

COAL, CAPITAL AND LABOUR IN COLONIAL ZIMBABWE*

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CRISIS AND CLASS STRUGGLE, 1914 - 1922

I take it that an attempt is made to push up wages at Wankie Colliery in the knowledge that the Wankie Company cannot afford to shut the place down in that this would affect the whole country. If the question is left to my decision I shall certainly shut the Colliery down rather than give effect to the demands outlined in your letter.

(AR Thomson to General Secretary,
Rhodesian Mine & General Workers' Association)

During 1914 the colliery's output grew rapidly. "Coal production again shewed an excellent increase in output", reported the Secretary for Mines. "The colliery has a good market in Belgian territory, in addition to the requirements of Rhodesia ... Tons raised, 349,459; tons sold, 265,574; value of sales, £115,099. These shew increases on 1913 of 106,131 tons raised, 91,916 tons sold and £36,678 in value." [1] With total profits for the year amounting to over £50,000, the Wankie Colliery Company announced that its shareholders would pocket a record dividend of 25 per cent. [2] Corporate celebrations were tempered, though, by a number of considerations. Chief amongst these was the outbreak of World War, three months previously, between Britain and her allies and the Central Powers. In this entirely new context, large dividends paid on the production of raw materials essential to the Imperial war effort were likely to attract accusations of profiteering. Nor was local reaction any more encouraging. The Rhodesia Chamber of Mines sourly remarked "in connection with the dividend of 25 per cent, paid by the Wankie Colliery Co.... that [as] the shareholders are beginning to be recouped for their early losses and misfortunes, ... naturally we hope that the price of coal will be reduced in the near future". [3]

Acutely aware of the Colliery Company's exposed position on what was becoming increasingly unfriendly terrain, Wankie's board of directors lost little time in lowering the company's financial profile. At the end of December 1914 the Company was again reconstructed. A new company was formed with the same name as before, but this time its capital was written up instead of down. Nominal capital formation was doubled to £410,000, divided into 820,000 shares of ten shillings each, of which 810,466 shares were allotted as fully paid on the basis of two new shares for one old ten-shilling share. At the same time, the value of the Company's mining rights was increased from £166,281 to £347,559, even as shareholders were discreetly rewarded with the further sum of £20,000 "retained for distribution amongst members of the old Company on its liquidation". [4]

This drastic upwards revision of the Company's capitalization had the desired effect. Combined with a reduction in the price of coal from nine shillings to eight shillings and sixpence per ton, it significantly depressed the colliery's apparent profitability. The dividend declared for the financial year ending 31 August 1915 tumbled to a modest 7 1/2 per cent. [5] As a leading member of the Southern Rhodesian Legislative Assembly later observed, it all "meant that ... an amount of wind, water, or whatever you may call it, of

* This paper forms part of a longer work on the Wankie coal fields, currently under preparation.

£202,000 was injected into the affair". Operations of this kind, he added, were "somewhat typical" of companies dealing in

a necessary commodity of life, because these concerns never like to show they are paying too large a dividend. It looks too bad. If you find a flour-miller paying 50 per cent dividends, the next thing that is said is that he is a profiteer and ought to be hanged on a lamp-post. [6]

Far from coming to the sticky end wished upon it by its critics, the Colliery Company initially enjoyed an extended run of successes. War-time demand for coal expanded from year to year. Soaring exports of coal, and especially coke to the Katanga copper mines of Union Minière, were augmented by growing local consumption as more and more gold mines switched from wood to coal fuel. Coal production in 1915 increased by almost 17 per cent over the tonnage raised the previous year, and jumped by a further 20 per cent in 1916 [7] "The Wankie Colliery fully met all requirements, both in coal and coke, in addition to large consignments to Belgian territory", noted one report, "and an increase in output has again to be recorded." [8] By 1917 annual coal production had risen to 548,954 tons, of which c125,000 tons were used for coke. Sales and profits both surged to the point where neither the redemption of debentures totalling £14,000 nor another tiny reduction in the price of coal much affected the Colliery Company's onwards rush. At twelve and a half per cent and fifteen per cent, respectively, year-end dividends in 1916 and 1917 were once again assuming embarrassing dimensions. [9]

As in the past, however, the colliery's fortunes ultimately turned on the regular supply of cheap black labour, and, in the absence of capital investment, this dependency became increasingly pronounced as the war continued. Apart from badly needed water tube boilers installed in 1914, Wankie's board of directors refused to sanction the purchase of additional capital equipment. [10] Expanded output was instead won through the simple expedient of increasing the size of the labour force. By drawing on the flood of migrant workers initially compelled to seek wage employment by the tax regime enforced by the BSA Company Administration north of the Zambezi, and latterly propelled by the need to avoid conscription into the carrier legions deployed in Britain's East Africa campaign, Wankie's general manager steadily increased the number of workers on the company's books. Between 1913 and 1917 the number of black workers at the colliery grew from c650 to slightly more than 2,000 [11], the majority of whom were employed underground as lashers and trammers, that is, as unskilled labourers filling and pushing tubs of coal. [12]

Over much the same period, concerted and largely successful efforts were also made to minimise expenditure on black miners' food and wages. As shown by the Table below, the unit costs of labour dropped noticeably during the war. Compared to other Southern Rhodesian mines, wages on the colliery were extremely low by 1918. Average deferred pay

FOOD AND WAGES PER SHIFT WORKED [13]

Year ending	Cost of food per shift worked (pence)	Wages paid per shift worked (pence)
July 1915	7.31	11.43
July 1916	7.47	11.25
July 1917	7.04	11.33
For 11 months ending June	6.86	11.27

earned by Bureau recruits after 12 months' work in the gold mining industry varied between £5.10.5 on small mines, and £7.17.3. on larger mines towards the top end of the scale. At Wankie the equivalent figure was £4.14.7., a difference which even the hardened managing director of the RNLB was moved to describe as "remarkable". [14]

But in the process of changing the size and conditions of service of the colliery's labour force, Thomson drastically altered its composition as well. The unspecified but tiny proportion of "voluntary" labour still remaining at Wankie once the outbreak of scurvy finally subsided, in 1913, grew rapidly in the following years. By the end of 1917, "free labour", as Thomson called it, accounted for about three-fifths of all Wankie's black workers. [15] Almost all of them came from Northern Rhodesia (Zambia). "The best class of native labour we obtain", he explained, "comes from around Fort Jameson [Chipata], mainly Angoni [Ngoni] and Mushukulumbwe[Ilala] natives, with natives of the Zambesi Valley [Tonga] a good second. There are a certain number of natives now coming down from Barotseland." [16] The dwindling balance of "unfree labour", also very largely drawn from across the Zambezi, was made up by RNLB recruits. "Of the 2000 natives [employed at Wankie] 60% applied for work at the Colliery Office which does not indicate that the place is unduly unpopular", boasted the colliery's general manager. "During these years no Recruiters were employed by the Colliery, all labour required (other than free labour) being received from the Rhodesia Native Labour Bureau." [17]

Consequently, the foundations on which Wankie's productive capacity rested were extremely narrow, and the colliery was severely shaken when the supply of labour from Northern Rhodesia abruptly dried up in the first half of 1918. There were five interconnected reasons why this happened. In the first place, the number of "voluntary" workers appearing at the colliery's compound gates dropped off as the escalating cost of living made Wankie's falling cash wages daily more unattractive. After a period of relatively gradual price increases, the rate of inflation accelerated in the last stages of the war and its immediate aftermath. A commission of enquiry, appointed by the Beira & Mashonaland & Rhodesia Railway Company, established that the cost of clothing, to take only one example, had increased by roughly 100 per cent [18] As a result, many people could "no longer afford to buy blankets and clothing as they used to". "The majority of boys working on mines and farms are clad in sacks", reported the CNC. [19] Overall, the cost of living was later estimated by the Native Department to have risen by 165 per cent between 1914 and 1920. [20]

