introduction of electrolytic refining, both of which further reduced the proportion of unskilled to skilled workers on the mines, "the net effect of postwar technological progress was to raise the European to African employment ratio." Expressed as a percentage of the total labor force on the mines, white miners grew from 11 percent in 1947 to 18 percent in 1961.[23] At the start of the 1950s, there were some 4,600 white workers on Copperbelt mines. By the end of the decade, about 7,200 white miners were employed, at an annual cost of £12.6 million. Company responses to this changed situation varied over time and place, but in essence they "continuously and actively searched for ways to reallocate factor inputs in a manner that would minimize costs within the given socio-political context." What the two mining groups had to do was find a solution to the problem caused by the fact that "increased mechanization was accompanied by increased demand for skilled labor of the type monopolized by Europeans." This they found in African advancement. As one economist was quick to appreciate, "the advancement of Africans by substituting them for Europeans would complement the substitution of capital for low-skilled African labor by reducing the cost of employing skilled labor."[24]

Costs and African Advancement

RST had more reason than Anglo American to want African advancement. Although production at RST's Roan Antelope mine was improving, it still had the highest proportion of white to black labor of any Copperbelt mine, while even Mufulira was operating below capacity.[25] Once the British government stopped its bulk purchases of Northern Rhodesian copper in April 1953, RST wasted no time. With the copper-mining industry released from its obligation to maintain production for the benefit of Britain's dollar reserves, RST pressed for talks between the two mining groups and the white Northern Rhodesia Mine Workers Union (NRMWU). It wanted an end to the "closed shop" agreement, conceded under wartime duress, which effectively blocked African advancement into "European" jobs.[26] But when Prain declared in November

[22] Baldwin, *Economic Development and Export Growth*, 95.

[23] Ibid., 95–96, 91.

[24] Mhone, *Political Economy*, 172, 166–67.

[25] Baldwin, *Economic Development and Export Growth*, 91.

[26] Berger, *Labour, Race, and Colonial Rule*, 124, 64. For the origins of the white miners' union generally, and the 1941 "closed shop" agreement in particular, see Ian Henderson, "Labour and Politics in Northern Rhodesia, 1900–1953: A Study in the Limits of Colonial Power," PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1972.

1953 that the job color bar was "untenable both in principle and in practice," he found that RST was on its own.[27] Since its Rhokana subsidiary was making a fortune, Anglo American had no reason follow suit. "The trade union's difficulty is not altogether one of colour," acknowledged Anglo's chairman, Sir Ernest Oppenheimer.

> What we are asking them to agree to our doing is to replace one man by another at a very much lower rate of pay. We do not think that we can reasonably expect the right to do this unilaterally. We have no intention of breaking or denouncing our agreement with the union, and we recognize that whatever progress can be made along the lines we have in mind could only be achieved in co-operation and agreement with the union.[28]

As the NRMWU was unwilling to abandon the rate for the job, deadlock ensued. As far as Anglo American was concerned, haste was best made slowly. But time was precisely what the smaller and weaker RST group lacked. Even as Oppenheimer was invoking the copper-mining industry's "very great capacity for expansion," Prain was warning that between 50 percent and 60 percent of the world's copper was produced more cheaply than it was in Northern Rhodesia. He was responding to Sir William Lawther, secretary-general of the Miners' International Federation, whose parting shot when leaving the Copperbelt in March 1954 clearly hit home. "It would also be a good thing if the Chairmen of these fabulously rich Companies were to think about giving the Africans a fair wage when [they advance] to a European job," Lawther had declared. In a privately circulated memorandum, Prain insisted that Lawther could have no idea of the "commitments which those companies have on hand and which have to be financed out of earnings while the going is good, or alternatively by the raising of fresh capital; or of the relationship between current dividends and the return of capital which has been invested for twenty years or more in these mines." RST's chairman continued:

> It is one of Management's first jobs to see that this [competitive] position [in relation to other mining areas] is not further impaired by the reckless financial advancement, in the mass, of Africans who, by comparison either with their past circumstances or with their fellows in other trades, or by reference to their own fitness to assimilate further earnings without improving their efficiencies, are as well paid as is good for them or the country. This leads to . . . the

[27] Ronald Prain, "The Problem of African Advancement on the Copperbelt of Northern Rhodesia," *African Affairs* 53 (1954): 101.

