

WORKING LEATHER: THE FUSION OF FORMAL AND INFORMAL INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS IN A DURBAN SHOE FACTORY

by

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ABSTRACT

The thesis concerns the persistent coupling of formal and informal industrial relations within a particular manufacturing company. At first, the company's formal structure of industrial relations was heavily tempered by the operation of informal cross cutting ties. The resultant system of industrial relations was one that might be regarded as a hybrid, integrating formal and informal networks of relationships within the organization of the factory. The quite discernible ethos of informality or paternalism remained largely unchallenged by the rather facilitating political conditions that prevailed at the time. However, the political climate has, in the last decade or so, been subject to considerable pressure that has resulted in some far reaching and fundamental changes to the political order of the country.

The emergent political conditions have enforced upon the company the need for change. The essence of such changes were perceived to hinge upon the transformation of the company's system of industrial relations. The transformation entailed the establishment of a more overtly formal system of industrial relations, separating the formal and informal relations which had become inextricably entwined. However, the objectives of such changes were never quite achieved. The distinction between the formal and informal industrial relations remained submerged in the mêlée of intergroup contestation. The various interest groups in the factory context appropriated the division between formal and informal industrial relations, enabling these groups to phrase their industrial strategies within an idiom most contextually appropriate. What emerged was an extension of this tendency to merge formal and informal industrial relations.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page No.
ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. General Introduction.....	1
1.2. Method.....	6
1.3. Problems in the Field.....	8
1.4. Lay Out.....	12
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE AND THEMES.....	15
2.1. Literature Survey.....	15
2.2. Extraction of Themes.....	25
CHAPTER 3: EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES: FORMAL AND INFORMAL MECHANISMS.....	31
3.1. Focus on Cheval.....	31
3.2. Employment Practices.....	38
3.2.1. Recruitment.....	39
3.2.2. Promotion.....	45
3.2.3. Remuneration.....	57
CHAPTER 4. THE WORKERS' LAMENT: 'MANAGEMENT IS NOT WHAT IT USED TO BE.....	72
4.1. Profile on Jayraj.....	72
4.2. What is the Problem?.....	76
4.3. Paternalism: the former system.....	84
4.4. The "Changes": Dualism emerges.....	91
4.5. Conclusion.....	104
CHAPTER 5. THE POSITION OF TRADE UNIONISM IN THE FACTORY EXPERIENCE.....	107
5.1. Introduction.....	107
5.2. Worker-Trade Union Relations.....	107
5.3. The Shop Steward.....	120
5.4. Union-Management Relations.....	125
5.5. Union-Owner Relations.....	130
CHAPTER 6. INFORMAL RELATIONS ON THE FACTORY FLOOR.....	133
6.1. Introduction.....	133
6.2. Joking Relationships.....	134
6.2.1. Overcoming Social Distance.....	135
6.2.2. Accentuating Social Distance.....	141
6.2.3. Conclusion.....	149
6.3. Stokvels: systems of organization and control.....	152
6.3.1. The Social Situation.....	154

6.3.2. Analysis of the Social Situation..... 155

6.3.3. Conclusion..... 163

6.4. Illicit Monetary Activities..... 164

CHAPTER 7: SUMMARY..... 166

REFERENCES..... 170

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"Many social scientists believe that an understanding of industry is crucial to an understanding of present day society. What is industry? What way of life does it provide, what patterns of behaviour does it foster; and what effects does it have on an individual's other relationships in society? Until we can answer this kind of question we cannot have an adequate understanding of our modern industrial cities which hold so many lives within their bounds." (Gardner:1945;iii)

Although rather dramatic, Gardner's sentiments do however ring true. It is widely acknowledged that South Africa is presently experiencing a process of urbanization that is quite unprecedented in the country's history (see Simpkins;1985-1994,Jones;1993). Given this quite astounding urban growth, compounded by the fact that over half of the country's population is under the age of 24, the need for rather rapid industrial growth is quite urgent. Although employment statistics indicate a slight decrease in over-all industrial employment¹, such figures are generally assumed to reflect the effects of the worldwide recession, offering a modicum of hope for the creation of employment opportunities in the future.

Provision of housing, transport and services for these recent

¹.The Annual Report of the National Manpower Commission recorded a slight decrease in employment statistics for most sectors of the economy from 1991-1992. Furthermore, absorption rates exposed the inability of the sector's employment creation process to match or 'absorb' the country's quota of annual school leavers.

urban migrants, as well as those deprived by Apartheid's urban 'planning' are just a few of the areas that have of late received considerable attention from both governmental and research agencies. Another area of increasing concern is that of relations within industry itself. Acknowledging the fact that industrial relations are not merely 'reactions' of the day but rather products of an historical process and that they impact upon the daily lives of millions of people within the borders of South Africa, the need to examine industry and society is of increasing importance. Various academic disciplines have entered the 'fray', so to speak, of the industrial society. Each discipline, guided as they are by their philosophical assumptions and contingent methodologies, has something quite unique to offer this rather nascent field of inquiry.

Industrial anthropology, as a subdiscipline of anthropology, has a history of about 65 years. The origins of the field can be traced back to Elton Mayo's psychiatric\psychological studies of industrial human relations. Mayo's research, conducted in a Philadelphia textile mill, was instrumental in encouraging a whole series of investigations into "the relationship between improved productive efficiency and informal social organization" (Holzberg & Giovannini: 1981;319). Subsequent studies conducted under the auspices of the Harvard Business School were, among others, sequels to the now quite famous human relation studies conducted at the Hawthorne plant of the Chicago-based Western Electric Company. One of the conclusions reached by these studies of group productivity was that "...it proved at least that other kinds of things besides the physical conditions of work can affect the output of a group.." (Homans:1949;56).

Essentially, the Hawthorne studies challenged the assumptions of the industrial psychologists whose predictions, based on

information derived from questionnaire surveys, failed to account for low productivity in the Hawthorne plant. Guiding such assumptions was the "doctrine of individualism" (see Arensberg;1951 & 1978) which informed the methodologies utilized by these social psychologists. Primarily, critics of the doctrine of individualism have pointed to the failure of the individualistic perspective to recognize the work place as a social system. By failing to examine the workplace as a social system, the relationships that were examined were done so out of context. As Whyte points out, the psychologists often studied human relations in a "structural and technological vacuum" (Whyte:1948;68).

Subsequent anthropological and sociological studies in industrial situations have shown that there is not a direct cause and effect relationship between ability and performance. Instead, these studies highlighted the relationship between productivity and changes in social activity and human relations. The manner in which such realizations were reached emphasizes the value of anthropological research in the field of industry. Such conclusions were based upon observations of actual behaviour rather than merely an analysis of workers' attitudes and beliefs gathered by a series of questionnaires, the modus operandi of the social psychologists.

Industry has an organizational structure that operates on both the formal and informal or the official and actual level. Such structures are comprised of relations that are largely situational and at times, cross-cutting. Relations are not necessarily vertical, as the individualistic perspective tends to suggest; equally important are the horizontal relations as

well as the diagonal relations². Furthermore, such relations are often intentionally obfuscated in order to conceal the at times 'contradictory' or paradoxical alignments that emerge within the factory. Another factor contributing to the difficulty involved in discerning factory relations on the basis of "attitudes and beliefs" is the illicit nature of certain activities. Such activities may force the worker to conceal or disguise certain relations in order to avoid detection (see Mars:1982).

Given these constraints, it becomes increasingly apparent that anthropology as a discipline, given its methodological assumptions, is rather favourably equipped for the study of industry. Not only is the discipline primarily concerned with the group, but moreover, rather vigorously endorses the concept of 'holism', emphasizing that "social or historical phenomena must be understood and interpreted in terms of the total context which encompasses them" (Seymour-Smith:1986;138). This embraces a tendency quite contrary to the methodological individualism of the social psychologists. The social matrix of meaning or rationale which informs the dynamics of small group behaviour must be established on the basis of participant observation. The utilization of allied techniques eliminates (or at least acknowledges) the 'distortion' evident in mechanisms of data accumulation that rely largely on the given "attitudes and beliefs" of the research subjects.

The 'case study', focusing on a single industrial plant, has proved a relatively popular and valuable means of industrial

². Holzberg & Giovannini describe diagonal relation as "those between two individuals at different hierarchical levels in different organizational units where neither one has authority over the other" (1981:320).

inquiry. Such studies facilitate a more thorough understanding of, or insight into, the dynamics of small group behaviour. The following thesis is an example of one such study. It is an attempt to illustrate the various kinds of relationships evident on the factory floor. Alignments between the various interest groups are shown to be largely dynamic, reflecting a certain situational quality within the logic of their formation.

The various group formations evident in the factory structure are largely 'interest groups', which unite in situations of mutual interest and draw apart where their respective interests diverge. Ideological constructions that, for instance, necessarily place owners and managers within the same formations often neglect the dynamics of small group behaviour. There are various illustrations within the text that show how the local situation defines interests and needs that are often manifest in seemingly contradictory formations. In a certain context, owners and workers may share specific interests that draw them together in opposition to management. Similarly, managers and workers may operate in tandem at the expense of the owner. However, such configurations are largely situational, activated by the contextual operation of cross-cutting ties (see Gluckman:1940).

The primary aim of the thesis is to illustrate and explain, as far as possible, the situational motivation of certain 'alliances' between the various interest groups at Cheval. The rather anomalous alignment between owner and workers discussed in chapters three and four is a predicament that obtains largely as a result of a half-hearted attempt to transform the administrative structure of the organization. The seemingly ambivalent attitude of the owner towards 'change' has largely resulted in a dualist system of management operating at Cheval. The 'dualism' is a composite of old and new managerial practices

which operate in unison, governing relations between the various interest groups in the factory organization. The dualism generates certain ambiguities that are expediently mediated or exploited by the various groups and individuals, creating some rather unusual situational 'alliances' between traditional 'foes' such as the workforce and the owner.

All group formations are, in some way or other, influenced by the hybrid organizational system in operation at Cheval. Although the manifest influence of this dualist system of organization may differ from one interest group to the next, the influence of this system remains, nevertheless, readily traceable.

1.2. Method

The research for this thesis was conducted over a period of five months, from August to December 1993. Permission to conduct the study was granted by the owner on the basis of his close friendship with the author's family. The research was almost entirely conducted during the working hours of week days. Although such an arrangement may appear to challenge the holistic principles of anthropological inquiry, it was, however, a most practical arrangement given the rather diffuse residential patterns of the workers and the patent lack of any meaningful social interaction between workers beyond the factory premises.

The research was conducted primarily by means of participant observation, though there was considerably more 'observation' than there was 'participation'. The high level of mechanization within the factory precluded much direct participation in the production process. The only case of genuine 'participation' in the production process was learning the art of faking under the

guidance of Vijay, the department's chief faker. However, I was fortunate enough to partake in many discussions and informal conversation that in certain respects compensated for the lack of direct participation in the production process.

Data collected by means of participant-observation was supplemented by quantitative inquiries into various 'general' aspects of the workforce's predicament. Although 'life histories' were not used as a research technique *per se*, it was, however, utilized as a means of eliciting certain kinds of information which contributed to the author's attempt at reconstructing certain aspects of the factory's organization prior to the research period. The use of an interpreter was fortunately unnecessary as the high percentage of Indian workers ensured the medium of communication was chiefly English.

The use of any formal and particularly structured research techniques was rendered largely impractical by the constraints by which my research was governed. I had to conduct the research during working hours. The only real opportunity for formal interviews and the like was during one of the three daily breaks; morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea. The workers were understandably reluctant to forfeit their 'freedom' by having to embrace the curiosity of the ubiquitous researcher. Although I was welcome to join them during their breaks, any attempt to gain their undivided attention was quite clearly resisted.

The diffuse residential patterns of the workers meant that conducting such interviews after work at their place(s) of residence was largely impractical. The logistics involved were not facilitated by the time frame of the research.

1.3. Problems Encountered in the Field

The first problem was to allay worker suspicions that I was not merely gathering information for the owner or management to be used against the workers in some way or other. I had to establish my credentials independently of management and the owner, individuals that I had known personally for some time prior to the research. The prospect of concealing such relations was both improbable and unethical. To establish confidence, one should ideally be as open and honest as possible. Such proprieties are not merely endorsements of the 'Ethical Guidelines for South African Anthropologists' which were ratified by the Association for Anthropology in Southern Africa at its 1987 conference but furthermore embody some tenets of self-interest as well.

Were my relations with management and the owner revealed at some stage during the research period, confidence gained would almost surely have been lost. Permission granted by the owner was necessary though insufficient to ensure access to the field. The consent of the workers themselves, whether tacit or explicit, was absolutely vital in ensuring continued and purposive research in the field. An incident that transpired towards the end of the research period attested to this.

I had been attempting to investigate illicit monetary activities on the shop floor (see chapter five) when quite suddenly, worker cooperation ceased. In literally one afternoon, the apparent willingness of the workers to talk about such activities was replaced by a reticence and an 'ignorance' that was clearly nothing more than a rather shallow attempt to preempt my inquiry. From what I could discern, I had trodden rather clumsily over an area of particular sensitivity. However, the point being made here is that without the consent of the workers, or for that

matter, any group the researcher intends to study, the research would have been severely impeded.

Returning to the problem, I was forced to establish my credentials independently of management and the owner. The question I had to ask myself was how I could 'earn' the workers' consent. The idea of an equitable exchange was attractive but rather 'quixotic'. To gain consent through the promise of an exchange is a naïve (or shrewd?) proposition for the researcher to consider. It is often rather pretentious to assume that the information, analysis and conclusions generated by studies such as my own will necessarily improve, in some way or other, the lives of those researched. I was not in any way 'commissioned' to undertake a study of this nature. Whether such information provides or contributes in some way towards change, be it positive or not, is a process over which this particular researcher had or has no control.

The argument that such studies contribute towards a general body of information to which the 'policy makers' may refer is, despite its 'truth', a tenuous one indeed. Overlooking the duplicity of the option of 'grandiose possibility', there was little I could offer the workers, or for that matter management and the owner, in terms of reimbursement for the time and patience they were prepared to offer. Quite ironically, it was the realization of this predicament that contributed quite significantly towards the workers' consent that was ultimately granted.