The adverse impact of inflation on the colliery's labour supply was greatly aggravated by two further developments. In January 1918 large areas of Northern Rhodesia were closed to labour recruiting as various detachments of British Imperial forces plodded southwards after the elusive columns of General von Lettow-Vorbeck, military commander of German East Africa. Although warned by the RNLB that "there would be some difficulty in fulfilling labour requirements for the coming year" [21], the colliery's management remained fairly unperturbed until it realised that very few "voluntary" workers were arriving either. Along with thousands of labour migrants from northern and western Nyasaland (Malawi), many Northern Rhodesian workers took to entering Southern Rhodesia by way of Feira in Mozambique. [22] By crossing into Portuguese East Africa as soon as possible on their journey south, labourers could avoid the widening zone of British territory in which all able-bodied men were pressed into carrier service. As the centre of gravity of labour migration routes shifted eastwards to the enduring benefit of Mashonaland mines and farms, the flow of labour reaching Wankie slowed to a trickle. [23] Whereas the colliery's location in a remote north-western corner of Southern Rhodesia had previously placed it astride one of the major routes taken by northern migrants, it now found itself out on a limb.

Although this awkward position could not have been maintained for long at the best of times, it was made very much more precarious by the fact that the contraction in Wankie's labour supply coincided with enormously expanded demand for coal. Already committed to large new coking and coal contracts for the Katanga mines [24], Thomson was quite unable to satisfy the burgeoning requirements of Rhodesia Railways. Contrary to expectations, demand

from this source increased by about ten per cent per annum in the final years of the war. By mid-1918 the railways were consuming about 12,000 tons of coal each month, and were the colliery's largest customer. [25] Nor was he able to respond to an urgent request early in the New Year from the Royal Navy for upwards of 2,000 tons of coal each month for its coaling station at Beira. Apart from a single shipment of 1,000 tons which hardly placated the frantic Fleet transport officer for a moment, Wankie had to turn a deaf ear to the normally irresistible call of patriotism and profit. [26] Indeed, far from rising, its coal output was actually dropping. In April 1918 the colliery only "despatched 16,257 tons of coal ... out of 30,068 tons asked for". [27]

By the time that point was reached, a familiar pattern had re-emerged. The rising demand for coal and the falling supply of labour were very quickly translated into hugely intensified pressure on the remaining workers. All leave was cancelled, and Sunday work reinstated as the colliery worked day and night shifts. [28] In the interest of greater production, surface workers were forced to labour underground. As a later committee of enquiry discovered, "when the Mine was short of labour, even the Compound Sanitary gang had been used for work elsewhere". [29] The length of shifts also increased significantly, though less by design than through the chaos and confusion which characterised the colliery's underground operations. For most of the war, the colliery management had economised on capital expenditure by stripping wire rope from side haulages in order to keep the main ropeway in a reasonable state of repair. [30] But this practice of robbing Peter to pay Paul eventually resulted in considerable congestion around the main haulage. Black miners, who even the colliery's unyielding management admitted "were on their feet throughout the working day"[31], endured endless delays as they struggled to position full tubs and retrieve empty ones from a system which was dangerously over-loaded. "There is difficulty in getting tubs in rotation", conceded Thomson, "and the time [spent underground] may be extended due to this reason." [32]

Pushed beyond the limits of their physical endurance by black foremen or "boss boys" who were as quick with their fists and feet as white miners had ever been, the health of many black labourers deteriorated rapidly. "No man engaged in strenuous physical effort is constantly up to the full pitch of his abilities", explained the Colony's medical director.

He feels that he must have relaxation or a break, in order to rest, the desire being a physiological one, and arising out of the necessity of muscles and nerves for a period of rest. If this rest is not given him, or if he does not take it, his powers of resistance to disease are lowered, and his liability to sickness increased. [33]

In short, "the heavier the work and the longer the hours, the higher the sickness rate amongst the workers". [34]

Underground workers covered in coal dust and "subject as they were to cuts, scratches and abrasions in the course of their occupation", began developing large open sores, so-called "tropical ulcers", on their legs and arms. In extreme cases, these suppurating sores led to limbs being amputated, and even to death. As labourers were issued with no protective clothing whatsoever, wounds were constantly reopened and reinfected. In any case, they were seldom properly cleaned. There was no change house at the colliery for black miners, such bathing arrangements as there were comprising "an uncovered cement bath, more nearly resembling a tank ...[filled with] black coal water ... [which] had to suffice for over 2,000 labourers". [35] Many workers, naturally enough, gave the bath a wide berth, but the main compound in which most of them were housed was itself a major source of infection and disease, especially once all the cleaning gangs had been redirected to underground labour. Badly sited and difficult to keep clean under ordinary circumstances [36], the compound was left to swelter in Wankie's 34 °C heat, amidst growing piles of uncollected rubbish, for the greater part of 1918. Visitors to the compound remarked on its filthy state. It was "neither clean nor sanitary ... refuse of all sorts was noticeable". [37]

Nor was the "native" hospital much help to sick and exhausted workers. Although the existing building had been officially condemned years previously as "totally inadequate", "too small" and otherwise unsuitable for the daily rate of sickness [38], the construction of a new hospital had been repeatedly subordinated to the imperatives of accumulation. Requests that the situation be remedied as a matter of urgency were invariably met with a shrug of the shoulders: "the General Manager says he had no labour and as soon as certain coke ovens are completed the building will be commenced". [39] There was only one doctor, a Dr Sutherland, who had replaced the unfortunate Hewetson in 1913. He was helped by a clerk who dispensed medicine, and by ten orderlies who "were not trained Assistants but the best Natives he could get". [40] They were, however, responsible for "a good deal" of the "actual treatment" of patients. Hospital records were fragmentary and incomplete, and the general air of indifference which permeated the place matched Sutherland's own prejudices perfectly. When asked why so many miners avoided using the colliery bath, the man of science "advanced the theory that many natives cordially disliked washing". [41]

By February 1918 ulcers were already covering the limbs of dozens of workers. Two months later, some 200 miners were similarly affected. In May, when "the Ulcer trouble assumed the proportions of an Epidemic", the total had risen to over 400, of whom 250 of the worst cases were belatedly sent to a convalescent camp established at the confluence of the Dekka and Zambezi rivers. Thoroughly alarmed by this state of affairs, hundreds of other workers began leaving the mine. The number of desertions, which anyway had been climbing steadily since the beginning of 1918, now rocketed. Worse still from the management's point of view, "in returning to their homes these natives advised other natives not to proceed to Wankie on account of the abnormal sickness". Halfway through the year, the colliery was in crisis, the "outbreak of Tropical Ulcers ... [having] developed to an alarming extent incapacitating a large number of natives and creating wholesale desertions and disorganisation". [42]