[28] Theodor Emanuel Gregory, *Ernest Oppenheimer and the Economic Development of Southern Africa* (Cape Town, 1962), 477.

> conclusion that the fault in the set-up on the Copperbelt, namely the gross disparity between individual European and African earnings, is not due to the African being underpaid but to the European being overpaid.[29]

For RST, advancement meant increased opportunity for some, not more money for everyone.[30] The point of African advancement would fall away unless jobs previously designated as "European" were fragmented and pushed down the pay scale. Hochschild and Prain devoted time and effort to justifying this stance. At a joint meeting of the Royal African and the Royal Empire Societies at the end of November 1953, Prain argued that "equal pay for equal work, taken literally, would mean the end of African aspirations because on those terms no-one will employ the African. It means not only equal pay, it means equal leave, equal housing, cash bonuses, pensions, and so on. This is . . . clearly impracticable." He continued:

> You may ask what we are going to pay them. I believe there is only one way to do it and that is to adopt a formula approximately of the type adopted in the Belgian Congo. . . . For instance, if a carpenter is earning £100 a month in Africa, it is evaluated under Belgian, or in our own case, say, English conditions, on the theory that the man has come from England and anything above the English rate is in the nature of a tropical bonus . . . If the answer is £60, that is the standard rate for the job. . . . When you advance Africans, you apply an efficiency factor which is essential in the early years, and if any African qualifies at say 50 per cent. of the theoretical efficiency standard, he would get 50 per cent. of the £60, so that he would earn £30 as against the European earning £100.[31]

If anyone listening to Prain noticed the self-serving dimension of this argument, he kept it to himself. The Anglo American corporation was not so forbearing. Internal Anglo American correspondence, obtained confidentially by RST and circulated at the highest levels, set out Anglo's thinking. Concerned that action by RST to "speed up the African Progression issue" would trigger a white miners' strike that "would have the complete and vocal support of all the South African Trade Unions, of the S.A. Government and of the whole country [*sic*]," the Anglo American Corporation had no interest in forcing the pace. "We

[29] Ronald Prain, "Notes on the Advancement Situation," 1 Apr. 1954, African advancement file, box 2, RP collection.

[30] Ronald Prain, *Reflections on an Era: Fifty Years of Mining in Changing Africa* (Worcester Park, 1981), 110.

[31] For Hochschild, see his "Labor Relations in Northern Rhodesia," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 305 (1956): 46–47; and for Prain, see his "The Problem of African Advancement," 100–101, from which the quotation comes.

feel that any unilateral attempt by the Companies to replace white men, members of the European Union, by Africans at much lower wages, will unquestionably result in a prolonged strike . . . . [T]hey will be accused of seeking to use 'sweated labour' to increase their profits." To Hochschild's and Prain's annoyance, the notes mocked the contradiction in their position. "It is difficult to see how the R.S.T. Group manage[s] to accept one [principle] and reject the other [principle]," ran one set of comments.

> If they really believe that there should be no colour bar, how can they reject the principle that a white man and a black man should get the same rate of pay for the same job? . . . Why then are R.S.T. and the E.M.W.U. [European Mine Workers' Union] not in complete harmony? Only because they are both being dishonest; neither of them really believes in the principle they are advocating; neither is prepared to follow it to its logical conclusion![32]