I quite openly explained to the workers that I could do little in the way of assisting them in resolving the problems or grievances they experienced. At first, such resignation was met with a certain despondence on behalf of the workers. They had anticipated some form of exchange for their co-operation and,

that it was expressly not forthcoming, quite naturally aroused a certain disinclination towards my presence. However, certain individuals remained visibly curious as to what it was I was doing. Such individuals, coupled with those concerned about their own children's educational opportunities (which appeared to be a pressing concern) invested sufficient interest in my presence to ensure that those initially indifferent to my efforts were soon asking to be "interviewed".

This 'germinating' acceptance was by no means anticipated but was, in retrospect, not terribly surprising. At first, the workforce was generally quite suspicious of my presence, but at no point were they hostile. Once my intentions were informally communicated through the factory, people's interests were aroused. It appears that the workers perceived my presence to be quite harmless. I was not considered a threat. It is difficult (or impossible?) to offer a psychological sketch on the recreational needs of the workers. However, it appeared that a fair number of the workers enjoyed the attention I gave them and the conversation we shared. I'm not suggesting they were riveted or in awe of my presence; on the contrary, it was the possibility of communicating with an "outsider" about factory life and not having to edit one's thoughts and feelings that fuelled their cooperation.

The presence of a university student, who was interested in their attitudes and thoughts towards work, politics or what ever the case, perhaps offered a brief respite from the monotony of their work routine. Although I am by no means suggesting that research participants are willing to co-operate on the basis of interest alone, and need not be reimbursed or rewarded for their co-operation, I do maintain however, that tenuous and improbable arguments of 'long-term' rewards are tantamount to deception. It

is up to those researched to determine for themselves whether or not to co-operate and such decisions should not, as far as possible, be prejudiced by hollow allusions towards 'possible' rewards.

A second, though related, difficulty was having to manage spatial distance between the workforce and the management body and owner. Although, as I have previously stated, I did succeed in gaining the confidence of the workforce in general, the preservation of such acceptance required constant attention. Gaining acceptance or approval is something of a resource that needs constant replenishing lest it becomes depleted. Constant and visible interaction with management may have threatened the acceptability with which I was regarded by the workers. The need to interact with all group formations in the factory necessitated a rather delicate handling of this potentially invidious matter.

During the initial stages of the research, the predicament was far more sensitive than it was in the latter stages. Initially, there was a certain amount of suspicion regarding my presence on the floor. Until such suspicions had been largely assuaged, I had to avoid visible or protracted interaction with management and the owner. As far as the research was concerned, this need was in no way a handicap. The first few weeks were largely devoted to orientation; gaining acceptance and information and attempting to discern the 'politics' of factory organization. Fortunately, such preparatory requirements accommodated the need to avoid immediate interaction with the management body and owner.

As the research progressed, interaction with the various groups within the organization was conducted on a more casual basis. However, there was one persistent concern. The need to determine the validity of various accusations and comments which I had to

'cross-check' with other individuals. While doing so, I had to simultaneously ensure that the initial purveyor of the information did not feel as if he or she had been 'betrayed'. Although all sources were treated with the necessary confidentiality, I was still obliged to ensure that the 'impression' of betrayal was never conveyed. I developed something of a 'zigzagging' routine for the investigation of specific issues.

Instead of immediately attempting to validate certain information, I would rather pursue other issues and only later return to the appropriate person. Although seemingly deceptive, the potentially sinister element is largely negated by the absolute anonymity with which my sources were treated. It is extremely important to manage space and time. Although ones intentions can be completely 'innocent', impressions to the contrary may easily arise. In certain respects, the researcher needs to 'keep an eye' on himself. Although 'total submergence' within the group, community, etc. remains the ideal, the rather fanciful analogy that equates the anthropologist's task with the camouflage of the chameleon has been largely destroyed by the inimitable colours of reality. Although my presence on the floor was accepted, I was however, despite my efforts at 'participation', never regarded as a worker. I was always a student, a white student easily noticed in the setting of the factory floor. I had to manage impression just as some of the individuals researched managed their own impressions.

1.4. Lay Out

Chapter one provides a general introduction to the study, commenting on the development of industrial anthropology as well

as reflecting on the research supporting this particular thesis. Chapter two is designed to offer the reader some information regarding the analytic themes and theoretical frame that, in a sense, have guided this research. The qualification evident in the preceding statement derives from the difficulty experienced in imposing the presupposed themes and orientations on a field that, prior to any significant research, remains relatively unknown. A basic grasp or anticipation of the field is essential prior to initiating the research; however, the process remains a dialectical one, where the theoretical orientations inform the research and the research informs the theory. Such theoretical and analytic orientations were derived from a combination of research and review. The literature survey, both general and particular, offers the reader some idea of the available literature pertinent to this area of inquiry and provides commentary on the prevalence of certain orientations and themes.

Chapter three is divided into two distinct section. The first is intended to inform the reader of the work process and lay out of the factory. Within the core 'research chapters' (three to six) various references to operations, operatives and departments are made with the assumption that the reader is familiar with the lay out and work process of the factory. Furthermore, a hierarchy of authority is provided in order to inform the reader of the patterns of authority or relative positions of individuals within these formal conceptualization of authority. Such provisions facilitate a more succinct focus, eliminating the need to constantly contextualize or 'over-inform' on a particular situation. However, it should be said, that economy of presentation is not endorsed to the point where simplification becomes complication for the under-informed reader.

The second section of chapter three focuses on the employment

practices at Cheval. Although originally intended to offer commentary on the 'formal' situation of employment at Cheval, the application of such intentions often revealed counter, or informal, mechanisms that demanded a broadening of the scope of this chapter. Ultimately what is offered is an insight into both formal and informal mechanisms under the heading 'employment practices at Cheval'. The rubric incorporates issues such as recruitment, promotion and remuneration.

Developing this theme of 'formal and informal' further, chapters four and five focus on the alternating of frames of reference evident in the interaction of the various groups at Cheval. The paternalist frame of reference, a survival of the 'former' managerial ethos, competes on various levels with the bureaucratic frame of reference, the 'official' managerial style, creating a mosaic of formal and informal representations by the various interest groups within the factory. The alternation of frames of reference introduces the role of the binary opposition of macro and micro-level politics. The assumptions of political rhetoric are frequently challenged by the unique character of 'local' relations.

Chapter six takes a look at a few sets of informal relations, often emphasizing the link between formal and informal relations as well as reflecting on the low density relations between workers on the factory floor. The primary aim of this chapter is to elucidate informal relations and to draw attention to the need for some understanding of such relations to be reflected in the construction of any formal proposal geared to change.

Chapter seven provides the reader with a rather distilled summation of the major themes and concepts around which the thesis is developed.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE AND THEMES

2.1. Literature Survey

Although there has been a fair amount written in the vein of 'industrial anthropology', little however, is available locally¹. For instance, Holzberg & Giovannini (1981) cite over 300 references, mostly American, in their appraisal of anthropology and industry, of which only a very small percentage (between 10 to 15 per cent) is available locally. Why this local 'indifference' to industrial anthropology exists is a difficult question to answer. Perhaps the vastly superior number of tertiary institutions in the United States and the extent of urbanization and industrial development within that country might partially explain the relative academic apathy detectable locally in the field of industrial anthropology. Or perhaps the answer lies concealed somewhere amidst the traditions of American anthropology.

Developing a suitable response to such a question would require a study of its own. Suffice it to say, South African anthropology does not appear to share with its American counterpart a distinct interest in the field of industrial anthropology. To the best of my knowledge, the anthropology department of the University of Natal currently offers the only undergraduate course in

¹ An observation such as this obviously omits the abundance of sociological studies of industry that are readily available. The omission is based on the macro-political vis-a-vis the micro-industrial distinction between these broad sociological studies and studies such as my own.

industrial anthropology in the country. Although certain contemporary South African anthropologists have conducted studies into various sociological aspects of industry (see Whisson et al:1979, Cheater:1986 and Moodie:1980²), such studies have generally not emanated from these scholars' specific interests in industry. Cheater's publications to date reflect a rather general interest in class formations, notably in the rural areas of Zimbabwe (Cheater:1975, 1984). In the introduction to her study of factory organization, she remarks, "Why study such a factory system? To an academic anthropologist, there is the attraction of doing something different" (Cheater:1986;xiii).

Whisson's audit of the implementation of the Sullivan Principles at Ford, Port Elizabeth, was done under commission by the S.A. Institute of Race Relations who were approached by Ford to carry out such a study. The audit itself is an example of an interdisciplinary 'team study' rather than a specifically anthropological study. Moodie, on the other hand, appears more interested in 'urbanization' than industry per se³. His studies (see Moodie:1980,1983,1994) focus largely on mineworkers in the context of the mine compound. Issues such as identity, ethnicity and authority largely form the nucleus of Moodie's interests in mine workers and the mining industry. Although he does discuss certain features of the 'workplace', his appraisal of and interest in this aspect of industry clearly remains secondary to

² Although Moodie is a trained sociologist, his studies reflect a certain 'observationalist' research approach which, although not strictly anthropological, does however restrict his research field to the 'microstudy', discerning some rather interesting sociological minutiae which, given a certain latitude, accord quite closely with the general tenor of anthropological studies.

³.The distinction between 'urbanization' and 'industry' will be discussed in more detail later on in this section.

the social processes he evinces in the mine compound itself.

Given the paucity of local industrial anthropological literature, a rather valuable alternative source are those studies associated with the 'Manchester School', at the anthropology department at Manchester University. Most of the research supporting these studies was undertaken whilst members were affiliated to the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute located in Northern Rhodesia (as it was then). The Manchester 'connection' is probably best articulated through the influence of Max Gluckman. As director of the Institute between 1942 and 1947, his ideas were taken up by the Fellows who now came to do fieldwork. In 1947 Gluckman left the Institute to take up a teaching appointment at Oxford, and after a couple of years he moved again, opening up a department of anthropology at Manchester University. But throughout he had maintained close association with the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute. A number of the Fellows were later associated with the Manchester department and even those who were not, often remained quite committed to the tenets of the 'Manchester school' (see Kuper:1973;175-203).

The 'Rhodes-Livingstone Papers', as they were called, covered various aspects of social organization, including some pioneering work on the concept of 'social networks' (Mitchell:1969). It was the earlier work of Wilson (1942) and Gluckman (1940, 1949) that led to a series of systematic studies of the region. Born out of this interest in social networks and change, a number of Rhodes-Livingstone Fellows were encouraged to examine relationships within the urban context as well as relations between urban and rural areas. The publication of Philip Mayer's book Townsmen or Tribesmen in 1961, which elucidated the cultural and social linkages between the rural and urban areas, lent further justification to the importance of extending the examination of

social networks into the urban areas.

The belief that the peoples of this region, who had been, either directly or indirectly, effected by colonial and industrial-commercial developments, constituted a field of significant anthropological enquiry was characteristic of most of these studies'. Mitchell (1954), McCulloch (1956) and Epstein (1958) were among the first Rhodes-Livingstone scholars to start working in the towns. Urban studies in Zambia in the 1960s were conducted by scholars such as Harries-Jones (1964), Boswell (1965) and Kapferer (1969). Kapferer's study of an African factory (1972) represented something of a watershed for the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute's interest in urban studies.

The advent of de-colonization created further opportunities for urban research. Independent rule facilitated protracted studies and, furthermore, enabled researchers to live among their 'subjects', an arrangement previously denied to them by the ever suspicious colonial officers and the animosity of the subjugated African population. Kapferer and Boswell were among the first Rhodes-Livingstone researchers to exploit these new conditions. Kapferer's study of an African factory in Kabwe, Zambia (Kapferer:1972), reported, in the first instance, on work-place behaviour. Kapferer's study was one of the first studies of Africans in an urban context that analyzed such a matrix of

' It was assumed that, in the words of Mitchell, "...[the] relations into which the people of the region had been drawn were as much a proper subject of anthropological study as the indigenous social systems of the people themselves" (Introduction to Kapferer:1972:viii). No longer was it the anthropologist's task to examine 'pristine' social systems, but rather to recognize and comprehend change and, as a concomitant, to examine ways in which such societies confronted change.

interaction through the application of the anthropological procedure of direct observation.

The significance of the Rhodes-Livingstone studies is the manner in which the locus of such studies shifted from the 'traditional' rural focus to, or expanded to include, an urban focus which was largely predicated on the development of mining, an industrial concern. The studies traced the social forces in operation at the time. Africa was experiencing a steady process of urbanization and the researchers were forced to move along with this process. Although the Manchester\Rhodes-Livingstone's influence was not essentially industrial, the patterns of interest described above significantly facilitated anthropological studies of industrial situations.

Kapferer's study of workplace behaviour provided the impetus for a series of studies reflecting a heightened interest in African industrial life. Lloyd (1974), Lubeck (1975) and Peace (1979) were just some of the industrial studies that proceeded from Kapferer's somewhat pioneering work. Peace's study was the first of a series; the Harvester Studies in African Political Economy, which offered a medium through which the results of recent work on Africa could be published. Peace's study elucidated the linkages between the rural and urban areas, supplementing the prevailing interest in social networks between the town and countryside. The Harvester Studies, like the Manchester studies, appeared to emerge from certain rural interests and move with the actual social processes, i.e. urbanization, into the urban areas.

Although the Rhodes-Livingstone\Manchester studies and the studies associated with the University of Sussex display certain similarities in their sociological intents, for instance an

interest in social and personal networks⁵, they do, however, frequently diverge in their respective appraisal of the nature of rural-urban continuities. Mitchell, in his study of the Kalela dance (Mitchell:1956), emphasized the social or cultural discontinuities between the rural and urban areas⁶ (a rural-urban dichotomy), while Peace, in his study of African workers in a Nigerian factory, illustrates certain linkages between the rural and urban areas.