Unwilling or unable to grasp the magnitude of the crisis unfolding before him, Thomson's response was initially confined to a series of *ad hoc* arrangements with private labour recruiters who operated inside Southern Rhodesia itself. When these agents all too predictably failed to deliver anything like the necessary number of recruits, the colliery's compound manager "was sent to Livingstone to find out what could be done in recruiting the labour required ... [but] the Secretary for Native Affairs [in Northern Rhodesia] was not sympathetic" [43] Only then did Thomson turn to the Southern Rhodesian Administrator, Sir Drummond Chaplin, for help. Writing towards the end of April, and blandly attributing the "seriousness of the Colliery's position ... [to] an abnormal season interfering somewhat with voluntary labour seeking work while the Rhodesian Native Labour Bureau's recruiting areas have been restricted for Military reasons" [44], Thomson made two demands. He requested prior and preferential treatment from the RNLB, as well as "leave to recruit North of the Zambesi". "It is perhaps superfluous to point out to you", he concluded,

that I am not asking your assistance on behalf of the Colliery as a Colliery in that if the Colliery was a self-contained enterprise the shortage of labour would only concern the Colliery and we could not hope for you to be personally interested in the matter. The position is, however, one of National importance in that if the Colliery fails to supply the fuel required throughout the country all industry depending on coal fuel will be affected. [45]

The point was not lost on the Salisbury Administration. Letters were promptly sent to the Bureau inviting it to "consider the possibility of giving the Colliery specially favourable treatment in the supply of natives", and to the Northern Rhodesian Administration asking it to lift the embargo placed on recruiting, at least so far as Wankie was concerned. [46] These steps were followed up in May by the despatch of the Colony's medical director, Andrew Fleming, to Wankie. Fleming, an entirely unsentimental but thoroughly professional doctor, quickly sized up the prevailing situation. "The demands of the Wankie Colliery are

considerably in excess of the labour available", he reported, "and in consequence there is a tendency to push the labourers unduly. The direct consequence of this is to increase the normal sick rate, and so a vicious circle is established." [47] For the immediate relief of suffering, he prescribed liberal applications of iodine. Over a longer period, Fleming argued, the remedy lay

in having a surplus of labour which ... [would] allow the labourer so many days off in every month, without necessarily interfering with the output of the mine ... Though the native cannot express it, he feels himself the necessity for these days of idleness, and mines where he is pressed, and where he is forced to work beyond his capabilities, become deservedly unpopular. [48]

Wankie's general manager rarely took the longer view, however. With the "epidemic of tropical ulcers" showing signs of abating after Fleming's visit, and confident that the colliery's future labour supply was assured, Thomson characteristically ignored the medical director's advice. Far from addressing the structural causes of the colliery's recurrent production crises, he concentrated his energies instead on satisfying the short-term demands of what was easily Wankie's most lucrative market. As coke sales were "much more profitable to the Colliery than coal sales" [49], the first contingent of some 200 "chibaro boys" to reach Wankie at the start of June were all put to work on coke oven construction. [50] All in all, 28 bee-hive ovens and retorts were built. [51]

Having just invoked Wankie's position as "one of National importance" in order to obtain labour, Thomson and the Colliery Company's supremely self-interested board of directors were quite prepared to leave Southern Rhodesian consumers in the lurch. Some of the biggest mines in the Colony were "incensed to discover that with the growth of the more lucrative coke business their coal requirements suffer[ed]. [52] By diverting a steadily growing proportion of Wankie's falling coal output into coke production, Thomson succeeded in keeping the colliery's coke sales close to the record level achieved in 1917. [53] "Shamva, Falcon, Globe & Phoenix, [and the] Cam & Motor [all] used to get their supplies in the form of peas, nuts and smalls [54], but nearly all of this has been stopped as the coke requirements of the Congo have increased so greatly", complained the Rhodesia Chamber of Mines. "There is no safeguard of control to ensure that regular supplies to Southern Rhodesia will be maintained or to prevent supplies being sent to the Congo or elsewhere to the detriment of this country." [55]

For the entire period that coke oven construction was energetically pushed ahead, nothing at all was done to reduce pressure on the remaining trammers and lashers. Indeed, it gradually increased with every new desertion. Yet almost two months passed before Thomson turned his attention to the worsening situation underground. "I have a message from the Rhodesian Native Labour Bureau", he informed the Administration early in July, "stating that 98 boys of whom 78 are underground labourers have been allotted to us. In addition to these, 20 underground labourers are on their way here now. This number, together with the 100 natives coming forward from Shamva, should make a considerable difference to our output from the middle of next week when the boys should be on the place." "This being so", he incautiously added, "we should be able to allocate to Beira for Naval purposes at least 2,000 tons of coal per month and I think this quantity can safely be promised." [56]

Less than one week later, Thomson was sounding a very different tune. The promised RNLB recruits had not arrived. Nor could the Bureau provide the colliery with "definite information ... as to what steps they are taking regarding recruiting natives for us in Northern Rhodesia". [57] In any event, as Thomson was now forced to acknowledge, expanded output also depended on the arrival of a new supply of wire rope for Wankie's much depleted haulage system. Stocks had been run down earlier in the war with little thought given to their replacement, and orders placed since the beginning of the year had encountered lengthy

delays. Britain's iron and steel industry was working overtime to help meet the challenge of Ludendorff's spring offensive on the Western Front, and shipping space was at a premium. "We require considerably more rope which the Home people are doing their best to ship", explained Thomson. "10,000 ft. have just arrived and 20,000 ft. are advised. We will conserve the use of this as much as possible but extensions to several main haulages are now necessary and we cannot afford to re-equip the haulages stripped until we have fair stocks." [58] There would be no increase in the tonnage raised, and certainly no possibility of meeting the Royal Navy's recently revised requirements of 2,500 tons of coal per month, unless the colliery was "granted supplies of labour wire rope and other mining stores". [59]

But it was precisely these same three elements which continued to remain in short supply. By mid-August fewer than 20 out of more than 300 recruits promised for the colliery had arrived. [60] When new "chibaro boys" were told their destination, they "refused to proceed to the Colliery". So-called "voluntary" workers were no less emphatic in their avoidance of the place: "Mr Posselt the Native commissioner at Wankies stressed the fact that natives seeking work would not go to the Colliery but preferred to travel long distances to other mines in the Country." [61] Even more damaging to the colliery's prospects was the seemingly unstoppable haemorrhage of the remaining workforce. "The Colliery's strength has decreased by over 100 boys within the last three weeks", confessed Thomson, "due to natives leaving, desertions and a certain amount of loafing ... The mine is suffering." [62]

Desperately lacking labour, Wankie colliery was also cripplingly short of machinery and supplies. To some extent this reflected the difficulty of obtaining mining equipment in wartime. Mostly, though, it expressed the Colliery Company's consistent failure to capitalise the colliery at the point of production. Output was not only severely handicapped by the shortage of wire rope, but also by the fact that the main haulage itself depended on a single hauling machine which had been in constant use since 1904. As Thomson later testified, "if a serious breakdown of this engine occurred the haulage of any coal would be stopped for an appreciable period". [63] Problems created by inadequate haulage capacity were compounded by obsolete and "often overcrowded" coal screening, sorting, and washing plant and machinery. "The equipment was designed for day shift work when owing to conditions of light better sorting can be obtained", noted one report on Wankie's equipment and capacity, "but on account of the demand for coal, night shift sorting has had to be resorted [to], which has resulted in a higher percentage of shale and dross." [64] A similar conclusion was reached by the Rhodesia Chamber of Mines after it had made its own investigation into the colliery. Because the mine was under-equipped, existing plant and machinery were overloaded and inefficiently utilised. [65]

Refusing to admit that the renewed crisis was of the Colliery Company's and his own making, Thomson stubbornly maintained that the colliery's problems had nothing to do with low wages and over-work. His initial and most vehemently defended position was that "the whole question" of Wankie's labour shortage could only be explained in terms of "native prejudice". Firing off a letter to the Administrator at the end of July, Thomson claimed that

there is in the native mind the same prejudice to Wankie as exists among quite a number of white inhabitants of the country. They come to Wankie with the preconceived idea that the place is unhealthy and on the appearance of the slightest ache or pain which would pass unnoticed if they were in another part of the country which has not Wankie's reputation they wish to leave immediately. [66]