In November 1954, RST served notice on the NRMWU of its intention to withdraw from the closed-shop recognition agreement. Pressure on RST to lower costs was mounting as claims on Mufulira's retained profits grew.[33] Yet even as these charges accumulated, the price of copper began to increase. While this had the effect of inflating the copper bonus paid to white miners, it also afforded the group considerable breathing space. Despite higher-than-average costs of production, RST found itself making money hand over fist during 1955. With every reason to maximize output at a time of buoyant copper prices, both RST and the NRMWU, whose members had no desire to jeopardize the good times, opened negotiations in a conciliatory spirit. Following a ballot in which 60 percent of union members voted to release certain jobs to Africans, RST withdrew its notice to terminate the agreement.[34] But goodwill was subsequently soured by what white miners believed was a company climb-down in the face of a black mineworkers' strike. As part of the settlement bringing the dispute to an end in March 1955, dismissed strikers were reemployed by the mines, not a concession always extended to white workers. In fact, the companies had come close to destroying the African Mine Workers' Union (AMWU), and were only dissuaded from doing so by external intervention: the Miners' International Federation warned the companies against using "scab" labor; raised the specter of British dockworkers refusing to move Northern Rhodesian copper; and threatened international trade-union financial support for the strikers.[35]

[32] Richard Hagart to Frank Searls, 8 Feb. 1954, and attached correspondence, and Prain to Hochschild, 19 Mar. 1954, file 3, AmCo–H. K. Hochschild, 1952–54, box 1, RP collection.

[33] Cunningham, *The Copper Industry in Zambia*, 105.

[34] Prain, *Reflections on an Era*, 110.

[35] Ibid.; and Berger, *Labour, Race and Colonial Rule*, 144–46.

Evidence of international support for black workers underscored the fact that African advancement served a number of purposes beyond cutting production costs. In the first place, it opened up the prospect of silencing the AMWU's more articulate members, by promoting them upward into semiskilled and supervisory jobs. Indeed, the companies took advantage of the AMWU's weakened state to recognize the Mines African Staff Association.[36] Secondly, it played well overseas. Hochschild had long recognized that there was an "ethical" dimension to African advancement. In October 1949, he had toured Union Minière du Haut Katanga (UMHK) mines in the Belgian Congo, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, before going on to the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt. Hochschild was convinced that he had seen the future.

> Twenty-five years ago . . . they [UMHK] were employing 2300 Europeans and 20,000 natives. Today, with greatly increased production, they employ 1300 Europeans and 16,000 natives . . . . Many of the 1300 Europeans are in their offices. In their mines and plants one rarely sees a white man unless one searches for him. Considering the speed with which ideas travel nowadays, it is not reasonable to assume that the color bar can continue indefinitely on the Copperbelt, less than 150 miles away.[37]

Six months later, Hochschild painted the bigger picture for Prain. Referring to an earlier letter in which Prain had informed him that "the Companies had declared themselves in favour of abolishing the color bar but had taken that position explicitly on economic and not on ethical grounds," Hochschild explained:

> [In the United States,] public opinion has swung to the view that it is the duty of management to take ethical considerations into account in labor relations. I mention this only because it seems to me that the color bar issue has a strong ethical aspect and that it is heavily weighted in favor of the Africans . . . . [If] the Companies take the initiative they may be able to guide the evolution of the new order, whereas, if the change is forced upon them . . . their prestige and their influence will be badly damaged. [Failure to take preemptive action, he advised Prain, has been] at the root of much of the difficulty between labor and capital in this country and in Mexico, where it has had particularly unhappy results.[38]

But Hochschild's ethical sensitivities had their limits. They did not brook trespass by organized labor on management prerogatives. From

[36] Jane L. Parpart, *Labor and Capital on the African Copperbelt* (Philadelphia, 1983), 140–41.

[37] Confidential memorandum, "Visit to the Rhodesias," unnumbered file, misc. 1949–1962, box 1, RP collection.

[38] Hochschild to Prain, 8 May 1950 and 13 June 1950, file 2, AmCo–H. K. Hochschild, 1950–51, box 1, RP collection.