The distinction between 'urbanization' and 'industry', broached rather fleetingly above, is an interesting and important one. Studies covering the concept of 'social networks' were largely studies of urbanization, a prominent exception being Kapferer's detailed study of the 'Cell Room' of the Electro-Zinc Plant of the Zambia Broken Hill Development Company (Kapferer:1969). The interests and objectives of the researchers engaged in such fields were to discern the character of individual and group reactions to this nascent urban milieu. When we speak of 'urbanization', the assumption is often implicit that there is a two-fold change; people change from agricultural work to industrial work, while at the same time changing from rural to urban residence. For instance, Mitchell's use of the concept *tribalism* became less of a cultural\social references than a, quite novel, category of organization which had developed in the

⁵ Although social networks, as represented in a complex set of inter-relationships in a social system, has a long history, the purported difference between this former usage and that which gained prominence in the 1950s, is that the latter was "an analytic rather than metaphoric concept" (Mitchell:1969;1). The analytic application of the concept specifies the properties of such inter-relationships while the metaphoric merely refers to the interconnections of social relationships, without particular reference to the actors themselves.

⁶ For a critique of Mitchell's accentuation of the rural-urban dichotomy, see Argyle 1991.

quite novel, category of organization which had developed in the mosaic of interaction in the mine compounds. Researchers were interested in how groups developed a new matrix of meaning and identity in the quite recently established urban milieu. The structures in these contexts were regarded as being more atomistic than the 'shop-floor' structures confronting the industrial anthropologists.

Industrial studies, on the other hand, are attempts at discerning workplace activity, how the workers respond to the constraints and relationships intrinsic to the structure of production. Kapferer's study illustrates the various strategies adopted by workers, and managers, in attempting to strengthen their respective positions within the context of formal industrial relations (Kapferer:1972). However, the distinction is rather plastic. As Peace's study suggests, a focus on African industrialization should include reference to class formations (Peace:1979;5).

An appraisal of class formations tends to extend the analysis beyond a narrow look at workplace behaviour to a position tantamount to that occupied by the anthropologists investigating 'urbanization'. Classes are sociological strata that unite certain elements of a society and exhibit a similar 'categorizing' tendency as, for instance, Mitchell's concept of *tribalism*. However, despite these potential shortcomings, the distinction remains a useful one.

One of the areas that quite candidly bears out the importance of such a distinction is the question of methodology. As Kapferer demonstrates, a certain psychological appraisal, or

methodological individualism⁷, is occasionally quite useful in analysing motives and strategies adopted by particular individuals in particular contexts. This is not to suggest an abandonment of 'the group', but rather an augmentation of techniques that were largely developed in pre-industrial or rural contexts. The complexity of industrial relations⁸ may be simplified or rendered more manageable if the anthropologist tempers the discipline's 'distaste' for methodological individualism somewhat and adopts a more flexible methodological approach.

Turner's work offers a valuable illustration. His method frequently combines general analysis with the individual case study (Turner:1957;ix). Although, as some of the critics of psychological anthropology have pointed out, in its methodological sense individualism can be contrasted with holism, such a view is largely an exaggeration. Psychological anthropologists, such as Bruner, have quite categorically stated that their interest is "not in any particular person in all his

⁷ This reference to 'methodological individualism' requires a few clarifying remarks. I am not using it in the sense that all the philosophical assumptions informing such methods are espoused by the anthropologists concerned. They are not psychologists, however, they are simply acknowledging the situational elevation of personality in a particular context. It is not a matter of abandoning assumptions about the role of the group, but rather acknowledging the interplay between certain personalities and 'the group'. However, the group still maintains central importance.

⁸ For instance, the imposition of a rigid structure of authority and identity in the form of 'standard industrial relations' creates increased potential for duplicity, subterfuge and various other 'covert' activities. An illustration of this would be the assumed ideological\structural opposition between managers and workers which creates a rather stereotyped set of expectations. Such expectations are easily manipulated, enabling individuals and groups to adopt 'contradictory' agendas that remain largely undetected.

uniqueness; individuals are studied for the light they shed on regularities in the social process" (Bruner:1964;72).

This, at times troublesome, distinction between 'urbanization' and 'industry' is perhaps given extra clarity by the evident 'divisions' in American urban anthropology⁹. Urbanization studies are numerous. Articles in journals such as Urban Studies, Ethnic and Racial Studies and Human Organization offer commentary on a variety of issues from politics; local government, civics, municipalities, town planning, to economics; consumption, income distribution, to social organization; ethnic enclaves, immigration, racial features, which are all central issues in the study of urbanization¹⁰.

Within these particular studies, there is however, little attention focused on industry *per se*. A large portion of American industrial anthropological studies might well be considered under headings such as 'organizational studies' or 'social psychology' or 'human relations'. For instance, Arensberg and Macgregor's (1942) article is concerned with one particular aspect of industry, the determination of morale. Bell (1979), Belshaw (1960), Chapple (1942), Chapple & Arensberg (1940) are just a few

⁹ Theoretically, the relative positions of these two foci are not contradictory. On the contrary, the situation is such that they merely occupy opposing positions on the same continuum. Elements of 'psychology' are to be found in studies of urbanization as well. However, I am merely suggesting that the pre-existing structure of industrial relations, production, etc. necessitates a greater 'methodological mix' than urbanization studies wherein structures are far more atomistic than those found in industry.

¹⁰ Obviously such categories are not mutually exclusive. However they do offer some insight into the various kinds of interests incorporated within studies on urbanization.

more examples of articles that deal quite specifically with a single aspect of industrial organization or personnel within industry.

Although much of the social psychology or industrial relations literature is pursued under the label of 'applied anthropology' it does, nevertheless, reflect the methodological eclecticism of much of America's industrial anthropology¹¹. Considering this contrast between studies of urbanization and studies of industry, one can discern that the distinction operates on at least two levels. Firstly, the ethnographic extent of industrial studies appears to be generally more circumscribed than the urbanization studies. Secondly, Industrial studies exhibit a tendency to be more methodologically eclectic than studies on urbanization, and moreover, American literature reflects a greater willingness to experiment with interdisciplinary methods.

However, as I have previously asserted, the boundaries are not rigid. Arensberg's 'Industry and Community' (Arensberg:1942) incorporates aspects of both industrial and urbanization studies. This is not intended to provide an exhaustive bibliography of industrial anthropology but rather, a brief insight into the kinds of studies that proved valuable in the completion of this thesis. There are others, notably the studies undertaken by Holmstrom (1976,1984). However, the kinds of studies mentioned, in a sense map out the development of industrial anthropology, as well as some of the methodological considerations that inform these studies.

¹¹ For a bibliography of industrial anthropological literature see Holzberg & Giovannini (1981) and Burawoy (1979).

2.2. Extraction of Themes

This particular analysis of factory organization employs various concepts and embraces particular themes that are, in certain respects, borrowed from the literature appraised above. Perhaps the most prominent of these conceptualizations is Kapferer's depiction of the the factory floor as part of an arena of contestation (Kapferer:1972). In his study, the concepts of field and arena are rather deftly employed in the illustration of strategic interaction on the factory floor. The factory is treated as a setting or "locale" (Kapferer:1972;120) in which the participants organize resources present in the setting itself and introduce resources external to it in the pursuit of their various interests.

Through the employment of the concepts of field and arena, Kapferer has shown how the field of action expands and contracts over time. Dependent on the expansion and contraction of the field is the extent to which individuals and agencies who do not ordinarily participate on the factory floor are able to enter the field and influence activities. The most apposite illustrations of such agencies are governmental agencies and trade union organizations.

In the context of a dispute, the interest groups involved will choose particular strategies that are essentially considerations of the character of that particular dispute. The evident patterns that Kapferer discerns show a marked degree of strategic versatility. The premium placed on certain strategies in the context of particular disputes is, as Kapferer observes, largely a function of the relationship between these groups and the broader social processes. For instance, the dynamics of a particular dispute might encourage management to attempt to

expand the field of contestation to include trade union organization and/or governmental agencies. Management may perceive that the participation of such 'resources' in the expanded field will strengthen its position in the process of negotiation on the factory floor.

However, as Kapferer quite clearly demonstrates, the relationship between these interest groups on the factory floor and the external agencies are notably inconsistent. Indeed, a fundamental feature of Kapferer's description of these processes is the manner in which workers and management come to "alter their perceptions and the inferences based on them of what resources in the environment in which the factory is set are relevant to the process of negotiation on the factory floor" (Kapferer:1972;123). The value of an analysis of this nature is, in part, its usefulness in overcoming some of the problems with the conventional structural-functional analysis, most significantly, the problems encountered with structural-functional analysis as applied to rapidly changing modern contexts. The dynamic interaction, which Kapferer encountered between interest groups, defied the structural-functionalist arguments of 'coherent social structure' and "institutions which are necessarily interconnected and consistent with one another" (Kapferer:1972;122).

By perceiving the workplace as a contested terrain, Kapferer is able to demonstrate how the various interest groups select strategies that are situationally appropriate and incorporate a particular logic, despite the possibility of certain 'contradictory' patterns emerging. The apparent contradictions that emerge in the kinds of strategies adopted by these interest groups become explicable in Kapferer's framework of altering fields of action. Each dispute evokes a unique set of

considerations for the participating groups and individuals. That one particular group might favour a strategy which was previously favoured by one of the other interest groups, demonstrates the changing character of the disputes and, concomitantly, the logic of strategic flexibility.

Within this focus on strategic interaction, Kapferer discusses the position of one particularly interesting man, Patel, the manager and one of the company's co-owners. Patel had developed for himself a rather cunningly 'ambiguous' relationship with his co-owners and workers. This ambiguity derives in part from an ability to successfully manage impressions so as to avoid being 'typecast' in any particular situation. On the one hand, he is a particularly hard taskmaster, at the same time however, he maintains the image of the benefactor who is largely sympathetic to the needs of the workers.

In certain respects, Patel evinces a form of managerial 'dualism'. He frequently withdraws from open dispute with his employees, drawing in his business partners into these negotiations, enabling him to impart the impression to his workers that he feels for them, but that the action surrounding the dispute is out of his control. This dualism which Kapferer discerns, is essentially Patel's ability to instruct his workers and to maintain production etc. without incurring the displeasure of his employees. He is able to successfully manipulate impression to the extent that any benefits accruing to the workforce are construed as coming from him, while any negotiated settlement that reflects more in the favour of management is misconstrued as an outcome attributable to his partners. In a sense, he constructs, through the use of imagery and action, a dualism in management 'styles'; the paternal, caring benefactor which he is often likened to, and the formal,

insensitive professional manager which is the reputation of his fellow owners.

A second theme of particular interest is that of the existence of both formal and informal modes of organization and activity on the factory floor. Approaching the subject from the view of the anthropology of work, Mars, particularly in his Cheats at Work (Mars:1982), has dealt with the question at some length. As he asserts, if students of industrial relations want to find out what people are actually capable of rather than what they are actually required to do in the job, they must "learn to listen to the music behind the words" (Mars:1982;182).

This rather eloquently cryptic message is a reference to actual rather than *purported* meaning(s). The general tenor of worker-management disputes or general worker dissatisfaction often veils the real issues at stake. Certain worker grievances have what might be referred to as 'intrinsic credibility'. Wage disputes, hours of work, paid leave are just a few of the more 'popular' areas of worker-management dispute. And it is issues such as these that tend to be the 'decoy' issues through which workers express dissatisfaction arising from other issues that, for obvious reasons, lack this 'intrinsic credibility'. For Mars, workplace 'fiddling' is one such practice. However, it is this principle of deception that concerns us here as opposed to fiddling *per se*.

These illicit or uncondonable activities are the substance of what Mars refers to as the "music behind the words". They are part of the covert or informal institutions that are central to the structure of the workplace. They, along with their formal and overt counterparts, contribute to what Mars regards as the "workers' environment" (Mars:1982;184). Mars refers to two broad

changes which intentionally or unintentionally tighten the working environment; technological change and organizational change.

Generally such changes are made in ignorance of the existence and functioning of these covert institutions. When such institutions are threatened by change, the worker(s) is vulnerable, first in the way the job is organized and secondly, to changes in the way he negotiates for and obtains the rewards or reinstitutes the activities he believes are due to him. But he cannot actually say as much, there is no official language to protest about such threats. The most common language he can employ is that which is couched in 'intrinsically credible' concerns.

Verging on this point, Mars questions the role of the manager. Is it not, he asks, the responsibility of the manager to 'manage', which includes a knowledge of his men and their work? In response to his own question, Mars draws on the issue of socialization, referring to the manager as an "outsider in the social sense". Management ethnocentrism inculcates in such personnel an "inbuilt difficulty in appreciating the otherness of other cultures" (Mars:1982;200). In a prior publication Mars expounds on this conception of the manager as the 'social outsider' by suggesting that managers "throughout industry, commerce and government, can be treated as having a cohesive ideology or culture; a set of beliefs and values that allows them to be studied anthropologically" (Mars:1981;4).

This management 'culture', generally defined as a highly valued sense of individualism, frustrates management's efforts to comprehend the true nature of the workers' environment. Management does not have the necessary access to the 'workers'

world' in order to understand the need for and nature of the workers' covert or informal institutions; managers cannot listen to the "music behind the words".

The significance of Mars' observations rests on this notion of change. For regardless of management's 'good' intentions, uninformed introduction of change to the workplace "is always resented because it disrupts informal rules and tends to push workers upgrid when new rules formalize and replace existing informal rules" (Mars:1982;202). Management, or for that matter any other agency, which introduces change to the workplace without considering its covert institutions is operating blindfolded. As Mars rather aptly illustrates, it is of fundamental importance for management or students of industrial relations to understand that management is not solely responsible for the development and control of workplace behaviour. Although managers are largely responsible for the imposition and control of formal activities and institutions, such a sphere of workplace activity is but half of what the workers perceive as the 'workplace environment'. Although the formal institutions often influence the nature of informal institutions and covert activities, they are however, essentially two separate spheres of activity.

If managers wish to fully understand the 'music behind the words' they must understand that they are not the sole custodians of workplace 'meaning'. The workforce constructs a set of values and beliefs, informed as they are by the workers shared conditions and perception of these conditions, which is largely inaccessible to management who, as Mars points out, are largely 'outsiders' to the workers' 'world'.