When the number of workers "wishing to leave immediately" showed no sign of falling, however, the colliery's general manager began to give ground, slowly at first and then fairly rapidly. While still unable to discover "any cause connected with the treatment of natives or their pay to account for their disinclination to work here", Thomson decided that "there must be something wrong with the Compound administration". [67] In mid-August he dismissed the colliery's compound manager, "and with this am making several radical changes in

connection with the Compound". In quick succession, a rather more systematic and somewhat less unsympathetic compound regime was instituted, and the ration scale improved by the issue of extra meat. [68] Hopeful that "an improvement should set in just as soon as the new Compound Manager gets abreast of his work", Thomson none the less belatedly recognised that the colliery would not "get any good supplies of independent labour until such time as we are able to build up a labour force in excess of what the Mine has got to do in order to allow a certain amount of loafing at times which will not interfere with the Company's business". [69]

Faced with the seemingly intractable problem of how to get to that point from where he was, when "arrears in orders ... [were] such that we cannot possibly allow natives to go slow for a month or two even if we had our full complement" [70], Thomson eventually found a solution, less because of his own efforts than through a combination of events, which radically reshaped the terrain on which the colliery operated. The first of these concerned Rhodesia Railways. Short of staff and supplies for most of the war, the railway system had become increasingly over-stretched. In September 1918 it finally snapped. A sudden influx at Beira of ships from a scattered convoy found the railway authorities quite unable to cope. While railway trucks "accumulated in the vicinity of the port", Southern Rhodesia's smaller towns and remoter industries were left to fend for themselves. For two days no coal was moved from Wankie. [71]

Seizing on the transport crisis as further proof that the coal shortage was not the colliery management's fault, Wankie's general manager began calling for an official investigation. Some weeks earlier Thomson had studiously ignored a throw-away suggestion by the RNLB's managing director that "in the event of all else failing, you ask His Honour the Administrator to appoint a small commission of enquiry to help you in definitely ascertaining the causes of the complaints by natives concerning the mine", but in the comparatively favourable climate brought about by the breakdown of regular rail services, he now courted "such remedies as ... [would] place matters upon a permanently satisfactory footing". [72] For its own reasons, the Administration agreed. Despite its manifest opportunism, Thomson's call for a commission of enquiry would at least allow the state to create the illusion of doing something even when it had no intention of taking any serious action. At the end of September, the appointment of a small committee "to investigate labour and other recent troubles at the Wankie Colliery" was announced.

The composition of the committee and its terms of reference were compromised from the start. Because "the appointment of the Committee emanated from the Wankie Company", solemnly announced the Mines Department, "they [would be allowed to] select the members" [73] The Colliery Company prudently chose Ernest Montagu, the crusty Secretary for Mines, as chairman. The balance of the committee comprised a mining engineer from the Globe & Phoenix, the one big mine in the country with a record worse than Wankie's; a mechanical engineer; the managing director of the RNLB; and a traffic manager from the railways. By successfully muddying the waters around the whole question of the coal shortage, the Colliery Company were also able to insist that the committee include the railways within the scope of its deliberations. But, most important of all, the cynical construction of the committee encapsulated the much narrower role which the Company state was prepared to play in Southern Rhodesian economy and society following the Privy Council decision of July 1918 that ownership of the Colony's so-called unalienated land was vested in the Crown and not the BSA Company. Stripped of its most valuable commercial asset, the Chartered Company "saw no further point in subsidising administrative deficits, and told its shareholders that 'since the land is not yours, capital for its further development must be sought elsewhere than from you'". [74] While still ostensibly representing capital in general, the Company state increasingly looked to its own. Long after the stage was reached where any further indulgence of the colliery's antics would threaten the interests of the mining industry as a whole [75], the Administration in Salisbury continued to extend every possible consideration to the Wankie Colliery Company.

On the evening of 5 October, the Committee's members assembled at Wankie station. They spent the next three days taking evidence and touring the colliery. Not surprisingly, their findings were wholly consistent with the Chartered Company's preoccupation with the interests of the more profitable parts of its remaining financial empire after the Privy Council's decision. "The following reasons are entirely accountable for the recent shortage of coal", concluded the Committee.

1. The outbreak of Topical Ulcers which ... continued almost unchecked until May. This outbreak does not appear to have been promptly dealt with ...
2. Inefficient control over the Compound, including medical treatment of natives.
3. That to cope with the increased business ... the Colliery Management were compelled to run their mechanical equipment on a twenty-four hour basis ... These conditions were of course brought about owing to the impossibility of being able to purchase any of the necessary equipment during the War ...
4. For a certain period the falling off of Coal supplies was entirely due to shortage of railway trucks. [76]

Thomson himself, declared the Committee, was "to be congratulated on the way he has kept the Colliery going ... [despite] labour troubles and other difficulties which have arisen owing to the war". [77]

Taken as a whole, the Committee's findings "exonerated and white-washed" the colliery's management. [78] Such censure as the Committee expressed was confined to "the care of the sick and the medical arrangements generally" [79], and to the way the compound had been run for the first eight months of the year. "It is plain", commented the final report, "that the late Compound Manager, whom Mr Thomson dismissed in August 1918, did not rise to his responsibilities and was unsympathetic in his treatment of the boys." [80] Its other comments and recommendations were hardly meant to be taken seriously. The colliery's wrist was slapped for practices which often went unremarked and invariably unchecked elsewhere in the Southern Rhodesian mining industry. [81] Thomson was gently chided for paying "voluntary labour a higher wage than prevailed under Bureau contracts, with the result that a Bureau and Voluntary boy of the same length of service would be doing the same class of work with an appreciable difference in pay". The Committee thought that this was a "fruitful source of discontent especially amongst the Bureau natives", and, although pleased to hear that the system of differential pay had recently been altered, felt that it needed to be explained carefully to "the boys". The colliery's management was also mildly rebuked for permitting "a monopoly in the sale of 'Kaffir truck'". "There is only one store on the property ... and in evidence it was shewn that the boys when they were able, walked six miles to the nearest store off the property to make purchases ... [and] we consider that competition should be encouraged as far as possible." [82] None of this detracted from the Enquiry's bottom line, however: the Committee's unanimous "desire to place on record our appreciation of Mr Thomson's work under very difficult conditions". [83]

The only dissenting official voice was that of the Colony's medical director. Infuriated by the Committee's attempt to place most of the blame for the "recent troubles" at Wankie on the colliery's doctor, Fleming sharply reminded the Administrator that

though it is admitted that the chief cause of the troubles arose out of the health and sanitary conditions prevailing, there was no medical member of the Committee who could guide the Committee in their deliberations or advise them as to their

findings. This at the outset appears to me a serious drawback to the usefulness of the Report generally [84]

While holding "no brief whatsoever for Dr Sutherland or the Medical Staff of the Wankie Colliery whatsoever", added Fleming, "I have read through the evidence as given by him most carefully, and I must conscientiously state that were this Report submitted to an independent Committee of experts in public health and sanitation, I feel sure that the findings of the Committee in many respects would not be upheld". The basic problem, argued the medical director, was the utterly inadequate medical facilities with which Sutherland had to work. "That a better supervision of the compound sanitation and hygiene, together with perhaps a more effective attempt at the prevention of disease, might have been exercised, I for one am not prepared to doubt", wrote Fleming, "but the failures here are the failures of the system rather than of the individual." [85]