Hochschild's perspective, one advantage enjoyed by UMHK over RST was that "no unions" were permitted in the Belgian Congo. Nor did his ethics preclude efforts to promote mechanization. "I meant but forgot to speak to you while you were here about promoting further mechanization at our mines on the Copperbelt," he wrote to Prain in May 1954. "All signs indicate that the more we can reduce our dependence both on European and on African labor, the better off we will be."[39]

As the price of copper scaled new heights in the second half of 1955, RST's efforts were concentrated on holding the line against general wage increases for black miners, while searching for an accommodation with white workers over African advancement. After the African mineworkers' strike, the attitude of the NRMWU stiffened. A second ballot that confirmed the readiness of white workers to make concessions, albeit by a smaller margin than before, was followed by an announcement that the white South African Mine Workers Union (SAMWU) intended to come to the assistance of its brothers. A contribution of £5,000 would help the NRMWU "in its struggle to maintain European standards."[40] Company policy, declared the union's general secretary, "is to exploit cheap African labour. I can see no other motive beyond that."[41] Hitherto electorally solicitous of white miners' concerns, Sir Roy Welensky, prime minister of the Central African Federation, gave SAMWU's general secretary a public dressing-down. He was careful when doing so, however, to emphasize the patriotic element of objecting to "external interference," rather than question the principle of trade-union solidarity.[42] Claiming that South African help had been envisaged as a last resort, the NRMWU offered in May to transfer a small number of hitherto "European" job categories to African workers, "conditional on the European Union's approval at the time of transfer." This was accepted by Anglo American as compatible with its policy of "action by consent," of working with rather than against organized white labor. At the end of July 1955, the Anglo American Corporation and the NRMWU signed an agreement transferring twenty-four job categories from white to black miners, subject to union agreement.[43]

RST refused to give what it described as "a veto for all time on the rate of African advancement" to the NRMWU. Representing the struggle

[39] Confidential memorandum, "Visit to the Rhodesias"; and Hochschild to Prain, 7 May 1954, file 3, AmCo–H. K. Hochschild, 1952–54, box 1, RP collection.

[40] Berger, *Labour, Race and Colonial Rule*, 128.

[41] *Rhodesia Herald*, 21 Apr. 1955.

[42] Philip Murphy, *Party Politics and Decolonization: The Conservative Party and British Colonial Policy in Tropical Africa, 1951–1964* (Oxford, 1995), 74; and Sir Roy Welensky to Ronald Prain, 23 Apr. 1955, file "Correspondence Sir Roy Welensky 1951–1959," box 2, RP collection. See esp. J. Richard T. Wood, *The Welensky Papers: A History of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland* (Durban, 1983), 431–32.

[43] Berger, *Labour, Race and Colonial Rule*, 129; and Gregory, *Ernest Oppenheimer*, 484.

as one of Manichaean proportions, Prain kept the British Colonial Office apprised of his views of the situation. A letter anticipating the possibility that "what we may be heading for is a line up where the African Unions look for their help to the north and the European Union to the south" was followed by the prediction that "the granting of such a veto power to the Union . . . [would be] the equivalent of passing over the future of the Copperbelt to the Mineworkers' Union which might in time become tantamount to the control of the Federation, to say nothing of the implications of a South African dominated Union." "I feel very much that we have now reached the crisis for which Rhodesia has long been heading," he confided to the colonial secretary, Alan Lennox-Boyd, "and I equally feel that in view of Anglo American's apparent readiness to concede the veto, it is R.S.T. who hold[s] the key to the immediate future."[44]

What happened next cannot be established with certainty. On Prain's telling, he was asked to meet secretly with the union's secretary general and two other top officials. "By the time we finished they had a better understanding of the reasons why our companies had taken the position to which they so strongly objected. I tried to explain . . . that their own interests . . . would be better served by an orderly transition to a position where Africans could advance on the basis of merit; I was also able to assure them that their own immediate jobs were most unlikely to be threatened in any way." But, Prain continued, "I left them with no illusions about our determination once more to cancel our agreement with them unless the veto was dropped, and that we would have no hesitation to close the mines if the offending clauses were not removed." After delay occasioned by Anglo American having signed up to an agreement that "could have resulted in the effective [union] blocking of each and every advancement proposal introduced by the companies," and that RST "refused absolutely to accept," the NRMWU capitulated, dropping the veto clause. At the end of September 1955, an agreement was signed by all parties. "[The] principle of the colour bar on the Copperbelt had been broken."[45]