CHAPTER 3: EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES AT CHEVAL: FORMAL AND INFORMAL MECHANISMS

Before discussing the actual mechanisms of the employment practices evident at Cheval, the chapter offers a brief introduction to the factory lay out and production process which might assist the reader in establishing the situation of certain events and personalities referred to in the thesis.

3.1. FOCUS ON CHEVAL

Cheval Shoes (pty) Ltd was founded in 1973. The company is currently located in Pinetown, a municipality approximately 20 km north-west of Durban. Set back of the road, a narrow driveway provides access to the factory covering an area of approximately 3000 square meters. The factory is presently located in the more recently developed Richmond industrial area, having relocated from Westmead Industrial Park some 13 years ago.

The company produces a wide range of shoes that are marketed under both the company's label; Chevalier, and the various clients' labels. According to the chief designer, the company's range is considered "middle of the road", in terms of design, appealing to a very "middle-class" market with relatively conservative tastes. In the company's favour, its high level of mechanization enhances its ability to produce a more diverse range of shoes than most of its local competitors. Neighbouring Crown Footwear exclusively manufacture court shoes, while other local competitors are similarly specialized, giving Cheval a

distinct advantage in its ability to appeal more broadly to interested retail outlets with its greater range of shoes.

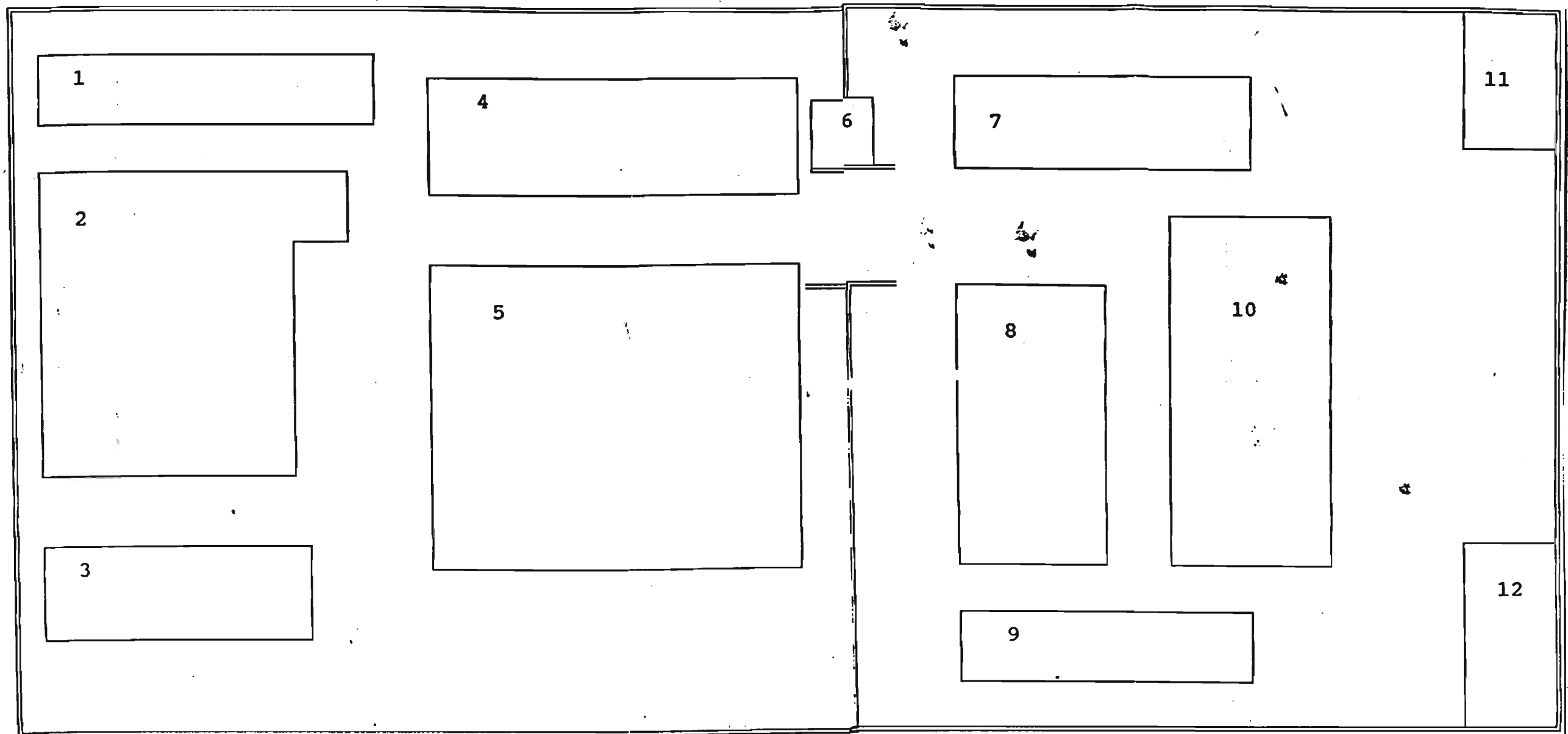
3.1.1. Employees

Two separate categories of employee are evident in terms of the structure of remuneration; wage and salaried employees. At the time of this study there were 239 wage employees and 17 salaried staff. The quantitative differences in remuneration notwithstanding, the primary distinguishing feature was the mode of payment. Wage workers receive weekly wages, paid in cash every Friday while salaried employees receive monthly salaries deposited directly into their bank accounts. The mode of payment contains a certain status differential in that promotion into the upper echelons of management is accompanied by a shift from wage to salary status.

The racial and sexual breakdown of the wage labour force is as follows:

Description	Indian	Coloured	African	Total
No. of workers:	M\F 99:67	M\F 0:1	M\F 41:31	M\F 140:99
% of workforce:	41:28	0:0.4	17:13	58:42
Total No.	166	1	72	239
Total as %	69	0.4	29.6	100

Following the purchase and occupation of the adjoining factory some 10 years ago, the work floor is now divided into factory A and factory B. Factory A contains the original administrative offices, storage and preparations departments, closing and



INDEX

1. Clicking Department
2. Closing Department
3. Stores
4. A & B Making Tracks
5. Bottom Stock\Preparations Department
6. Faking Department

7. A & B Shoeroom
8. C Making Track
9. C Shoeroom
10. Despatch\Packing Area
11. Despatch Offices
12. Design Offices

clicking departments as well as making tracks A and B. Factory B operations are largely a continuation of factory A's although a third making track, track C, contributes significantly to mid-phase production. Adjoining factory B, at the south end, are the design offices where four designers or shoe draughtsmen are situated.

Between Factory A and B, located alongside the inter-leading corridor, is the faking department. Here, repairs are performed on shoes damaged in the manufacturing process. Stretched uppers, damaged heels, protruding tacks are just some of the kinds of 'inhouse repairs' that take place within the faking department. To provide a more comprehensible picture of the manufacturing process, I will describe each inter-leading phase of production from the acquisition of the raw materials to the despatching of the finished product.

3.1.2. Manufacturing Process

Every six months the range of shoes produced by Cheval is updated. This new release includes both completely new designs as well as certain amendments to existing patterns, depending on their ability to be modified with regard to the changing requirements of fashion. The design department works continuously throughout the year preparing the new range for its imminent release. Considerations such as the changing requirements of the market and the ability of the existing level of mechanization and specialization to accommodate new patterns are amongst the primary factors that informs the design process. Such a process includes the production of the shoe. The most expedient leather cuts as well as the kinds of stitching, their relative strength and so on are all formulated by computer. Pattern information is fed into the computer which proceeds to determine the most appropriate, in terms of cost and quality, design for a particular shoe.

A trial is then conducted. Each new design is put to the test

by a single 'production run', producing one pair of all the new shoes. This trial run provides essential feedback on any possible faults in the design which are duly modified. Once management is confident that a shoe of acceptable standard can be efficiently produced, the shoe is then put on display in the viewing room, contributing to a range from which prospective clients may order.

Leather and synthetic materials are kept in the store room beneath the factory offices. Most of the leather is obtained from local tanneries although a certain amount is supplied by international agents. Heels, lacing, soles, buckles and various other shoe accessories are stored in the bottom stock department in factory A (see diagram A). From the store rooms, the leather and synthetic materials are taken to the folding tables where they are prepared for cutting. Each shoe design includes a variety of different cuts, all of which are performed in the 'clicking department', so named because of the clicking sound made by the cutting machines.

Amongst the responsibilities of a clicker, is to ensure that in each cut the quality of the material is appropriate for the position of that cut in the shoe's design. The quality of a reasonably large piece of leather may vary quite considerably from one end to the other. The upper part of a shoe, i.e. the most visible part, needs as a matter of course, to be of the greatest quality. A further consideration is that of thickness. The back support that rounds the heel of the foot needs to be of a more durable quality than most other cuts. The clicker is required to observe all the nuances of texture and thickness in excising the most appropriate and economical cuts from a sheet of leather.

Working with synthetic materials, such precision is unnecessary. Although economy is still a factor, less regard is given to the variation of texture. In contrast to the single-cut procedure required by leather cutting, synthetics are usually 'doubled up' cutting as many as 10 sheets in one press. For the cutting of

both leather and synthetics, the machinery is essentially the same. The pressing of two buttons simultaneously (an action necessitating the use of both hands, keeping them clear of the knives) lowers the press onto the knives which, given the pressure, cuts through the material beneath. In the case of leather cutting, more precision is afforded by the machines high manoeuvrability than in the synthetic cutter's standard press operation.

Given the high cost of the knives used in cutting, the average knife set costs in the region of R800, small orders are cut by hand. Only once an order exceeds 1000 is it considered economically viable to purchase the appropriate knife set. Manual cutters average about 80 pairs of shoes a day while machinists average up to 300 pairs of shoes a day.

The shoe cuttings are continuously packed into crates which are delivered to the closing department. Here the various cuts are stitched together and where necessary, further embellished with buckles, straps and various other elaborations that adorn the modern shoe. The closing department is highly mechanized consisting of row upon row of specialized machinery offering every necessary form of 'closing' the various shoes may require. At any point in time there might be as many as 10 different shoes circulating around the closing department.

Designated workers ensure that shoes requiring multiple closing move smoothly from one machine operative to the next. The sequence of orders is obviously determined by the priority of output. However, priority is not determined by a simple time equation, but includes considerations of the design's relative simplicity and of the status of the clients concerned.

The production process is multilinear as opposed to unilinear. While specific orders are receiving attention in the cutting and closing departments, certain related preparations are under way in the bottom stock\preparations department (see diagram A). For

instance, the counting and preparations of heels and socks, the coloured inner of a shoe, takes place simultaneously with the closing of the corresponding uppers. The heels are sent out to other manufacturers for closing as the acquisition costs of the necessary machinery and manpower makes such an undertaking economically unviable. Once the upper is completed, i.e. all the necessary stitching has been accomplished, it is trimmed of any remaining tassels and shaped in a temperature controlled mould. This is necessary as the upper is then placed onto a last, according to its size, upon which it will remain throughout the 'making' process.

Although the three making tracks are similar in function, a distinction does exist on a level of mechanization. Making tracks A and B are essentially the same, it is just a matter of an upper and a lower track that distinguishes them. The work space and machinery utilized are identical. However, making track C is situated in factory B and is markedly more mechanized. Making track A is operated by 27 workers and has an average daily output of about 1600 pairs of shoes. The operation of track C involves 11 personnel who achieve an average of about 2200 pairs of shoes a day. The differences in labour input and production levels can most fairly be explained by the respective levels of mechanization utilized on the different making tracks. Making track C was established once the adjoining factory was purchased by the company. Its more recent development meant that the level of technology was higher, enabling it to significantly increase production.

The first step in the making process is the attachment of the upper and the inner sole to the last. From this point the last proceeds along the track, receiving attention from no less than twenty operatives, the last undergoes a transformation from a simple upper into a perfectly contoured shoe. The making process involves firstly, the attaching the inner sole to the last. Followed by the attachment of the upper over the last and tacked beneath the base, partially covering the sole. The last then runs

along a conveyer through a heating system which reinforces the shape of the shoe. The flaps of the upper that are tacked beneath the last are then sanded and a cork cushioning fixed to the sole in the upper central part of the shoe. Over this cork fix, the heel component of the shoe is then attached and the shoe finally removed from the last.

Shoes leaving making tracks A and B are then sent to shoe rooms A and B while those shoes leaving track C are directed to shoe room C. The shoe rooms or finishing tracks as they occasionally referred to as, represent the final stage of the production process. Here, much like the making tracks, the shoe moves along a conveyer belt being attended to by the various operatives. It is here that the socks are inserted, featuring the various company's logos. The shoes are then cleaned with an oil based substance, dried and then proceed through quality control. Rejected shoes are sent to the faking department where the blemishes are 'faked'. Those shoes passing through the quality check are packed in boxes and sent to the despatch area.

The administrative offices are located on a mezzanine level over-looking factory A. The area includes the male workers' recreational area. The present staff occupants are:

Managing Directors [owners]: Mr & Mrs Von Falkenhausen

Factory Manager: Brett Momberg

Marketing Manager: James Staning

Logistics Manager: Robbie Van Wieringen

Clerical Staff: Gregory, Prem, Satha and Tony

3.2. EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES

The initial reasoning behind the inclusion of this section was quite simply to provide the reader with a better overall understanding of the formal workings of the factory. However, it became increasingly evident that to effect a precise dichotomy

between the formal and informal, or official and actual, relations was a hopelessly impossible task. Not unlike the arguments accompanying the debates that arose over the concept of the "dual economy" (Harriss:1990), which enjoyed a certain vogue in the 1980s, it became readily apparent that the overlap of formal and informal relations would not accommodate a neat and systematic separation of the two.

However, although the discussion inevitably contains illustrations of 'informal relations', the intention remains, albeit somewhat qualified, to present an account of the formal situation of employment at Cheval.

