

## MINERS, MIGRANTS AND PROLETARIANS

*Labour, Race and Colonial Rule: The Copperbelt from 1924 to Independence.* By ELENA L. BERGER. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974. Pp. xiv + 257. £6.00.

As a competent professional study, Dr Berger's book will be welcomed by some ex-trade unionists, most ex-colonial administrators, and all orthodox political scientists and historians. The author has selectively interviewed white notables who were involved in the development of the Northern Rhodesian copper mining industry, undertaken diligent research into the records of the mining companies and carefully examined official government publications. From these sources she has reconstructed some of the major developments in the first three decades of copperbelt industrial history, and revealed the nature of the formal interaction between administration, trade unions and the mining companies. Within the confines of this methodology the author's analysis of events is thorough and detailed and at times, such as when she deals with industrial training during the Federal era, subtle.

Stiff formalistic approaches which focus predominantly on institutions, however, have helped to bury colonial economic history as an exciting study. In both Zambia and Rhodesia they have left us with a literature which is about as inspiring as the average central African cemetery. Most of the labour histories of the area are totally devoid of a vibrant and vital human dimension. This is also lacking in Dr Berger's study. An evolutionary perspective which suggests that 'progress created labour problems' is not a promising start. Working classes in colonial situations emerge as a result of proletarianisation—that set of economic processes which historically separates Africans from the means of production. In Northern Rhodesia these processes stemmed from a variety of important factors which operated before 1924—a date which is virtually only of political significance. Dr Berger tells us that 'the attraction of the new urban areas was so great that many families had a relative or unemployed friend staying with them' (p. 17). Surely unemployment is more of an index of distress, rural underdevelopment and poverty than a mindless craving for the doubtful psychological delights of urbanism? Only an analyst with considerable faith in government publications could accept at face value the contention that 'the Government's policy of encouraging migration' was partly designed 'to secure the circulation of money and skills in the rural areas' (p. 45). The broader economic fabric of the countryside—a crucial dimension to the understanding of labour in the colonial situation—is virtually ignored in the work. Are there perhaps compensating features in the study when the author looks at the workers in their urban setting?

Not really. For penetrating sociological and political insights into copperbelt societies the student can still do much worse than reach for his old copy of Epstein's *Politics in an Urban African Community*. Dr Berger would have had greater appreciation of the conflict between the African Mineworkers' Union and the Mines African Staff Association if she had been more alert to the possibility of stratification within black society on the copperbelt. Black miners are manual labourers and there is a world of difference (in terms of status, income and consciousness) between them and those engaged essentially in

white collar jobs. It is not only inadequate but misleading to refer to 'boss boys', hospital orderlies, clerks and others as 'senior workers' (p. 93). More sensitivity to social detail and a sympathetic understanding of workers—outside of trade unions—would also have produced a more rounded study.

Most tolerant readers will be distressed by some of the deeper sociological and economic shortcomings of *Labour, Race and Colonial Rule*. Others, perhaps more tough-minded, will not wait so long to become irritated by the inability or unwillingness to acknowledge what seems to be simply ruling class ideology. Thus administrators 'reason' with Africans, company officials 'negotiate' with strike leaders, black workers have 'ring-leaders' who sometimes behave 'irresponsibly' and make 'demands' and, perhaps most predictably of all, the communist 'agitates'. It is possible that the author would have been more guarded in her choice of words if she had interviewed fewer white notables and spoken to more black workers outside the trade union hierarchy.

Broadly speaking, this book is a disappointment. There is a sound account of the major institutions involved in the recent industrial development of this part of central Africa, but there is little to give us much greater insight into the infrastructure of race, labour and colonial rule in Northern Rhodesia. To understand the emergence of modern Zambia we need studies which can describe the role of the state as well as civil servants, recognize class as well as colour, and analyse the countrywide role of capital instead of the actions of companies.

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## ISLAM AND POLITICS IN FRENCH WEST AFRICA

*The Wahhabiyya: Islamic reform and politics in French West Africa.* By LANSINÉ KABA. Northwestern University Press, 1974. Pp. xv+266, maps. \$13.50.

This is a book of unusual qualities, and certain drawbacks. Dr Kaba, himself a member of the Maninka trading group which provided the backbone of the Wahhabiyya, draws much of his information from discussions—often quite informal, when it would have been 'most inappropriate and bothersome' even to ask a particular speaker his name—with Wahhabis and others. The author's close involvement colours the book, which is in part the dispassionate enquiry of an outside researcher, and in part a statement of Wahhabiyya beliefs: it is both a secondary and a primary source. 'Muslims,' says Dr Kaba with charming naïveté, 'happen to be those who have been convinced of God's omnipotence and consequently have decided to abide by His rules' (p. 128). The Wahhabiyya, a little-known but significant reform movement between 1945 and 1958, spread from Bamako and eventually influenced Guinea, Ivory Coast and, to a lesser extent, Upper Volta, Senegal and even Sierra Leone. The names indicate a doctrinal similarity, not an actual tie, with the Arabian movement.

The first chapter discusses possible immediate precursors of West African Wahhabiyya. The second examines two main channels of the diffusion of Wahhabiyya views, the pilgrimage and Dyula trade. In the latter, an emergent individualistic ethic, contrary to earlier wider family loyalties, prepared the ground for Wahhabiyya. The problem of too narrow reading confronts us at