Celebrated by the *Economist* as "Mr. Prain's victory," the September agreement was represented by RST and the American Metal Company as an outstanding example of corporate responsibility "discharged at great risk and enormous cost, in the interests of race relations, not

[44] Ronald Prain to Alan Lennox-Boyd, 3 Mar. 1955 and 11 July 1955, file "Misc. Correspondence with Harold Macmillan, Alan Lennox-Boyd, and Ian Macleod," box 2, RP collection.

[45] Prain, *Reflections on an Era*, 111–13. For one of several different accounts, see Edward Clegg, *Race and Politics: Partnership in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland* (London, 1960), 198–201.

only in Northern Rhodesia, but in the other federated territories."[46] But close inspection of the September agreement suggests that it was nowhere near as pathbreaking as some observers believed, either then or now. Far from the NRMWU having "capitulated," it secured the essence of its demands. The union agreed "to release from Schedule 'A' [the term given to those occupations represented by the European union] certain jobs of low [skill] content together with certain 'identical' or 'ragged edge' jobs previously performed by Africans in some mines and by Europeans in others." The companies "on their side declared their adherence to the principle of the rate for the job in respect of those jobs which remained in Schedule 'A.'" Additionally, "an independent firm of industrial consultants would undertake a detailed survey of the jobs in Schedule 'A' for the purpose of arriving at an objective analysis and assessment of the job content, the responsibilities, the training and skill required to perform each job so listed." The consultants were to be employed jointly by all parties to the agreement. While the survey was conducted, no additional jobs would be released for African advancement. In effect, the NRMWU retained its veto until 1959, at which point negotiations would start again.[47]

Downplaying the significance of the job survey, RST guided sympathetic observers to see what they wanted to see. "The agreement by the European Trade Union to allow Africans to advance to skilled and semiskilled employment on the Copperbelt removes one of the great potential sources of friction between races in British Africa," declared an editorial in the *Times*:

> The industrial colour bar in the copper mines, and the agrarian colour bar in the White Highlands of Kenya, have been since the war the two most likely points of inter-racial explosion in the British African colonies. Unhappily that explosion occurred in Kenya before it could be averted. In Central Africa, averting action appears to have been taken in time.[48]

At a conference in Oxford, the newly knighted Sir Ronald Prain emphasized corporate generosity toward African workers. Saying only that "the colour bar on more advanced types of jobs . . . has now been breached, and we need not spend time on it," his broad brush strokes covered issues of African labor stabilization and differentiation. Wages,

[46] *Economist*, 17 Sept. 1955; Prain, *Reflections on an Era*, 122. See Hochschild, "Labor Relations in Northern Rhodesia," 48–49; and esp. his "Copper Mining Industry of Northern Rhodesia," 16–17.

[47] *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Mining Industry of Zambia, 1966* [Brown Report] (Lusaka, 1966), 6–7; and *Northern Rhodesia Chamber of Mines Year Book, 1956*, 8.

[48] *Times*, 3 Jan. 1956.

of course, could not be "outrageously incompatible with what other industries, including farming, are paying."[49]

With no pressing need to cut costs, and consequently less cause to press for African advancement, Prain and RST had reason enough not to jeopardize production by backing white miners into a corner. From the middle of 1955 onward, it had become clear to RST's board of directors that the Copperbelt stood on the brink of a new era of expanded production. In May 1956, Prain wrote to Sir Ernest Oppenheimer of Anglo American with details of the developments planned for Mufulira. Because of Rhodesian Anglo American's one-third interest in Mufulira Copper Mines Ltd., Oppenheimer was informed that, although previous investigations had proved inconclusive, over the "last year or two" geologists "drilling from the surface, together with underground exploration work from the existing mine workings" had transformed the situation. "The evidence now accumulating is becoming extremely interesting," disclosed Prain, "and it is already safe to say that the [major] 'C' orebody continues and will extend the [ore] strike of the Mufulira mine to 14,000 feet." "Such is our confidence in these new discoveries," he continued, "that we recommended to the Board that we should now proceed with the planning necessary to increase the production of the whole Mufulira enterprise by something over 50% . . . making a total of 600,000 tons of ore per month."[50]