3.2.1. Recruitment

Although the company favours more formal channels for recruiting personnel, such as the use of employment agencies and the media, in practice however the mode of recruitment varies between this formal position and such informal mechanisms as "grapevine" recruitment (Grint:1991;257). Grapevine recruitment procedures are, according to Grint, familial based and illustrate the links between home and work. The varied mode of recruitment that obtains at Cheval derives from, I would argue, the varying levels of qualification required for the kinds of jobs available in the factory.

The company tends to be more rigorous in its efforts to recruit skilled labour than is the case for unskilled labour. Personnel recruited for positions as cutters, for instance, who are considered highly skilled artisans, are generally procured from employment agencies. The requisite experience is guaranteed through such formal channels of recruitment. In contrast, grapevine recruitment can offer no such guarantees and consequently is used for the recruitment of unskilled personnel, although it should be noted that there are exceptions.

Interestingly, the company does not officially sanction the use of any informal means of recruitment. The existence and use of such channels appears to be largely a product of South Africa's astonishingly high level of unemployment. Vacancies are quite quickly and expeditiously filled by the grapevine method, as over a third of the workers questioned had unemployed dependants of a working age residing within their households. The value of this informal recruiting procedure is the speed with which vacancies are filled. Time lost is minimal and the administrative work involved in handling such matters through an employment agency is eliminated.

Although grapevine recruitment is not the only informal means of recruitment, it does appear however, to be the most utilized mechanism. In the case of 'random' or 'chance' employment, the influence of the 'grapevine' is again evident. This process is less a question of 'chance' as 'chancers' quite often respond to a tip off by some employee rather than randomly seeking employment.

The company's primary objection to informal modes of labour recruitment is the potentially restricting influence that familial and other extra-factory linkages are generally assumed (by the owner) to have on the ability of management, particularly at the lower levels, to exercise effective control. In a discussion with the owner, the overall impression was that familial ties in particular, would militate against effective control were an individual manager part of a skein of kin relations amongst workers on the factory floor. The different identity and status configurations in the kinship systems operating beyond the confines of the factory may well be incompatible with the status and system of authority accorded these same individuals in the work situation. A further scenario broached by the owner was the potential of "favouritism" prejudicing management's ability to deal with their charges in an essentially equal fashion.

Despite the potentially genuine nature of management's concern, there appears to be more to this question than simply the issue of lower management's ability to manage. Bailey introduced the concept of the 'moral community'¹ in which he claims that participation within a geographical boundary was considered to be participation within a particular system of rewards (Bailey:1966;400). Cheater has applied this concept to an industrial setting. She asserts that the factory workers themselves regarded the factory as a "captive employment market" which they felt should be restricted to the relatives of those already employed (Cheater:1986;43). The future employment of kin was regarded as a legitimate perk.

The extensive use of grapevine recruitment at Cheval suggested that this occasionally expedient mechanism of recruitment was being mistaken for a right rather than an alternative recruitment procedure. Management was, in effect, fighting against the establishment of a 'moral community' in order to maintain complete control over the workforce². It was an attempt to avoid a situation like the "family business ethos" in which discipline and commitment are assumed to decline as job security became

¹ There are various examples of industries that utilize the 'moral community' as a mechanism of their formal employment policies. Clarke observed that a "continuity existed between the society of the factory and the village" in Japanese industry, suggesting that the industry had to bear a certain responsibility towards the village in terms of it having to employ local villagers (Clarke:1979;78). While Holmstrom, in his study of Indian factory workers, noted that "all firms give preference to employees' relatives...", a rather general feature of the 'moral community' (Holmstrom:1976;48).

² Although Whisson et al (1979:71) treat the concept of the moral community with a rather different emphasis, i.e. on the value of worker loyalty and participation, management at Cheval are equally opposed to this. Management's attitude, so I was informed, is that "total transparency" must be the order of the day. They attempt to achieve worker loyalty and participation through competitive wages and effective industrial relations as opposed to bandying about the image of the 'factory as a family'.

erroneously associated with familial ties as opposed to quality of personal workmanship. As one employee rather aptly remarked; "finding the job for oneself implies a certain motivation for the job".

Many of the factory's employees that have been recruited through this grapevine mechanism have done so based on the information provided by one particularly well placed individual. During discussion with employees, the picture that emerged was one in which this particular individual was, more often than not, the purveyor of vital information regarding job vacancies. Such information is of considerable value to the prospecting individual as the timing of recruitment is unpredictable and consequently such information offers a decisive advantage over job seekers relying solely on chance.

Here was an individual who had access to information regarding recruitment. It was quite obvious that certain people had benefitted directly from such information. A rather ad hoc survey conducted by the author showed that out of a total of 17 workers who had gained employment through the grape-vine recruitment method, 12 (70%) had done so on the basis of the information provided by this particular individual. The information, in the context of high unemployment, can quite reasonably be regarded as a valuable resource. In significant respects, the situation conjured up images of the role of the "gate-keeper" or the "broker" offering access to a resource over which only he had control. However, the reciprocal element intrinsic to transactions of this nature was absent. To my knowledge this 'gate-keeper' accepted no payment or compensation of any discernible form for the information he provided.

As a role, the position of gate-keeper infers a conscious manipulation of or control over certain valuable resources, material or otherwise. Occupying this position, the incumbent may make certain demands on others in return for providing access to such resources, in this case information and subsequent

employment. One of the assumptions evident in such conceptualization of the role is the provision of reciprocity or reward and the notion of control. Although this individual enjoyed exclusive control over the dissemination of pertinent information, he did not appear to be benefitting from the provision of this information. Such behaviour, at first, appeared to be altruistic.

However, given the value of the information, and of the considerable risk taken in providing it³, the idea that such efforts are not in any way rewarded seems irrational. It seems highly improbable that those workers willing to reveal details of how they gained employment, a considerably risky confession to a researcher who spent as much time with the managers as he did with the workers, would subsequently lie about the manner in which the purveyor was rewarded. Without exception, these 'clients' asserted that the information was received without any reciprocal obligation. Although they were clearly appreciative of the opportunity to work, they did not regard themselves in any way indebted to the 'gate-keeper'.

The individual concerned was a member of a lift club. The club involved three cars which picked up workers from their homes before work and dropped them off again after work. Although over half of the lift club members were in possession of their own vehicles, use of vehicles would nevertheless rotate amongst these members in order to share the costs involved. All the club members worked on the factory floor with the 'gate-keeper' being the only exception. He was a clerk, working in the administrative offices.

The absence of any reciprocal elements diverted my attention to Marcel Mauss's analysis of 'gift giving'. In his discussion of

³ As mentioned, the company is formally opposed to grape-vine recruitment. By divulging the information, this individual is placing himself in considerable danger.

the obligation to give, he refers to various illustrative expressions that "denote the superiority of the giver over the donee" (Mauss:1969;37). Analogous to such expressions is the behaviour of the "chief" during Indian potlatch ceremonies in which he is observed "flamboyantly destroying blankets and valuables" (Keesing:1981;150). Here we have behaviour that is markedly one-sided. However, it is neither altruistic nor irrational. The logic or rationale is the status accruing to the 'chief' or the 'gift giver'. Rewards are not necessarily material. Adrian Peace's "host", discussed in his study of Nigerian factory workers, did not receive any sort of material payment for providing lodgings and an entrée into the 'world of the worker' for recent rural migrants. He did so, argued Peace, "because this enhanced his prestige and personal reputation in their place of origin" (Peace:1979;68).

As suggested in chapter six, the construction of a 'work identity' is particularly useful in governing interaction amongst people who enjoy very limited interaction beyond the workplace. The 'gate-keeper' is in a position to offer gifts. He enjoys white-collar status while the other members of the lift club are, without exception, blue-collar workers. He does not 'expect' any reciprocal response to his 'generosity'. He is in a position to provide such information and his 'clients' are not. He is demonstrating his good fortune by expending it on others. Not unlike the chief's followers in the potlatch ceremony, his clients have been "put in the shadow of his name" (Mauss:1969;37). The reward is the esteem in which his name is held.

As promotional opportunities within the company are considerably influenced by recruitment strategies, what remains to be said about recruitment at Cheval will be entered under the discussion on promotion.

3.2.2. Promotion

Presently, the wage structure at Cheval accommodates 35 different wage levels, ranging from R210 to R350 per week. Although, on the surface, such a range would appear to improve an individual's chances of promotion, there are however certain restrictive practices in operation at Cheval. One such practice is the 'out recruitment' of highly skilled artisans. For instance, the closing and clicking departments recruit primarily from agencies outside the factory. Given that these two departments employ over a third of the workforce and moreover, dominate the higher wage levels, such restrictions must exert a considerable influence on the availability of real opportunities for promotion.

Indeed, any note on 'worker aspirations' must reflect rather caustically on the unrealistic aspirations of most of the workers. The clicking department, which recruits entirely from outside the factory, was clearly the most popular department for the aspirant worker. The relatively high wages and independence were amongst the primary attractions of such a position. However, based upon current patterns of employment, not a single one of these workers will end up in the clicking department and yet they remain hopeful.

Another interesting pattern that emerged during this focus on worker expectations was the indifference or reluctance shown towards possible employment in the closing department. Admittedly, this department recruits primarily from employment agencies. However, there are a few current exceptions. One example was offered by the personnel officer. A few years back, a young lady had shown a persistent interest in learning the art of closing. Her commitment paid off as she was incorporated into the department as a trainee machinist and has subsequently risen to the level of pilot machinist, receiving a relatively high wage.

Her patent enthusiasm for closing, for what ever reason, was not shared by her colleagues. The repetitive and seclusive nature of the work appears to be a more powerful deterrent than is the attraction of higher wages. The tedium associated with certain jobs, and more significantly, certain departments, coupled with the unrealistic aspirations of the workforce, is a problem warranting considerable attention. Over time, the real restrictions imposed on mobility through the practice of out-recruitment, a symptom of the lack of internal training, will become increasingly clear. Precisely how the realizations of these restrictions will be manifested is impossible to project. However, the effects on worker morale will be tangible.

The now quite famous Hawthorn studies, conducted by Mayo in the Relay Assembly Test Room in the Hawthorn plant of the Chicago-based Western Electric company, drew attention to the importance of understanding the workplace or industry as a social system (Mayo:1933). The company may attempt to offset the effects of social isolation or functional tedium by offering higher wages for machinists in the closing department; however, such efforts suggest an inability to comprehend the influence of "social interaction with regards job satisfaction" (Holzberg and Giovannini:1981;320).

During the research period, the company was forced to push certain elderly employees into early retirement. Trade union opposition to retrenchments had compelled the company to adopt such a strategy in order to reduce the number of workers. Most of the 13 individuals were chosen from the closing department. The average age of employees operating in the closing department is well above 35. The lack of interest shown by younger employees in working in the closing department suggests that at some point in the near future, the company may struggle to find suitable replacements for outgoing employees who are far more likely to be leaving from the closing department than any other department. The area within which the solution may lie is precisely this notion of the factory as a social system. Moving away from the

material changes, such as increased wages, the company should focus more specifically on the 'social needs' of a workforce. The notion that the associated tedium might be offset by higher wages reveals a pattern of thinking too closely associated with the "doctrine of individualism"(Holzberg & Giovannini: 1981;320). An emphasis on the 'individual' might, albeit unintentionally, blur the relationships between individuals that may be more contextually appropriate⁴.

A related factor that compounds the paucity of genuine opportunities for promotion is that there appears to be a certain lack of confidence in upper management with regard to the workforce's general capabilities. A few incidents illuminated this problem. A woman working in the closing department applied for the vacant post of receptionist. She claimed that she had had experience as a receptionist and that she could "speak like a white", presumably a reference to accents. Her failure to get the job was rather accusingly attributed to the "attitude of upper-management towards the workers at Cheval". Before offering any firm conclusions about the existence and implications of this imputed lack of confidence managers have in the charges, a further illustration might be necessary.

A member of the upper management group confided in me his 'vision of the future'. The proposal suggested a more vigorously defined management hierarchy which would provide greater clarity on job descriptions and roles for all management personnel⁵.

⁴ Mars' treatment of the ideology or culture of management points to this 'individualizing' tendency. He claim's that managers place a high premium on individualism and independance, believing, among other things, that an individual is responsible for his or her own destiny. And that the individual manager is prepared to "change locality, accept separation from family..." (Mars:1981;4-5).

⁵ The contents of the proposal are discussed in some detail in chapter three. Furthermore, the effects of what has been referred to as the 'management crisis' are analyzed in the same section. What concerns us here is how this 'confidence' issue impacts on opportunities for promotion.

After discussing the proposal I ventured to ask why he was sharing this information with me and not with the managing director who was in a position to fully appreciate the proposal's contents. The answer I received was simply that "he would not accept them". This was not, I was told, a reflection of the status of the proposals themselves but rather because "he [the owner] lacks confidence in his management staff"

I use these particular examples to highlight the depth of this confidence crisis. From the lowest paid worker on the floor to the factory manager, all alike suspect that their superiors lack confidence in their ability. Whether this is true or not is not really the issue. What is significant is that it has real consequences. If an employee believes that a superior lacks confidence in his or her ability, it might promote the belief that there are going to be few opportunities for personal advancement. And indeed, a large majority of the workers express an almost fatalistic attitude towards personal advancement. Few actually believed that mobility was predicated on personal effort. Advancement was inevitably associated with factors beyond their control, the most commonly expressed being "who you know".

There is little evidence of any consistent criteria employed in determining the promotion of workers into positions of management. Discussions with various managers did not achieve any consensus in terms of the values and skills governing mobility. Various cases observed by the author offered little comparison by way of synonymity of qualities manifested by the numerous candidates. Moreover, the failure of certain candidates to qualify for promotion after their period of "probation" had elapsed further attests to the inconsistency with which candidates are selected.

The number of failed trials tends to suggest that the kinds of qualities, or the development of those qualities, deserves closer

attention. The company insists on a 'probation' or trial period for selected candidates before they are formally instated in their intended managerial positions. The maxim that reads "there is no substitute for experience" was particularly successful in drawing my attention to the ambiguity that exists in the eligibility of workers for managerial positions. The maxim was offered by the personnel officer who was in the process of constructing a social profile of *the* worker who would be ideally suited for management.