This one discordant note was barely heard in the general chorus of Administrative support for the Committee's findings, and was anyway suppressed as soon as was decently possible. "I cannot see that any good purpose would be served by sending Dr Fleming's letter to other members of the Committee", minuted the Secretary for Mines. [86] Nor did Sir Drummond Chaplin himself have any difficulty in swallowing the Committee's assurances that the colliery's underground labourers were not overworked. Reassured to hear that the "task of tramming and lashing is not too severe", the Administrator readily concurred with the Committee's conclusion that one of the main causes of the "native trouble was inefficient and unsympathetic compound management". [87] As a result, his confidential report to the BSA Company in London merely observed that "effect is already being given to some of the recommendations of the Committee ...[and] I should hope, therefore that the conditions on the surface affecting the native employees will show considerable improvement". [88]

The Committee of Enquiry's endorsement of Wankie's management, and the Chartered Company's manifest reluctance to criticise the Colliery Company, together smoothed the way for even greater state involvement in dealing with the colliery's labour shortage. These preparations became extremely urgent in the course of October when the Spanish Influenza pandemic, which ultimately claimed some 20 million lives around the world, swept through the Colony. The first cases of influenza occurred early in the month amongst railway workers in Bulawayo. From there the epidemic spread swiftly to Gwelo (Gweru), Que Que (Kwekwe) and Salisbury (Harare), before engulfing other towns and districts along the line of rail. [89] Wankie's turn came on 14 October, and "in the space of a few days nearly two thousand natives were prostrated". "The resources of the Colliery management were taxed to the uttermost in giving relief, as a large number of the Europeans also contracted the epidemic", reported the local NC. "All available Europeans were enlisted in nursing the sick Natives, and everything possible done to combat the scourge." [90]

The influenza pandemic struck the colliery with explosive force. Like most other large Southern Rhodesian mines, Wankie's overcrowded, filthy compound provided optimum conditions for the rapid spread of the disease. Underground labourers, subject to variations in temperature as they left hot and confined working conditions below ground for the surface where there were no change houses, tended to suffer most from the pandemic. Hundreds of miners drew the appropriate conclusion, and fled from the compound into the surrounding countryside. Some undoubtedly carried infection into outlying villages, but many more unquestionably saved their own lives by escaping from the colliery. By 24 October, an estimated 100 black workers had died, and by the end of the month, the total number of dead had more than doubled. One white miner died in the same period. [91]

For nearly two weeks Wankie was at a complete standstill. With no stockpile of coal to draw on, the colliery's sales stopped as soon as production ceased. After ten days, Thomson sent a telegram to the Mines Department explaining that while he thought "the worst is now past ... it ... [would] be Monday earliest before we can get a shift underground". As the Colony's "fuel position was a most serious one", Thomson formally requested that the Administration

either supply Wankie with labour, or that other mines be compelled to "loan" workers to the colliery until matters were back to normal. [92] On the 26 October, "mining operations, though on a very limited scale, were resumed ... the natives thereafter rapidly returning to work". [93]

The state addressed the problem of keeping the colliery supplied with labour in two ways. As an emergency step, the Administration secured Imperial agreement to the use of convict labour at Wankie. Because of the "dislocation caused by influenza and the importance of Wankie coal to the war effort", the High Commissioner for South Africa sanctioned the unpaid employment for three months of 200 convicts. This temporary relief was bolstered by the lifting of all remaining restrictions on RNLB recruitment in Northern Rhodesia immediately after the announcement on 11 November of the armistice ending the First World War. [94] Between them, these measures greatly facilitated Wankie's return to something approaching full-scale production in the last six weeks of 1918, but for all the state's efforts, the supply of labour none the less remained well below the level needed to maximize output for any length of time. [95] The recovery soon faltered, and output dropped in the New Year. By February 1919 the colliery was estimated to be "400 short of its proper complement", and as pressure on the underground work-force built up once more, so "tropical ulcers" began reappearing in "considerable numbers". [96]

As the colliery again teetered on the edge of crisis, it was rescued at the last minute by Rhodesia Railways' recurrent inability to muster sufficient rolling stock. During February, the railways served notice that they could no longer "get away the coal as fast as the mine can raise it". "This ... [plus] the fact that under present circumstances ... the coal cannot profitably be stored on the surface", reported the newly-appointed compound inspector for the sprawling Bulawayo mining district, "saves the labourers from being called upon to do too heavy a task". [97] It also saved many of them from meeting what would undoubtedly have been an unpleasant fate in the colliery's "native hospital", described as "so saturated with infection that the smallest wound brought in for dressings always becomes septic". [98]

This breathing-space, which officials feared would come to an abrupt end "should the Railway manage to get up more trucks before the mine gets more natives" [99], lasted just long enough for Wankie's replacement medical officer hastily to commission a new hospital building, and to insist on the installation of incinerators for the disposal of compound refuse. In the same period, the colliery's management increased the wages of black miners by an average of 13 per cent. [100] All of these improvements combined to draw the colliery back from the brink of disaster. They certainly helped Wankie to contain the strike which flared up soon after the incinerators were introduced in March 1919. Striking surface workers, desperate to protect their access to much-needed extra income earned from the sale of firewood to other miners, received no support from the comparatively better paid trammers and lashers who comprised the bulk of the mine's labour force. "On being ordered to dump the filth on the incinerators instead of the pits (a long way off) the sanitary natives struck", explained the district compound inspector. "[Yet] ... with the incinerators the work is much easier and by day instead of night. Upon investigation it was found that by hurrying over their night work they also worked most of the day in gathering firewood which they sold to other mine natives and thus made a considerable revenue. The management on learning of this practice knocked the bottom out of the market by issuing free coal to any native wishing for it. The strike then soon ended." [101]

From this point, the storm clouds which had so ominously heralded the onset of another labour crisis at the colliery gradually receded. Extremely vulnerable in the past to fluctuations in its labour supply because of its low wages and often dreadful working conditions, the colliery's position was transformed in the immediate post-war period by structural changes in the labour market. Although considerably delayed by the impact of the influenza pandemic as it rolled northwards, a pent-up flood of "voluntary" migrant labourers from across the Zambezi was released when the Great War ended. It rapidly swelled in size between 1919 and 1922 as a devastating combination of inflation, drought and economic

recession forced thousands of Central Africa's inhabitants to leave their villages in search of employment. And as many of those heading south from Northern Rhodesia came through Wankie on free rail transport thoughtfully provided by the Southern Rhodesian Administration, the colliery was perfectly poised to reap the enormous benefits to be gained from this proletarian "harvest of centre and periphery".