The capital cost would be about £20 million. Prain saw no reason to delay the development program until all the finance was in place, "as we have already a great earning power, part of which can be used for ploughing back, and we also have considerable cash resources. Not all of this is free cash, but much of it is in the nature of a permanent revolving credit, the use of part of which we feel we can justify for this purpose."[51] But RST's "great earning power" in the mid-1950s rested on maximum output at optimum prices. Securing the first condition depended on the cooperation of its white labor force. Not only were their skills indispensable in the medium term, but they had proved themselves invaluable breakers of African strikes. More pragmatic than Hochschild, and with the backing of other American Metal Company directors, Prain repositioned RST during negotiations with the NRMWU. Despite Hochschild's "misgivings," Prain agreed to the union's suggestion of a job survey in return for the veto clause being dropped. At union insistence,

[49] *His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh's Study Conference on the Human Problems of Industrial Communities Within the Commonwealth and Empire, 9–27 July 1956*, 2 vols. (London, 1957), 2: 56.

[50] Prain to Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, 22 May 1956, file misc. correspondence, box 2, RP collection.

[51] Ibid.

no discussions on advancement were to take place for three years, rather than the "year to eighteen months" preferred by Prain.[52] Nor were these the only concessions wrested by the NRMWU from the newly conciliatory RST. Following the precedent set by Anglo American, "job fragmentation and dilution, by redefining whole categories of European jobs, ensured the upward mobility of the displaced Europeans, who were retrained for higher and more technically specialized jobs."[53]

Prices and the Color Bar

No details of these negotiations were released. In any case, they were overtaken by events. Between January and April 1956, production was interrupted when white miners staged wildcat strikes. Signs that the NRMWU was not in control of its membership barely had time to register with mine managements, however, before the situation was transformed by a fall in the price of copper. For some time past, Prain and other leading figures in the industry had been concerned about the increasing price of copper. If the price went too high, manufacturers might substitute aluminum for copper. There was also the risk of a crash unless arrangements were made to place copper on the metal market at sustainable prices. Toward the end of 1955, RST released supplies at a "fixed price," but without lasting effect. In March 1956, the price of copper reached £437 per ton, before dropping in July to £264, a fall "both for magnitude and speed . . . unprecedented in the history of the copper business."[54] For both groups, the prospect of sharply reduced profits could not have come at a worse moment. Half of the financing of the Mufulira West Extension had been predicated on retained profits. Now, as the copper market declined and Mufulira's profits slumped from over £9 million in 1955–6 to less than £3 million in 1957–8, "public confidence waned." Unable to raise capital on the open market, MCM Ltd. was obliged to place "£7 million in 6.75 percent debentures, which were to be called up in four equal instalments." Even though MCM "gave itself a considerable amount of time in which to earn sufficient profits to repay the debentures," the underwriters experienced "extreme difficulty in finding subscribers."[55]

[52] Prain to Hochschild, 10 Aug. 1955, file 4, AmCo–H. K. Hochschild, 1955–56, box 1, RP collection.

[53] Mhone, *Political Economy*, 167.

[54] *Northern Rhodesia Chamber of Mines Year Book, 1956*, 19. For RST's attempts to introduce a "fixed price" for copper, see esp. *Metal Bulletin*, 21 Feb. 1956. See also Ronald Prain, *Copper: The Anatomy of an Industry* (London, 1975), 94–112.

[55] Cunningham, *Copper Industry in Zambia*, 106. Rothschilds had initially advised RST that "there should be no difficulty under present conditions in placing £7.5m. of unsecured loan stock 1977 to 1983 at 6%." See Ronald Prain to Walter Hochschild, 10 Apr. 1957, file 1, AmCo–W. Hochschild 1947/57, Amax, W. Hochschild, 1958, RP collection.