The profile contained a particularly heavy emphasis on experience and, in a rather obvious manner, closely associated technical skills with managerial skills. While discussing this, I am aware of that body of managerial ideology, particularly the now debunked "Managerialist thesis" (Jenkins & Poole;1990, Maller;1992) which projected that the new rulers of industry would be increasingly technically proficient. Owners would not control industry *per se*, the emergent factor was to be expertise. However, as my own research suggested, technical expertise, although necessary, was not in itself sufficient for determining managerial competence.

Discussions with various managers revealed an acute lack of competent managers. As mentioned, there were numerous examples of workers being selected for managerial positions who had not 'passed' their six month trial period. Giving someone the authority to manage is one thing; the ability to manage is something completely different. Fox raises an interesting point in this regard. He asserts that "however authority is defined...[we should not] fail to see it as being bound up in some way with legitimacy" (Fox:1971;34). By stating this, Fox is making the necessary distinction between the right to manage and the ability to manage. In the case of Cheval, the ability to manage is defined solely on the basis of expertise whereas it should, according to actual ability, include questions of

legitimacy⁶.

The most frequent criticism levelled at lower management was that they lacked control over their charges⁷. Few of these criticisms ever challenged the technical expertise of lower management, it was a critique that inevitably focused on a very distinct social issue. It appears then that lower-management was being accused of lacking the necessary social skills, specifically that of leadership, to gain the necessary respect or legitimacy from the workforce. Lower management found their level of technical expertise inadequate to exert effective control over their workers. Their success as managers was being assessed on the basis of their overall managerial skills, whereas they were, for the most part, selected quite specifically for their technical expertise.

Management must remember that, unlike machines, leaders must possess other indices of strength over and above their level of technical expertise. Industry is not simply materials and machines, but rather that these forces become operative within a social context. As Holzberg and Giovannini have concluded, "without social organization, industry cannot exist" (1981:318)

Various workers confided in me the need for a more experience orientated wage structure, a form of "pay-by-age" (Clark:1979;45). On the whole, these workers were employed as

⁶ Although 'expertise' might induce respect, then again, it might not. An ability to organize, communicate, instruct, etc. might equip an individual more effectively for management than a more sophisticated understanding of the technical process.

⁷ This issue is raised again in chapter four where such accusations are treated as products of upper management's efforts to assume greater responsibility for themselves. The apparent contradiction arises from the situationally expedient manner in which upper management manipulates lower management's functions. This is not always the case, but rather operates on the basis of a situational need and it is the realization of this that accommodates these seemingly contradictory analyses.

semi or unskilled operatives and all were over the age of 35. It is extremely rare to find these sorts of wage policies in western industrial culture. Clark draws the readers attention to the antique precursors in Japanese industry that has facilitated this practice in Japan (Clark:1979). In the culture of western industry, merit appears to be the locus upon which most remuneration systems operate, with the exception perhaps in the case of what Dore has referred to as the "middle-class worker", or professional, who enjoys a rising curve of earnings consonant with the increase in family responsibilities (Dore:1973;264)*. According to a "survey of personnel management in South Africa", 82,1% of the 190 participating firms claimed that their salary systems operated according to some form of merit system (Langenhoven and Vester:1972).

Although those workers who did advocate a pay system more commensurate with duration of tenure, did so as individuals, the comparability of their respective work situations united them in some interesting ways. Without exception, all were over the age of 35. Furthermore, all were male and occupied positions on the lower levels of the wage structure. As a 'group', they represented no more than 20% of those workers on similar wage levels, suggesting that factors other than low wages might more readily explain their particular interest in a more age sensitive wage structure. Roseman has identified a class of worker to whom he refers as "non-promotables" (Roseman:1977). The social profile that he constructs in the identification of such persons conforms quite closely to the character of the profiles constructed here for my own purposes.

Roseman's psychological presumptions restricts the value of his study, for my purposes, to the conceptual level. His typology and profile provided a useful framework within which my observations

* Such practices are based on social rather than economic development, over time. In this regard they are similar to Clark's concept of "pay-by-age" (1979:45).

could be ordered. A brief description of two such 'non-promotables' might effectively illuminate the work predicament of this category in general.

Profile one: Indian Shop Steward

Age: 38

Operation: line machinist

Duration of employment: 13 years

Weekly wage: R210

Unlike the majority of former shop stewards at Cheval, this particular shop steward has not made a very favourable impression on management. His rather diffident manner and, as one member of the upper management group remarked, "inarticulate rambling" have effectively stymied his chances of promotion. The workers whom he was elected to represent are no less sparing in their criticism of his efforts, these having garnered among them the reputation of something of a "loose cannon" (without the necessary ammunition it would seem).

It would appear then as if his election as shop steward took place at a time when there was something of a paucity of potential shop floor leaders. Personal communication with workers confirmed that he had stood for election unopposed. The overwhelming attitude of the workers spoken to was one characterised most strongly by a sense of pity. Although the workers had elected him, it appears that his election was more a product of general worker apathy than it was a question of his evident leadership potential.

Every so often an individual with a strong charismatic personality will emerge as the 'natural' choice for the position of shop steward. However, such occasions are the exception rather than the rule, and consequently the process of establishing worker leadership is forced to optimize within existing circumstances. It should be stressed here that the position of shop steward is generally not a coveted one. Although it would

seem as if certain personality types do indeed aspire to such leadership positions, workers in general appear opposed to the prospect of assuming worker leadership responsibilities.

Although certainly not qualified to offer a psychological profile, it was my impression however that this particular individual stood for election as a means of advancing his prospects for promotion. The obvious lack of confidence he had in himself, evinced by the demure manner in which he avoided eye contact and spoke to the floor as it were, coupled with his "mediocre" workmanship, required a radical initiative on his behalf if he was to bring sufficient attention to himself in advancing his cause for promotion. The patterns of success and failure of former shop stewards in advancing themselves suggests that the position may precipitate future success or totally inhibit such progress. It would appear then that this particular shop steward has met with the latter fate.

Based upon the comments proffered by managers and workers alike, one can only come to the conclusion that this individual, in terms of promotional prospects, has so entrenched himself in that category of 'non-promotables' that nothing short of a new job could extricate him from the inevitability of his fate. He has through a combination of diffidence and inefficacy, manoeuvred himself into a position of non-promotability.

Profile two: Earnest

Age: 37
operation: Moulder class II
Duration of employment: 18 years
Weekly wage: R230

Earnest joined the company in 1976, the same year as Jayraj, the floor manager of factory B. Considering that they were both recent school leavers at the time, the discrepancies in their respective levels of success in the intervening years is rather

alarming⁹.

For 18 years Earnest has not been promoted. Jayraj, floor manager of factory B, suggests that his immobility is a product of choice rather than competence. Earnest, according to Jayraj, is not interested in promotion, "he's happy where he is". Personal communication with Earnest himself, suggested anything but happiness. His surly remarks that punctuated our conversation were redolent of bitterness and a sense of betrayal. He was a victim of "favouritism", of unjust promotional policies.

Comments offered by other workers regarding this question of Earnest's stagnant work experience, varied from accusations of incompetence to concurring sentiments of "favouritism". In my opinion, Earnest's most palpable resentment of management quite severely undermines any realistic hope of future promotional success. Whether his surly, resentful attitude stems from his work experience or from an entirely different source I could not determine. What is evident however, is that his current attitude towards management is so apparent that this alone could suffice to prevent any change in fortune.

Why it is that certain people more readily gain the attention of management, whether to their advantage or detriment, is a question that remains to be answered. Such an answer would require the researcher to delve into the very subtle area of impressions and mannerisms. It is not simply a question of overt workmanship, as if the readily observable conduct of a worker provides management with an insight into, for instance, the

⁹ Although he enjoys a level of earning slightly higher than that of the shop steward in profile one, this is potentially misleading. Several operations occupying the lower levels of the wage structure can be justifiably grouped together on the basis of their relatively unskilled demands. It is quite possible that a new employee may start out on one of the unskilled operations that receive slightly higher wages than similarly unskilled operations in that category. This appears to explain Earnest's higher earnings for he has never been promoted.

leadership potential of a worker. Standing on the factory floor, it is virtually impossible to discern individual standards of workmanship. The factory's production process is co-ordinated on a department level, prohibiting any useful qualitative analysis of personal effort.

Any distinguishing criterion would, due to the structural organization of work, be confined, as suggested, to the very subtle area of impressions and mannerisms. The preceding profiles make reference to certain attitudinal traits displayed by the subjects of these profiles. Based on conversations with senior management personnel, it became increasingly evident that attitude plays a very significant role in management's perception of competence, insofar as competence is linked to mobility.

Few references to worker competence were derived from 'workmanship'. On the contrary, "good" and "bad" found their referents in personality rather than performance. An incident involving one of the workers and a senior manager illustrated this practice quite effectively. Martin, a worker in the preparations department, and Brett, the factory manager, had a minor altercation over Martin's habit of wearing sun glasses within the factory. A factory rule prohibits the wearing of sun glasses within the factory, presumably because of the possible dangers restricted vision might impose in a highly mechanized work environment. Martin, according to Brett, intentionally transgressed this rule and an altercation ensued in which the ever righteous Martin challenged Brett rather insubordinately. Precisely what was said during this verbal exchange I could not determine, however, it was the comments made afterwards that were of particular interest to me.

After this incident, I overheard one manager suggest that "we should fire him [Martin], he's no good anyway". I asked this manager a little about Martin, this "no good worker", and discovered that these sentiments were not necessarily reflections of Martin's performance, but rather "the way he looked at you",

his "disloyalty" to Cheval and his "blatant insubordination". On a separate occasion prior to this incident, I was talking to Martin when Jayraj happened to pass by. He cautioned me, jokingly, to "watch out" as Martin had "ANC connections".

It would appear then that management's assessment of Martin's work status is governed principally by his perceived attitude towards management rather than by some index of productive efficiency. Relating this discussion back to the profiles discussed above, it becomes increasingly apparent that attitude has achieved a certain primacy as a status differential in the process governing promotion. This is not to say that Martin is of yet a "non-promotable". There are various factors that distinguish Martin from the subjects of the profiles introduced above, the most important of which is Martin's relative youth. In the preceding profiles, the subjects conveyed a sense of bitterness towards the factory 'politics'. They had become disillusioned, to the point of being cynical, with what they perceived to be essentially the 'corruption' of the system. Their work opportunities or 'life chances' have, according to these workers, and that category of non-promotables in general, been irredeemably retarded. In a sense, they have become marginalized.

Martin on the other hand, appears to be something of a young buck challenging the old master. He is far from disillusioned or cynical, conveying a sense of energy and sprightliness that belie any notions of fundamental discontent. The differences notwithstanding, both illustrations reflect the deterministic role that 'attitude' plays in management's overall assessment of the individual worker. To attempt to explain the existence of this phenomenon, one would have to acknowledge the lack of any alternative means available to management that would enable them to assess, fairly, the 'merit' of individual workers.

As mentioned above, factory production is co-ordinated on a departmental level. Given this organizational structure, it is virtually impossible for an individual to 'out perform' his

colleagues. Internally, a single department's machinery is functionally differentiated to the point that multilinear coordination is the primary production process. The speed or efficiency, attributes that might offer a discriminatory basis for individual assessment, are largely determined by the actions of the preceding operator and, the more complex the shoe, the more evident this becomes. The absence of any incentive scheme (see following section) eliminates any individual motivation to proceed any more quickly or to raise standards above what is normatively required. Moreover, the relative parity of skill involved in the various operations within a particular department further militates against the likelihood of any single operative standing out from his colleagues.

All these factors contribute to the prevailing emphasis on attitude rather than performance. Beyond the possibility of certain employees becoming 'disillusioned' with the factory's system of promotion, it is difficult to discern with any accuracy the kinds of repercussions such a tendency will have, or already has, on factory organization and production. What is significantly apparent, is that few workers believe that considerations of promotion operate on a system of merit. How such frustrations manifest themselves is difficult to determine within the limited time frame of this research. However, one could rather safely speculate that worker morale or incentives will be (and are) negatively affected.

3.2.3. Remuneration

Although some aspects of the system of remuneration at Cheval have been broached in the preceding section, repetition can be avoided as it is not the question of basic remuneration that concerns us here. This section will deal almost exclusively with the pay system, its principles and techniques, utilized by Cheval, and the worker's reactions to such a system of payment.

Interest in ones earnings is not merely a practical consideration of survival but rather a more complex product drawing on various socio-economic issues. Similarly, the design of a pay system must take into account a wide range of human and material factors. Without reflecting too profoundly on the development of the wage earning economy as we know it, it is particularly important however, to remind ourselves that wages are a consideration of services rendered to an employer and as such, have to be reckoned as a particularly powerful influence over industrial relations. Given the virtual relationship of contingency between the sociological and material aspects of industry, the value of good industrial relations can never be overemphasized.

The concept of 'wages' is often applied in a manner that includes salaries, fees, commissions, bonuses and every other form of remuneration (Beacham:1979). Although this usage is sometimes practical for its economy, in the case of Cheval however, it is inadequate. The company makes a very significant sociological and economic distinction between the concept of a 'wage' and that of a 'salary'. Briefly, the sociological basis of this distinction operates on the notion of status. Senior floor and upper-level managers receive a salary while lower floor managers and workers receive a wage. Salaries are paid on a monthly basis and are of the nature of a package, while wages are paid weekly, and despite a few minor contributions and benefits, they are essentially made as straight forward cash payments.

There is also the concomitant question of money, which at Cheval establishes a further distinction between the two methods of remuneration. Wages and salaries do not, at any point, overlap in terms of monetary payment, the lowest salary is worth more financially than the highest wage paid at Cheval. Cognizant of these distinctions, the term 'remuneration' is used as a blanket reference under which the particulars of the pay system at Cheval are discussed.