While the great majority of these migrant workers insisted on making their way to better paid employment in Bulawayo and the goldmines of Matabeleland and the Midlands, a growing number presented themselves at the colliery's compound office during the second half of 1919 and especially from 1920 onwards. Many of them were Lozi-speakers from nearby Barotseland. From the very start, Lozi miners had constituted a noticeable proportion of Wankie's labour supply, but their presence expanded significantly after the war because the continued embargo on cattle sales in Barotseland, following an outbreak of bovine pleuropneumonia in 1915, left most people with no alternative to wage labour as a means of satisfying the Chartered Administration's tax demands. Despite a temporary set-back in September 1919 when a recrudescence of the influenza pandemic caused 30 deaths, the colliery's labour supply continued to grow. By mid-1920 the number of black workers at Wankie had climbed to c2,900, and a year later to almost 3,500. Of this total figure, an estimated 87 per cent were so-called "Northern boys". More specifically, 73 per cent originated from Northern Rhodesia, 14 per cent from Nyasaland, 4 per cent from Mozambique, and the balance of 9 per cent from Southern Rhodesia itself. Slightly more than 60 per cent of the labour force was designated as "voluntary". [102]

Buttressed by a seemingly limitless supply of black labour from the north, Wankie set about first rebuilding and then greatly expanding its productive capacity. Coal output in 1919 recovered somewhat to 510,040 tons, compared to the 491,268 tons raised the previous year. [103] As part of a long overdue programme of capital investment, a start was finally made on "opening up a new colliery by the same management". [104] Additional crushing plant was also erected, and electrical generating machinery, together with a huge new underground ventilation fan, were purchased. [105] Altogether, c£150,000 was spent on equipping the colliery's No 1 and No 2 shafts, as the different workings were now called. [106] "The Wankie Colliery is well equipped ... and ... in a position to increase its output if called upon to do so", reported the Secretary for Mines at the end of 1921. "A new incline shaft has been sunk to a depth of 700 feet about five miles distant from the present colliery, and this has been done for the purpose of opening up the western section of the coal deposit, and which in time will link up with the main workings. A very large area of excellent coal is therefore available at Wankie." [107] Total coal production for the year was 574,753 tons, valued at £256,815. [108]

This stunning turn-about in Wankie's fortunes was achieved very largely on the Colliery Company's own terms. It was all the more remarkable because it occurred against a background of intensified struggle, to some extent with black workers, but mainly with white miners flexing recently developed trade union muscles. Black labour unrest, where strikers were not undercut by hundreds of job-seekers from the north prepared to work for wages which lagged far behind the massive increase in the cost of living, was easily suppressed by a combination of mining capital and the colonial state working closely together, and the sour consequences of the racial division of labour. A strike in 1921, over the right of black workers to sell beer in the main colliery compound, was broken after two days by members of the paramilitary British South Africa Police, who "marched ... [the strikers] back to the pithead". [109] They were watched by a group of armed white miners. As members of the colliery rifle company, they were standing by ready to assist management and police if called upon to do so. Other white workers were busy underground keeping the mine's essential services operating. [110] Always certain of dealing separately with black and white miners, the colliery management was usually able to bend both to its will.

Until 1917 Wankie's despotic management had experienced very little trouble from the colliery's white work-force. Soons after becoming general manager, Thomson reduced white

miners' wages with impunity. Like his counterparts on other large Southern Rhodesian mines, Thomson was able to bank on the persistent surplus of white labour throughout the pre-war era, and the "much scattered" nature of the industry, to "militate against the force of white trade unionism". [111] However, this situation rapidly altered with the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. White workers "who left their jobs to enlist in the Great War caused the supply of skilled workers to fall below demand at the very moment that the cost of living was moving upwards ... [and] as a result those workers who remained behind were able to turn the wartime shortage of their skills into improved conditions". [112] At Wankie, these included shorter hours, lower rents, and higher wages. In 1917, the Colliery Company agreed to shorten the working week by three hours, and to reduce all house rents by 50 per cent until after the war. The pay of skilled tradesmen was fractionally raised by one penny an hour. A year later, the wages of fitters, blacksmiths, carpenters and electricians all rose substantially as the colliery tried to overcome the shortage of skilled labour by enticing artisans away from other big mines. [113]

None of these concessions succeeded in staving off further demands. With the rate of inflation accelerating, white workers proceeded to organize themselves into a trade union in June 1919. Led by a Yorkshire boilermaker, Herbert Walsh, the Rhodesia Mine and General Workers' Association was a general union open to all categories and grades of white miners. Enthusiastically supported branches were established on all the large gold mines, including Shamva, the Globe & Phoenix, the Cam and Motor, the Falcon and the Rezende, as well as at Wankie itself, and with white miners largely united behind it, the RMGWA lost little time in confronting mining capital. [114] Early in November, Walsh despatched letters to the major mining companies in the colony, requesting a general pay increase of 25 percent and a 48-hour working week. Specific demands were also addressed to particular mines. All of them were invited to attend a conference in Bulawayo at which the RMGWA proposed discussing white miners' wages and working conditions in general. "We now formally ask you", wrote Walsh to Thomson, "to concede to all your [white] employees as from the first day of the present month an increase in Substantive pay of twenty-five per cent on current rates of pay plus Climatic allowance of 2/6d per day and to introduce the 48 hour working week for all grades of workmen and an eight hour day, bank to bank, for Miners." [115]

Clearly incredulous at the union's effrontery in questioning management's prerogatives, Thomson fought hard to keep control of himself. Alternatively placatory and truculent, his reply was written with an eye to its eventual publication in the local press. [116] Producing figures which detailed the wage increases granted in 1917 and 1918, Wankie's general manager claimed that there were "single men ... [on the colliery] whose living expenses do not exceed £12 per month and who are earning £40 per month in wages, and married men whose household expenses do not exceed £20 per month who are earning the same money and I question whether the margin of profit was any greater than this before War conditions came about". His letter to the RMGWA further stressed that married white miners only paid "an inclusive rental of £1 per month ... [for] a three-apartment house with kitchen and bathroom, fuel, electric light and water laid on and sanitary service". Full board and lodging for single white men cost £8 per month, the same as it had done before the war. [117]

Each point was rammed home with heavy-handed condescension. "I would like to say in connection with workmen at Wankie Colliery", Thomson informed Walsh,

that since you came to the Colliery and organised a Workers' Union, the workers - many of whom never saw a Colliery in their life until they came to Wankie - have been holding meetings and kidding themselves that they are rather martyrs in a way. I should like it fully understood that there is nothing to prevent any man who is dissatisfied with conditions at Wankie Colliery leaving the place at any time it suits him, and if he betters himself by doing this he has my best wishes. [118]

Nor would Thomson entertain the union's claim of an allowance "for the Climatic disadvantages ... [its] members endured". Although quite prepared to argue on other occasions that wages paid at the colliery actually took climatic conditions "into full consideration", he now asserted that Wankie's climate was "all a matter of opinion". "I have several times had miners return from the Witbank district in the Transvaal to Wankie", he told Walsh, "because the Witbank district was too cold for their liking. Certainly the state of health of the two oldest inhabitants at Wankie is not conducive to the opinion that Wankie is unhealthy." [119]

But for all his bluster, Thomson was not in a strong bargaining position. The Colliery Company hardly relished the prospect of fresh conflict so soon after the protracted crisis of the previous year. Much as Thomson might threaten that "if the question is left to ... [me] I shall certainly shut the Colliery down rather than give effect to the demands outlined in your letter", the decision was not his alone. As even the autocratic general manager appreciated, he had his "Board, also the public of Rhodesia, to consider". Consequently, so he advised the RMGWA, "I have to get a mandate from my Board which will be transmitted by cable ... [but] I am perfectly willing to attend any Conference that may be arranged between employers and employed to discuss wages and conditions of living". [120]

The conference called by the RMGWA met in Bulawayo towards the end of the first week in December 1919. It quickly proved abortive. As several companies declined invitations "on the grounds that the conditions on the various mines ... varied so considerably that it was imperative that each company should be at liberty independently to arrive at arrangements with its employees" [121], only Consolidated Goldfields and the Wankie Colliery Company actually attended, and it soon became apparent that they too were not serious about meeting the union's demands. Discussions were broken off, and on 11 December white workers at the Rezende mine near Umtali (Mutare) struck work. Over the next few days the strike spread to other large gold mines, until by the middle of the month the Falcon, Gaika, and Shamva mines had all been forced to suspend production. [122] "The position today", lamented the *Bulawayo Chronicle*, "is that three or four hundred white miners are on strike, that a number of other skilled European workers are necessarily idle, and that some thousands of native workers will be eating their heads off except in so far as they can be kept busy about the mines'." [123]