Even Anglo American was affected by copper's changed fortunes. Investment decisions made at the height of the boom left Rhodesian Anglo American and its Chartered (British South Africa) Company ally saddled with loans of £8 million, the larger part of which was to be repaid before 1960.[56] After a visit to the Copperbelt in October 1956, Prain was convinced that the two corporations would have to cut costs. "At all mines," he warned, "the question of keeping costs down will become a major preoccupation and will not be easy."[57] The continued fall in the price of copper focused company attention on the need to eliminate restrictive and expensive work practices. In part, these were a consequence of the compromise reached in September 1955. Capital investment made after that date to accommodate the upward displacement of white workers by African advancement "resulted in recognized declines in the productivity of certain categories of European labor." In good times, these inefficiencies were not so much hidden as ignored. By early 1958, however, "the superfluity" of these workers obliged the Rhokana Corporation to take the initiative in submitting to the NRMWU "proposals designed to eliminate wasteful practices and to introduce greater flexibility in the use of European labor."[58] RST was quick to align itself with Anglo American's changed position. It had become "a matter of urgency for the companies to prune production costs of all kinds in order to maintain Northern Rhodesia's competitive position in the world market, and uneconomic working practices came in for strict revision, along with other items of expenditure."[59]

White miners were in no mood to cooperate. The falling price of copper was dragging down the copper bonus paid to them. By the time copper touched bottom at £167 per ton in February 1958, the bonus was down to 17 percent of basic salary, from a peak of 102 percent eighteen months earlier. Three "irregular" strikes in December 1956 were followed by eight work stoppages in the first six months of 1957. A union demand for a 15 percent wage increase to compensate for the reduced copper bonus was still on the table when, in July 1957, the NRMWU unilaterally announced that it was reducing the working week for rock breakers by two hours. Confident that old habits would prevail, the union made no allowance for company determination to cut costs or the united front displayed by Anglo American and RST. Within twenty-four hours of the NRMWU edict, "management countered with a curt statement that it was taking immediate steps towards closing down all

[56] Cunningham, *Copper Industry in Zambia*, 109.
[57] Prain to Hochschild, 5 Nov 1956, file 4, AmCo–H. K. Hochschild, 1955–56, box 1, RP collection.
[58] Mhone, *Political Economy*, 184–85.
[59] Prain, *Reflections on an Era*, 115.

mines." Shocked by company layoffs of daily-paid white miners, the NRMWU gave way. Early in 1958, Anglo American and RST presented proposals "aimed at a more efficient and economic use of White labour." Partial agreement was reached after lengthy negotiations, but before this could be acted upon, the NRMWU decided to resist its implementation.[60] In September 1958, white workers went on strike. After two months, the union abandoned the strike, "accepting new conditions differing but slightly from the companies' proposals."[61]

With union resistance broken, "not just on this issue but on a variety of other matters, including the implementation of African advancement," RST and Anglo American pressed ahead with job fragmentation and the direct substitution of black for white labor.[62] Although the initial numbers were small, "about 1,000 Africans, or slightly less than 3 percent of the average African labor force [in 1960]," the savings promised to be significant.[63] In 1959, an RST symposium was informed that a further reduction in costs of "£6 per ton of copper (thereby raising profits by about 10 percent) would occur under a program of a comparatively moderate degree of advancement. With a more extensive program . . . costs would be cut much more."[64] This was secured the following year when the NRMWU agreed to open an additional thirty-five jobs and twenty job categories to African advancement. By 1962, there were 1,900 black miners in advancement jobs, nearly double the number two years previously.[65] While accelerated advancement, together with increases for unskilled workers, caused African wages to rise from 38 percent of the total wage bill in 1955 to 53 percent by 1966, the cost of all labor as a percentage of production costs was gratifyingly low. At the start of the 1960s, when labor costs in the Chilean copper-mining industry amounted to 67 percent of total operating expenses, they were only 36 percent on the Copperbelt.[66]

Conclusion

At the heart of the advancement policies pursued by the Copperbelt's mining groups in the period covered by this article was the conviction expressed in private correspondence by RST's chairman that the

[60] Berger, *Labour, Race and Colonial Rule*, 183, 178; and Holleman and Biesheuval, *White Mine Workers*, 21–22.