During the research, there were 27 salaried staff on the company's payroll. Upper-management staff account for most of these salaried personnel, although this category did include clerks and department supervisors. For salaried staff, such a position is assumed to accord the individual a certain status above the obvious financial advantages. However, this view is not shared unanimously amongst all employees. During the research period, the personnel division was lobbying for the workers consent for the introduction of a system of payment, whereby the workforce's weekly wages would be deposited directly into a worker's personal bank account. The success with which such a system of payment had been implemented in other companies in the manufacturing sector had encouraged Cheval to attempt the introduction of a similar scheme.

Quite unexpectedly, the workers, through their union, had strongly resisted such efforts. Discussions with management revealed a genuine sense of confusion pertaining to the workers' rejection of this proposal. Management were tempted to believe that the threat of union interaction was merely a product of "resistance politics" rather than any serious misgivings with the proposal itself. Past "experience" with trade unionism, claimed one manager, had made management quite familiar with the "irrational" behaviour of the unionists.

Such disbelief was, to a certain extent, vindicated, for the workers appeared to have certain 'special interest' in retaining that particular mode of payment. The rationale for rejecting the new banking system was conveyed to me by one of the shop stewards. The idea of depositing weekly wages into personal bank accounts was considered, for various reasons, not in the interests of "the average worker". On the contrary, the workers regarded the proposal, for reason initially not too clear, as serving the interests of management rather than the workers. One of the more vocal and widespread objections referred to the costs involved in service charges levied by the bank. However, as my 'enquiries' progressed, these formal objections began to lose

their veneer of credibility.

A significant number of workers stated that, although they themselves did not object to the introduction of such a system of payment, they would nevertheless, support the other workers' opposition to this proposal. That such individuals appeared no more able to spare money for service charges levied by the bank than the 'average' worker on whose behalf the union ostensibly rejected the proposal, suggested that there might have been further reasons, over and above the issue of solidarity, motivating the 'general' opposition to this touted system. One such reason was the pervasive practice of loan sharking. Interest on loans were made effective on a weekly basis. If the debtor was unable to repay the loan during working hours on a Friday, interest on that loan would be added to the initial sum. A further factor, was the widespread participation of workers in various kinds of saving societies (see chapter six).

As in the case of loans, payments within these saving societies were made on a weekly basis, usually on a Friday after receiving ones wage. If wages were to be credited to the worker's personal bank accounts, as the proposal provided for, the structure of loan sharking and saving activities would have to be adjusted accordingly. The widespread use and apparent popularity of such monetary activities militated quite strongly against management achieving the workers' consent. Moreover, the illicit nature of the money lending activities required that the workers motivate their objections to management's proposal under the guise of more creditable worker concerns¹⁰. The exigencies of the workforce's monetary activities have generally rendered the notion of banking wages undesirable. The prestige and practicality with which management view the notion of 'banking' was lost on a workforce

¹⁰ Mars has pointed out the existence of the "covert institutions of the workplace", suggesting that changes introduced to the workplace would have to, some how, acknowledge such institutions or relationships and their functions in order to successfully institute change (Mars:1982;205).

whose monetary arrangements differed radically from those of management.

However, banking is not considered *ipso facto* a privilege. There remains the question of associated benefits and greater remuneration that might succeed in enticing the individual worker, regardless of how involved he or she may be in shop floor monetary activities, into this method of remuneration. As Dalton observed, worker solidarity was often compromised by particularly propitious circumstances that provide the individual worker with "the impulse to use ones own wings at times" (Dalton:1959;112). The primary militating factor is that the workforce on the whole has created opportunities for itself based on the existing structure of remuneration and as such, it would require greater insight and awareness on management's behalf if it wished to introduce any wholesale changes to the existing method of remuneration.

Minimum wage rates are determined by the Industrial Council, an organization comprised primarily of employer organizations who consult with the appropriate trade union bodies. The Council convenes on a biannual basis at which the wage rates are adjusted. At Cheval, although workers start out on the wage rates set out by the Council, after a period of three months, such rates are then determined by the company's own wage rates, which vary between eight and ten per cent above those recommended by the Industrial Council.

During the strikes in 1993 (see chapter five) the workers made it patently clear that they were striking in solidarity with the National Leather Workers' Union in general over the proposed increase in Industrial Council wage rates and not over wage rates paid at Cheval. Notwithstanding that category of worker which demanded a more 'age sensitive' wage structure, (see Promotion, chapter three) I encountered little worker dissatisfaction with regard to wage rates paid at Cheval.

One area of remuneration where the rumblings of worker dissatisfaction were quite palpable was that of incentive schemes and bonuses. Presently, there are no production bonuses or production-based incentive schemes in operation at Cheval. A proposal drafted by management was submitted to the workers some two years prior to my research. The proposal recommended the introduction of a production quota system, a form of "payment-by-results" (Beacham:1979;30). The quota was set at 90 000 pairs of shoes a month. All wage workers were to receive an equal amount at the end of every month in which this quota was achieved.

Workers at Cheval, represented by the union, rejected this proposal. An interesting feature of this opposition was the contrasting interpretations offered by management and members of the workforce. A member of the upper management team advised me that the "greatest fear" of this, or for that matter, all "determined" trade unions, was that incentive schemes would "undermine the unity of the workforce by raising self-interest above collective interests" -a reasonable consideration given the 'dragnet' politics of trade union organization. However, the proposal outlined an incentive scheme whereby all workers would derive equal benefit.

The general point being made here by this manager was that the union would rather avoid incentive schemes *per se*, fearful of the possibility that exposure to such potentially divisive schemes may promote a sense of individuality. Another manager remarked that it was "rather ironic that the proposal should be rejected for surely what works in America should work here". He added, however, that the union was not amenable to the idea for they believed that, if there was more money available, basic wages should be increased or more people employed.

The floor manager of factory B treated the workers' opposition to the proposal as a vindication of his belief that "workers don't like working harder for whatever the reason". Apparently the rejection of the proposal was not the product of some 'feeble

notion' of worker solidarity, it was quite simply that workers don't like working. What was particularly colourful was the contrast that the workers' sentiments provided.

Morgan, an operator in the clicking department, accused management of attempting to introduce "a form of modern day slavery". A further accusation levelled at management was that the proposal was a "symptom" of management's "unsympathetic manner with which they generally approach labour issues". The equation of incentive schemes and "modern day slavery" were sentiments so oft repeated that it would appear that this was one of the rallying points made at the union meeting convened to discuss the proposal.

One of the factory's shop stewards suggested that the proposal did not make sufficient allowance for the varying complexities of the different shoes. His argument was that for certain months, the quota would be more difficult to achieve, were the shoe orders preponderately for the more complex and time consuming designs. This would be a reasonable argument were it not for the fact that a target of 90 000 shoes was specifically set to be easily attainable in the case of the simpler court shoe designs and only slightly more challenging in the case of the more complex designs.

However, it did appear that the union's objection was not based primarily on a simple matter of arithmetic. Their position appeared such that any production-based incentive scheme would be unacceptable. The arguments put forward, such as that which suggested a reallocation of the funds marked for incentives into general wage increases, were often illogical. There apparently was no such money independent of the potential savings generated by increased productive efficiency. One may argue that the money may be recovered by the workforce's increased productive efficiency. However, such arguments remain purely speculative.

The sole form of incentive scheme permitted by the workers was

the attendance bonus. Previous complaints that workers were frequently absent from work for the most "imaginary" reasons, creating a fairly large absentee problem" prompted the introduction of this scheme. Without speculating here on the motives facilitating worker approbation of this scheme, in the light of their persistent opposition to other schemes, it would appear however, that the union's 'professional image' and the nature of local factory politics do play an almost deterministic role (see chapter five).

The weekly attendance bonus was set at 10% of the worker's weekly wage. Although a majority of the workers appear to favour the concept of an attendance bonus, many, however, have serious misgivings with the rigidity with which it is applied. There are essentially two areas of concern. The first pertains to the terms of eligibility. If a worker fails to arrive at work or is considerably late for work, barring the provision of a medical certificate, that worker would have forfeited his or her attendance bonus. The area of concern here is that the workforce believes that there are various situations or "special circumstances" that might necessitate a worker's absence. On the specific nature of such "special circumstances", the workforce was rather neatly divided.

Most Indian workers cited the attendance of funerals as the most frequent obligation necessitating their absence from work. African workers, on the other hand, referred to the endemic violence and unrest in the Townships which frequently disrupted the public transport service, preventing them from arriving at work on time or at all. The correspondence of certain circumstances with certain racial groups, although interesting, need not detain us for too long.

The violence in African Townships, particularly in Kwa Zulu\Natal, was one of the unfortunate realities that confronted this region as the country slowly made its way towards its first fully democratic elections. The political, social and economic

realities that underpin this violence have been extensively examined and summarized in publications such as the *Natal Monitor* (1990-1993) and the *Indicator* (1990-1994). With regard to the Indian workers, a more detailed analysis may include an investigation into household populations or perhaps even a study of traditional Hindu funeral rites which dictate, among other things, that "the time chosen for cremation has to be an auspicious one" (Das:1982;123).

However, such detailed and distilling investigations are likely to prove futile as the socio-economic and religious composition of Cheval's Indian workforce is markedly heterogeneous. A reasonable inference would be that as a racial group, Indians account for 70% of the workforce and therefore, that such requests are more frequently forthcoming from this particular constituency, should not appear entirely anomalous. Alternatively, such "special circumstances" may function as nothing more than a pretext upon which workers attempt to gain certain concessions. The correspondence of certain circumstances with particular racial groups may be nothing more than a manipulation of stereotypes. The gravity and plausibility of these kinds of circumstances may elicit a certain acquiescence from management. Nevertheless, these remain the kinds of circumstances that the workers suggest are given insufficient consideration by management.

The second issue that the workers regarded as rather contentious, was the time requirement implicit within the structure of this attendance bonus. A worker was required to work a minimum of 42 hours a week to qualify for the weekly attendance bonus. On the surface, such time qualifications appeared fair, for 42 hours was the official working week, a figure set to the union's approval. However, the vagaries of the market periodically force management to adopt a short time rationalization scheme in order maintain the symmetry between production and demand.

Under such circumstances, workers forfeit their weekly

attendance bonus on the basis of not having completed their 42 hour work week. The workers' objection to this practice stems from their belief that it is management's responsibility to avoid having to rely on short time and as such, should they do so, it is them [management] that should bear the burden and not the workers.

It is difficult to argue either for or against the view held by the workers. That they are resentful of such an arrangement appears justified in that the need for short time is not a necessary recourse arising from the actions of the workers themselves. They are fully prepared to work the 42 hours. On the other hand, no corollary apportioning of blame on management emerges either. The demand for shoes can quite conceivably fluctuate independently of the best intentions of both management and worker.

It appears that the imputations emerging, in this instance from the workforce, are symptomatic of a far more fundamental process, viz. the historical experience of labour within the South African economy. As Murry has noted, the demise of liberalism as the dominant intellectual perspective in South Africa was precipitated by the liberal scholars' failure to acknowledge the connection between capitalism and Apartheid (Murry:1988).

As inappropriate as an exposition on Marxian analysis would be at this point, I would however, like to develop this particular aspect one step further. The connection between Apartheid, specifically the 'homeland' system and the labour requirements of the capitalist system have been fairly extensively examined (see Bundy, 1988; Legassick, 1974; and Wolpe, 1970). Wolpe has argued that "Apartheid is the attempt of the capitalist class to meet the expanding demand for cheap African labour in the era of industrial manufacturing capital..." (Wolpe:1970;429).

The policy of Apartheid obviously impacted on the people of South Africa and other neighbouring regions in various ways. My

interest here, however, is more narrowly focused on how these policies and concomitant developments seemed to have facilitated the emergence of a separate identity and body of presumptions, that govern management-worker interaction.

In short, the emergence of a 'group consciousness'¹¹. In Van Onselen's observations of the destabilizing tactics utilized by black workers in Chibaro (then Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe), he noted that these tactics "...offered eloquent testimony to the existence of a consciousness of who the exploiters were" (Van Onselen:1976;34). Admittedly, my interests do not include Zimbabwean workers nor am I accusing management at Cheval of being "exploiters". The value of Van Onselen's observations is that it reminds us of the 'consciousness' of workers, as a group¹², of the marginal and inferior position they occupy in relation to managers and owners.

A product of this sense of alienation or 'structural weakness', is that workers at Cheval, and elsewhere, do not subscribe to some quixotic notion of 'shared fortune, mutual misfortune'. The workers, at times, tend to perceive their 'fortunes' or interests as something quite independent of management. It is the workers' understanding that if management decides to implement a rationalization or 'short time' policy, regardless of the rationale for it, it is then management's responsibility alone

¹¹ The rather conspicuous avoidance of the term 'class' is due to the inability of the anthropologist, this one in particular, to adequately extrapolate from the available data, the position of the workers at Cheval in relation to the national labour body. Class must be understood to refer to a particular strata or division in society as a whole, whose consciousness of themselves as a group (Marx's "class for itself") provides the platform upon which they organize and function. 230 workers is a wholly inadequate base upon which hypotheses about the nature of "class consciousness" may be confidently expounded.

¹²Compounded, particularly in the South African context, by the superordinate-subordinate coincidence of race and economic power

to bear the costs of such actions.

The emergence of a 'consciousness' among workers at Cheval is not strictly an *a priori* phenomenon. In significant respects, Marx's writings on the emergence of class consciousness and the stages of development it proceeds through, are often contradicted by the situational expedience evinced by the actions taken by workers at Cheval. Although they do exhibit a discernible level of "class consciousness", they are aware of their collective identity as 'workers', acknowledge (in theory) the role of trade unions in protecting the workers against exploitation and realize their position in terms of the functioning of industry, i.e. in relation to the means of production. However, the workers frequently accept, situationally, the structural weakness of their position in relation to management and owners. Such acquiescence suggests that this "group consciousness" is not specifically geared towards "revolution" as Marx has postulated, but rather offers the workforce a measure of protection against efforts to undermine their interests.

Handelman has written on the practice of marginalized groups who turn a 'societal' disadvantage into an advantage. Studying handicapped people in Israel, Handelman observed how such groups utilized their handicaps to their advantage in industrial settings. They acquired certain 'special concessions' which enabled them, in certain respects, to wrest concessions from a correspondingly indulgent management (personal comment: prof. J.Kiernan). Workers at Cheval were attempting to gain similar advantage. By avowing quite openly their structural weakness, they hoped to gain certain advantages from their, rather well publicized, 'handicap', i.e. their structural inferiority.