For four days, Wankie's white miners made no attempt to follow suit. They had earlier reached a compromise agreement with the colliery's management. At a series of meetings held in the main dining room of the mine's biggest boarding house, Thomson played with considerable adroitness on existing divisions between tradesmen such as carpenters and electricians, whose expertise the colliery could not afford to lose, and miners, whose blasting and supervisory skills were much less difficult to replace. The grievances of the former were satisfied virtually in their entirety, while the demands of the latter were met less than half-way. As Thomson later confided to his long-standing friend and ally, the Secretary for Mines,

I explained that the Union's demands were ambiguous and that if the lower scale was taken some men would be no better off than they are at present. If the higher scale was taken Mechanics would be getting approximately 31/6 for an eight hours day while unskilled men working a ten hours day would be drawing anything from 37/6 to £2/1/0. On the men realising the absurdity of their demands there was considerable commotion. I asked the men to retire and discuss their demands in their different grades and meet me later. This was done. [124]

By insisting on seeing each category of skilled workers separately, the general manager also succeeded in by-passing the local executive of the RMGWA. "In making this arrangement at

Wankie the men dealt with me without referring to their Executive", boasted Thomson. "They have foregone the principle of an eight hours day and although skilled men are receiving practically what the Union asked there is a considerable saving in the unskilled section." [125]

Thomson's satisfaction was short-lived. Within 48 hours, the colliery's white miners had been whipped into line by the indefatigable general secretary of the RMGWA. Successive telegrams bluntly informed the Wankie coalminers that unless they immediately joined the general miners' strike, their local union branch would be "excommunicated". [126] Perhaps more to the point, they would be blacklisted by every major South African trade union. [127] And if they still persisted in working despite these dire threats, they would find that the Rhodesia Railway Workers' Union had anyway agreed not to move Wankie coal. [128] The logic of Walsh's argument was unassailable, and on 20 December Wankie's white workers came out on strike. Their action finally tilted the balance of struggle away from the mining companies towards the union. Stymied by the RRWU's refusal to "haul trucks [of coal] from Mine if loaded by non-Union men with natives" [129], mining capital was beginning to feel the pinch. Just before Christmas, details of an improved offer were conveyed to the RMGWA, but after some hesitation and not a little dissension in union ranks, it was rejected. [130] Convinced that they had the mining companies on the run, the majority of RMGWA members dug in their heels. They were joined at the end of the year by strikers on the Globe & Phoenix, the biggest gold mine in the Colony, and when the strike showed signs of spreading even further, capital capitulated. On 5 January 1920 the mining companies agreed to union terms. [131]

Yet neither the mineowners' loss nor the union's win was quite what it appeared to be on the surface. As the highest levels of the BSA Company Administration well knew, the goldmining companies could easily absorb the cost of higher wages and shorter hours. "Having regard to the increased price obtainable for gold, and to the hours previously worked", commented Chaplin, "the mines ... had a certain amount in hand which they could afford to give away without suffering any real loss." [132] For its part, the Wankie Colliery Company simply passed the cost of the settlement on to its customers by raising the pithead price of coal by two shillings per ton. [133] But, regardless of their capacity to pay, the mining companies emerged from their humiliating experience determined to break the back of organised white labour. Concerned about the effect of "unsettled labour conditions ... upon the influx of capital" [134], they decided on united action against the "unreasonable demands of Trades Unionism". In November 1920, after extensive discussions between the territory's two chambers of mines and its most important mining companies, the Rhodesia Mine Owners' Association was established. [135]

While mining capital prepared the ground for its counter-attack, the sand was shifting beneath the feet of the white labour movement. Strains which had been apparent during the strike between some local branches of the RMGWA and its Bulawayo headquarters now erupted into open conflict. [136] Another source of bitter division was the emergence of craft unionism during the same period. By September 1920, some members of the RMGWA and the RRWU were refusing to work with artisans in the rival Amalgamated Engineering Union. [137] The threat, however, of a general strike to enforce "one big Union" was confidently ignored by the Administration, partly because "if it comes off, it will start with a twofold split in the labour ranks ... [and] ought not to last very long" [138], and partly because the supply of semi-skilled and skilled white labour was rapidly improving with the return of demobilised soldiers. By as early as July 1921 there were over 100 unemployed whites in Bulawayo alone. [139]

These three developments, none of them to the advantage of white labour, had two significant consequences. They encouraged mining capital to seize the first possible opportunity to strike back at the RMGWA; and, in doing so, they highlighted the ambiguous position of white workers generally. Politically weaker than their fellows on the Rand, but no less structurally vulnerable to displacement by cheaper, black labour, white workers in

Southern Rhodesia relied on an informal job colour bar to protect their interests. [140] More than this, because "the very existence of their jobs in many cases was conditional on the overall profitability of industries resting on the exploitation colour bars of employers - the contract, pass and compound systems which guaranteed the 'ultra-exploitability and ultra-cheapness' of black labourers" [141], white miners basically supported the *status quo* both as workers and as whites. It was a contradiction which mining capital never tired of exposing. "I would point out to you with all sincerity the dangers which exist at the present moment as regards native labour", disingenuously declared the president of the Rhodesia Chamber of Mines. "Owing to these strikes they are given responsible positions which, to my mind, is aiding and abetting the greatest possible danger in this country, which is the possibility of the native superceding (sic?) the white man in his Work." [142] Rooted in the racist ambience of colonial society, and assiduously cultivated by mining capital, the resulting lack of solidarity between white and black workers fatally undermined organised labour's struggle against the mining companies. This was particularly so at Wankie where a smaller than average number of white workers confronted a larger than life general manager. Insulated at work from black labourers by language barriers and supervisory roles, and differentially housed and paid, white miners were none the less ruled by an authoritarian regime which brooked no insubordination. "It was what one would expect", said Walsh, "from a mine manager who has reigned long in an isolated mining camp, and has had little to do with trade unionism." [143] Housing and hospitalization were tied to jobs on the colliery, and strikers could and did lose access to one or the other, or both. [144] Certainly no-one could be sure that the general manager, whose "palatial residence" was set on the most prominent of the low hills overlooking the colliery [145], would not get to hear what was said even behind closed doors. Two members of the local RMGWA executive reported directly, if discreetly, to Thomson himself. [146]

Vulnerable to intimidation and infiltration, the community of white workers at the colliery was always tiny. Never totalling more than c90 before the mid-1920s, only 75 of them were union members in 1921. [147] Their limited numbers were both cause and consequence of the fact that semi-skilled and skilled work at Wankie was not as widely reserved for whites as it was on other large Southern Rhodesian mines. In part, this reflected relentless pressure to minimise working costs. To some extent as well, it expressed differences between the labour processes in gold and coal mining. The much wider working faces of the colliery permitted white supervisors to watch over many more gangs of underground black workers than was possible in the narrow stopes characteristic of quartz reef gold mining. Taken together, they meant that the process of substituting black for white labour was comparatively far advanced at Wankie by the early 1920s. Where, for example, the ratio of white to black workers on the Globe & Phoenix a few years later was 1:15, at Wankie it was 1:28. [148] Only grudgingly respected by management so long as the RMGWA exerted pressure, the job colour bar was a burning issue for Wankie's white miners. [149]