[61] Prain, *Reflections on an Era*, 115.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Baldwin, *Economic Development and Export Growth*, 103.

[64] Ernest Bromwich, "Problems of Arresting Cost Increases in Our Mines," Lusaka, 1959, unpublished, as cited in Baldwin, *Economic Development and Export Growth*, 102.

[65] Butler, *Copper Empire*, 236.

[66] Mhone, *Political Economy*, 209, 212.

problem was not that black workers were paid too little, but that white miners were paid too much. The latter understood that RST in particular wanted to replace them with cheaper African labor, yet the white miners' motives for insisting on equal pay for equal work were suspect. White miners were repeatedly outmaneuvered by RST, whose public position that "there could be no sounder first step toward partnership [in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland] than the dissolution of the color bar" was well-received in Britain and North America.[67] But the motives and timing of business initiatives were not always what they seemed. While the American Metal Company and RST were keen to be seen as occupying the high moral ground, their position never obscured their view of the accountants' bottom line.

By disaggregating the copper-mining industry's company structure, by tracing the impact of technological innovation on skill levels, wages, and costs, and by periodizing fluctuations in each mining group's profitability, I have suggested in this article that corporate attitudes toward white workers and African advancement were largely driven by costs. Other factors certainly entered into company calculations, but without due acknowledgement of this fundamental consideration, it is hard to explain why RST took the initiative when it did, and why so soon afterward it failed to follow through. The appearance of the ensuing agreement belied the substance of what was actually achieved in September 1955. It is also the key to understanding the fate of white workers, hitherto largely ignored in the literature, after the price of copper collapsed. In short, it is a perspective that casts doubt on the centrality ascribed in Zambian and Central African historiography to the September 1955 African advancement agreement, as well as on the role claimed by and for RST in particular.[68]

If my focus on the economics of copper production raises a question about key elements of the subject's local historiography, it also has wider implications. Where studies of decolonization have examined the roles played by business, they have concentrated on political interventions. These have not been without controversy, but the missing dimension in all of them has been a sustained account of the economics and politics of production.[69] The postwar period was undoubtedly fraught

[67] Hochschild, "Labor Relations in Northern Rhodesia," 47.

[68] See note 3 above. Skeptical views include Baldwin, *Economic Development and Export Growth*; Burawoy, *The Colour of Class on the Copper Mines*; and Parpart, *Labor and Capital on the African Copperbelt*.

[69] For example, the differing interpretations in Larry J. Butler, "Business and British Decolonisation: Sir Ronald Prain, the Mining Industry and the Central African Federation," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 35 (2007): 459–84; and Andrew Cohen, "Business and Decolonisation in Central Africa Reconsidered," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36 (2008): 641–58.

with problems for business, but it was also one of unprecedented opportunity as the old colonial regime died and the new nationalist order struggled to be born. Nowhere was this clearer than in central Africa. Constraints on profitability imposed by the racial imperatives of settler colonialism were shattered by considerations of cost that were boosted by an acute corporate appreciation of the emerging ethical sensitivities of imperial retreat. The Labour member of the British Parliament Ronald Williams was far from alone in believing that RST was "not lacking in prosperity . . . [and while it] could have allowed things to drift, . . . in fact [it] felt that there was a moral principle which was involved apart from economic issues and . . . [thus] issued notice against strongly entrenched elements of [the company's] employees with a view to bringing about some radical change."[70] But in stating this belief, Williams was buying into only part of the story. Underpinning public-relations awareness were corporate calculations about costs. Not surprisingly, the business of copper mining in Central Africa was business.

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[70] Ronald Williams, "Trade Unions in Africa," *African Affairs* 54 (1955): 269.