Matters at the colliery came to a head in February 1921 when Thomson fired a white mechanic who refused to service a company car driven by a black chauffeur. [150] The local chapter of the AEU immediately downed tools in protest. They were joined soon afterwards by members of the RMGWA whose support for the principle of job reservation easily outweighed their dislike for the rival union. At much the same time, a quite separate strike started at Shamva over a different issue. This was the excuse which mining capital had been waiting for. The RMOA had earlier dismissed out of hand a claim by the RMGWA for a 20 per cent wage increase, and it now demanded unconditional acceptance by organised labour of capital's right to "employ or not employ whom they think fit". [151] When this guarantee was not forthcoming, the mining companies proceeded to arrange a general lock-out. In late February, notices were issued at the colliery to all daily-paid men, who comprised the great majority of white workers, terminating their services. They were further advised that, while access to hospital facilities was being withdrawn "at once", they could stay "in possession of the premises they occupy unless they are otherwise required, [and] that light and water services will be continued if possible". [152]

The lock-out eventually ended in the third week of March with union defeat. Their strike funds exhausted, white miners watched helplessly as black workers and a "handful of staff" maintained production near capacity levels. At Wankie in 1921, as in 1919, "the Natives ... worked so well ... that by the third day the output had reached 1,250 tons which is only 250 tons less than the average daily output in normal times with a full complement of Europeans at work". "All the Natives are loyal", reported Wankie's NC, "and doing all tasks set them." [153] White labour's surrender soon turned into a rout. Over the next two years, mining capital set about systematically favouring members of the much smaller AEU over members of the RMGWA, "and then, once the bigger organization was sufficiently demoralized, insisted on retrenchments and wage cuts over the protests of both unions". In April 1922 and again in March of the following year, the wages of white miners were reduced. [154]

By the time white workers' wages were again cut, the RMGWA had collapsed. Its branch at Wankie had been defunct for nearly six months. But even as the Colliery Company and other large Southern Rhodesian mining groups celebrated their crushing victory over organised labour, it seemed that they were in danger of losing the battle at the polling booth for the Colony's political future. An ardent admirer of Smuts's suppression of the Rand Revolt, and supporter of union with South Africa, Thomson did his bullying best to disrupt any canvassing for "responsible government". The local secretary of the Responsible Government Association was forced to resign from the colliery, and white miners were left in no doubt as to where the general manager's sympathies lay. They accordingly took the only revenge which their colour and class permitted. In the Referendum held in October 1922, Wankie's white workers voted overwhelmingly against big capital and union with South Africa, and for settler self-government. [155]

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Notes

- 1 *Report of the Secretary for Mines for the year ended 31 December 1914*, 4.
- 2 ZCB 2/2/1, "Capital History of the Wankie Colliery Company Ltd".
- 3 *Rhodesia Chamber of Mines Annual Report for the year 1914*, 32-3.
- 4 ZCB 2/2/1, "Capital History of the Wankie Colliery Company Ltd".
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Southern Rhodesia, Legislative Assembly Debates*, 25 May 1938, col 1168.
- 7 A3/17/12/1, "Notes on Wankie Colliery", attached to, Secretary, Rhodesia Chamber of Mines, to Secretary, Department of Administrator, 6 February 1919.
- 8 *Report of the Secretary for Mines for the year ended 31 Dec 1916*, 4.

- 9 *Ibid*; *Report of the Secretary for Mines for the year ended 31 Dec ember 1917*, 3; ZCB 2/2/1, "Capital History of the Wankie Colliery Company Ltd".
- 10 ZCB 2/2/1, Proof of Evidence, D. Martin, AJD IV, Table showing the date of installations of major items of plant and equipment, n.d.
- 11 A3/17/12/3, A R Thomson, to Secretary to Administrator, Salisbury, 31 July 1918.
- 12 *Ibid.*, Medical Director, to Secretary, Department of the Administrator, 10 August 1918.
- 13 *Ibid*, Thomson to Secretary to Administrator, 31 July 1918.
- 14 RC 3/9/5/20, Enclosure No. 1031A/1918: Wankie Colliery, copy, Managing Director, RNLB, to General Manager, Wankie Colliery, 27 August 1918.
- 15 A3/17/12/3, Thomson to Secretary to Administrator, 31 July 1918.
- 16 A3/18/30/20, A R Thomson, Wankie, to His Honour the Administrator, Salisbury, 22 April 1918.
- 17 A3/17/12/3, Thomson to Secretary to Administrator, 31 July 1918.
- 18 A3/17/12/1, General Secretary, Rhodesian Mine & General Workers' Association, to The Manager, Wankie Colliery, 6 November 1919.
- 19 Report of the Chief Native Commissioner for the year 1919, 2.
- 20 N3/33/2, Report and attached schedules, 22 Nov 1920.
- 21 A3/17/12/3, Thomson to Secretary to Administrator, 31 July 1918.
- 22 C v an Onselen, *Chibaro*, 121.
23. A3/18/30/20, Thomson to His Honour the Administrator, 22 April 1918.
24. A3/ 17/12/1, "Notes on Wankie Colliery".
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 H.Mss. CH8/2/2/12, Chaplin to Michell, 29 July 1918.
- 27 A3/18/30/20, Secretary, Department of Administrator, to Managing Director, RNLB, Salisbury, 30 April 1918.
- 28 A3/17/12/3, Thomson to His Honour the Administrator, 16 July 1918; Thomson to Secretary to Administrator, 20 August 1918.
- 29 A3/18/30/45, Report of Committee appointed to investigate Labour and other Recent Troubles at the Wankie Colliery, 1918.
- 30 A3/17/12/3, Thomson to His Honour the Administrator, 16 July 1918.
- 31 *Ibid.*, Thomson to Secretary to Administrator, 31 July 1918.
- 32 *Ibid.*, Thomson to Secretary to Administrator, 20 August 1918.

- 33 *Ibid.*, Medical Director to Secretary to Administrator, Salisbury, 10 August 1918.
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 A3/18/30/45, Report of Committee appointed to investigate ...Wankie Colliery, 1918.
- 36 *Ibid.*, Confidential, Memorandum to His Honour the Administrator on the Report of the Committee appointed to investigate Labour and other Recent Troubles at the Wankie Colliery, [from] A M Fleming, medical director, 2 January 1919.
- 37 *Ibid.* Report of Committee appointed to investigate ... Wankie Colliery, 1918.
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 *Ibid.*
- 41 *Ibid.*
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- 45 *Ibid.*
- 46 *Ibid.*, Secretary, Department of Administrator, to Managing Director, RNLB, Salisbury, 30 April 1918; H Mss CH8/2/2/12, Chaplin to Michell, 29 July 1918.
- 47 A3/18/30/38, Medical Director to Secretary, Department of the Administrator, 17 June 1918.
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- 49 A3/17/12/1, Notes on Wankie Colliery.
- 50 A3/17/12/3, Thomson, to His Honour the Administrator, Umtali, 12 July 1918.
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- 54 i.e. the different sizes of coal supplied.
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- 68 A3/18/30/45, Report of Committee appointed to investigate ...Wankie Colliery, 1918;
A3/17/12/3, Thomson to Secretary to Administrator, 11 September 1918.
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- 72 RC3/9/5/20, Managing Director, RNLB, to General Manager, Wankie Colliery, 27 August 1918.
- 73 A3/18/30/45, Confidential, Secretary for Mines and Roads, to His Honour the Administrator, 9 January 1919.
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- 108 Wilson, *Mining Industry of Southern Rhodesia*, 86.
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- 110 M3/11/15, Confidential, "Native Trouble Rezende Mine", Commissioner's Office, British South Africa Police, to Your Honour [the Administrator], n.d. IDecember 1919; A8/3/9, Compound Inspector, Bulawayo Division, report for September 1921.
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