The 'consciousness' observed amongst the workforce at Cheval was not necessarily a manifest effort to overcome their marginal position in the "structure of a capitalist society". Quite to the contrary, such consciousness was occasionally utilized in

reaffirming this position of weakness. In a sense, this can be read as a case of "boundary maintenance" (Barth:1969). Such behaviour was largely expedient and yet it is, one must assume, a product of the workforce's relative position within the structure of the economy. It is such a position, accompanied by an awareness of such a position, that informs the choices that the workforce makes in an effort to protect their interests.

This ability to manipulate such a 'relationship of difference', exhibiting a certain element of strategic versatility, has significant ramifications in the area of industrial dispute. However, our primary interest here is how such activities relate to the area of remuneration under discussion. How such developments impact on industrial relations are discussed in considerable detail in chapter four.

These observations and comments go some way towards explaining why the workforce react the way they do in certain contexts, but offers little in the way of resolving their problems. The solution may appear to lie in the practice of profit sharing or perhaps, more appropriate for a private company, profit related pay. As previously discussed, however, workers' cooperation would not be forthcoming.

The socio-economic distinctions between management and the workforce are considered, by the workers, to be too sharp for any serious amelioration to be affected by such options. The workers believe that the introduction of such schemes would be too palliative. Until the remuneration differential between management and the worker in the structure of the economy as a whole is considerably reduced, labour will persist in perceiving its interests to be necessarily divorced from those of management and the owner. A profit sharing scheme might increase productivity; however, the position of the 'worker' would remain largely unchanged.

Closely bound to this discussion is the concept of 'reward'. The

workers' perception of a reward is primarily an issue of personal labour and time, both of which he regards as being under-compensation. Such perceptions appear to be shaped by a set of values quite different to those that underpin management's perception of a reward. Certain values in what has been referred to as the "management ideology" or "culture" (Mars:1981, Floud:1987) support the notion of a dichotomy in values between managers and workers.

As is the case for any ideology or culture, the human agents within such groupings endorse a particular set of values and beliefs. One such value ascribed to the management ideology is the value system of economic growth; the philosophy concerned primarily with macro-economic performance rather than micro-economic performance as a yardstick for economic success (Floud:1987;68). A second particularly illustrative value ascribed to this "management ideology" is the notion that the individual is responsible for his or her own destiny and career progress (Mars:1981;5).

The quota based incentive bonus was conceived in management's belief that it was in the company's best interest, workers included, to increase the production output and to facilitate economic growth. For the workers, however, this system would necessitate an increase in their labour output, a potential change in their social and/or recreational activities and a strong possibility of increased supervision, whilst the workers' fortunes in general would not be significantly altered. In short, the worker would not, and did not, regard such changes as rewarding.

The belief that the individual is responsible for his own destiny is another such value that management appears to, rather optimistically, regard as being widespread. The sentiments that "what works in America should work here [South Africa]", as quoted above in response to the workers rejection of the production bonus, derive from an all too 'logical' understanding of what

motivates people under differing circumstances. The workers place a higher premium on equity than they do on self-advancement. Unlike "America" [USA], South Africa is not a middle-class society (Baritz:1992). The radical inequalities in income distribution suggest that only a small percentage of the population can be realistically regarded as middle-class (CSD Bulletin:April 1984). By far the majority of South Africans live well below what is considered to be a 'middle-class' in terms of life-style. Workers at Cheval regard the most meaningful reward as one that contributes towards an improvement, a fundamental improvement, in the quality of life for the working class. Solidarity rather than individual responsibility will bring about the most significant change in "destiny" for these workers, or so they believe.

It was Max Gluckman who broached the problem of "the limits of naïveté" (Gluckman:1967;3). At risk of appearing rather evasive, I do believe however, that the kinds of policies and actions that might succeed in resolving this dichotomy will stem, in part, from an area beyond the ken of anthropology or the anthropologist. It is not that I choose to maintain the boundary, so to speak, between what is anthropological and what is not. It is essentially a question of research verses policy. There is a complex web of interest groups competing for a stake in the country's resources. That the resources for which these groups compete are finite links these various interest groups regardless of their essential character. Consequently, this 'dichotomy' of values is not merely a question of industrial relations at Cheval, although such relations on the surface reflect a local character, but rather exhibit certain linkages with a far broader and complex condition whose resolution remains a national responsibility.

CHAPTER 4. THE WORKERS' LAMENT: MANAGEMENT ISN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE'

Through out the research period I was constantly informed of the existence of what was referred to as a "management crisis". Accusations of "authoritarianism", "racism" "mistrust" and "incompetence" inevitably followed this disclosure. A member of lower management pointed me in the direction of upper management, suggesting the "fish stinks from the head down". Others made gestures towards lower management, shrugging their shoulders as if to say "what can you do?" The following discussion is an attempt to locate the core of this so-called "crisis" and to establish how and why such a crisis exists. It is best approached by initially tracing the dilemma in which one particular manager finds himself, in an effort to discern and extract the salient influences at work.

4.1. Profile on Jayraj:

Jayraj started his career in 1977 as a semi-skilled machinist on the closing line. In 17 years he progressed from this position on the closing line to his present position as Floor Manager of factory B. At the age of 35, with 17 years experience behind him and the much touted 'democratization' of industry taking place within the country's economy¹, his own impressions of his

¹ The process of 'democratization' of industry is part of the broader process aimed at, in the words of the South African President Nelson Mandela "levelling the playing fields". The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) introduced by the new Government of National Unity is a broadly conceived plan aimed at 'redressing the imbalances of the past'. Evidence of the progress achieved by this program in the sphere of industry are

prospects for the future are characterized by a rather jaundiced uncertainty.

During the period preceding his appointment as floor manager of factory B, while still in the employment of Cheval, Jayraj developed a certain technical proficiency and appeared to have garnered a reputation as a hard, physical, worker determined to succeed. His approach has inevitably gained him as many enemies as it has friends. His reaction to such sentiments of scorn is rather philosophical, viewing these remarks with a sense of vindication for a job well done; "Ensuring people get the job done is not going to make people many friends", he remarked.

One candid illustration of his technical expertise is his ability to maintain the most sophisticated and costly piece of machinery on the factory floor, a proficiency shared with no-one else. The seat and side lasting machine was acquired by the factory about three years ago. Its operation on the making track C effectively does the work of three manual operatives doing similar tasks on the other making tracks. With no resident technician, Jayraj observes that "without my knowledge, who would maintain this machine?". Testimony to this is the frequency with which he is called upon to undertake some minor repairs or maintenance job on this and other machines on the factory floor. His technical knowledge was acquired through his own initiative, by obtaining and mastering the maintenance manuals on this and similar machines on the factory floor.

Although there are those that question his 'intrinsic'

reflected in the acceptance and adoption of affirmative action policies and the move away from formal and informal job reservation for whites.

leadership capabilities, his determination to succeed is rarely disputed. Jayraj's rather strident approach to his job, preferring to "take his shirt off and personally deal with trouble makers" coupled with his technical resourcefulness has ensured a steady rise through the lower rungs of the management hierarchy, culminating with his promotion to floor manager of factory B. Given this fairly successful work history, there emerges, on the surface, a certain incongruity between his past achievements and his attitude towards future prospects within the company

Claiming that "after 17 years of loyal service to Cheval, I might be forced to look elsewhere to secure my future", Jayraj portrays the image of a man betrayed. The explanation lies precisely within this alleged transformation process that is taking place within the industrial and other sectors of the economy and society. Prior to these changes, industry was primarily and rigidly stratified along the lines of race. For a 'non-white' the prospects of ascending to upper-management levels, in a full white-collar capacity, were extremely limited. The upper-management body at Cheval, to date, contains no illustrations to the contrary. Given these structural limitation, particularly evident at Cheval, Jayraj quickly realized the importance of availing himself of certain skills in order to optimize his resources within the framework of limited opportunities to which he was confined. He developed particular qualities that he felt would enhance his promotional prospects within the situation that obtained. The technical knowledge and forceful approach to managerial responsibility, albeit limited, were manifestations of his efforts to promote his 'work chances' within this framework. In terms of the account provided above, such efforts, within the context, could be conceivably regarded as 'successful'.

The prospect of change ushered in new hope for individuals such as Jayraj. The framework of opportunity was to be expanded to incorporate their aspirations for self-advancement. Upper-management positions would no longer be the exclusive preserve of whites. However, the qualifications and attributes, the values he availed himself of, developed in the previously era of exclusion were now regarded as a liability in the new era of 'opportunity'. Jayraj was now regarded, by upper-management, as "a bit of a rough diamond", too "churlish" and "technical" for a position in upper-management. The position required someone with a bit more "finesse".

Effectively, Jayraj has stymied his chances of promotion into the ranks of upper-management by optimizing his work chances within a certain framework that encouraged the development of values that, ironically, conflicted with the kinds of values that characterized the new framework. By pursuing a set of rather circumscribed objectives quite resolutely, he had positioned himself further from rather than closer to achieving his ultimate objectives. The kinds of values he espoused in order to optimize his chances of self-advancement have effectively led him down a cul-de-sac. The nature of the 'game' has changed and as a consequence he has been sidelined.

This brief synopsis of Jayraj's current work predicament quite effectively outlines the parameters of the management crisis that was observed at Cheval. The crisis has its roots in the fragmented manner in which certain changes were introduced into the management system of the company. The following account is an attempt to empirically locate this crisis as it manifests itself in the work process and goes some way towards describing the nature of the crisis itself.

4.2. What is the Problem?

"The problem is that management is insensitive to the needs of the workers". This statement was offered by one of the workers in reaction to a remark I had made concerning general problems within the factory. The workers in general appeared to reflect on management with a recurring disdain. Reproving remarks such as "they treat us like dogs", barely scratched the surface of this, at times vitriolic, hostility that the workers felt towards management. The extent of these attitudes notwithstanding, relations between workers and management in industry are rarely 'cordial'. However, a rather peculiar feature of the attitude of workers towards management at Cheval was that the owner was spared any criticism whatsoever.

When discussing management with the workforce a frequent and unsolicited response was one that posited the owner in a completely different frame of reference. Management, as stated, were often characterized by the workers, as "cold", "insensitive" and "aloof", while the owner received virtual accolades from the very same people. This distinction occurred with a rather perplexing frequency. After talking to one of the workers for about 15 minutes, primarily on the subject of rotating credit associations (see chapter five), he raised the issue of management insofar as the illegality of some of the other 'money games' were concerned. The worker suggested that management would be less than accommodating were they to discover that such money 'activities' were widespread through out the factory. What followed, completely unsolicited, was a paean on the virtuous nature of the owner. The worker claimed that, "Mr Von is a very understanding boss, whenever our demands are reasonable they are always met". He continued "He greets us by name and can always be seen in the factory".

As true as the workers observations regarding the owner's presence on the factory floor were, they were equally true of some of the management staff as well. Moreover, the management body and the owner spoke as one; they do not, as far as the workers can discern, disagree over meeting workers' "demands". Either the demands are met or they are not. It is inconceivable that management would respond in one way and the owner in another. But this pattern of distinguishing the owner from the managers persisted throughout the field work.

The most enigmatic feature of this opposition between owner and management was that management, to a large extent, were merely delivering according to objectives set by the owner. To the extent that the resentment of management by the workers was a reflection of the manner in which they undertook their tasks, this contrast was potentially defensible. However, if this resentment emanated from the workers subjective evaluation of the objectives themselves, then this contrast was untenable.

On a certain level of abstraction, the workers appeared quite acquiescent on the role of management. It was never implied by the workers that the factory could do without 'management' *per se*. What was suggested was that the 'problems' were a product of more recent developments. One worker remarked; "We never used to have these problems, we resent the impersonal relations between management and worker". Another remarked; "managers never ask how the children are, there's no longer any interest shown in the workers".

One way of attempting to account for these retrospective idealizations was to regard them as part of a process in which the workers were attempting to reinforce their claims against the organization of management. By constructing an 'ideal past',

their present grievances against management may have developed more credibility as opposed to appearing simply expedient. The 'ideal past' becomes a benchmark of sorts, and contrasted with the current managerial manner and processes, the workers' grievances obtain a veneer of credibility. To a point, this assumption contains a certain validity. The current organizational premises of management are relatively new to the operation of the factory. In the words of the factory manager:

"When I first arrived at Cheval it was simply a husband and wife team [presently the sole directors] and a group of supposed managers whose duty it was to do no more than carry out orders. We were paid to act and not to think"

The crux of the change, as it was conveyed to me, was the "professionalization of management". Understanding the discourse of such a process is one thing, but there still remains the need to understand and explain the contrasting attitudes of workers towards the owner and the manager. The changes themselves are causally inefficacious. They do not automatically account for the contrasting attitudes of workers towards management and the owner. If management has indeed been "professionalised" and it is the outcome of such a process that has incurred the displeasure of the workforce, why (or how) has the owner managed to evade such ire?

On the face of it, the sentiments conveyed by the workers suggest, reasonably clearly, that prior to these changes the workers' needs and interests, insofar as supervision is concerned, were more adequately addressed than they are at present. The 'reconstruction' of such a period should be able to show just how and why such 'needs and interests' were more

effectively addressed. Such a process would have to rely to a great extent on the sentiments expressed by the workers themselves and, where possible, the corollaries emerging from such sentiments.

Possibly the most reflective dimension of the workers' grievances is the contrasting attitudes expressed by the workers towards the owner and the managers. This rather neatly contrasting opposition is polarized along the lines of the 'manner' in which the interfacing of these two bodies is conducted. In the case of workers vis-a-vis management, workers regard the manner as "cold", "indifferent", "insensitive", "aloof" and even the occasionally more emotive, "racist". With regard to the owner, such interaction is perceived as "caring", "warm" and "considerate".

When one considers that the present managerial ethos is something quite new and it is the ethos of old to which the workers most favourably refer, such an ethos may have been epitomized by the manner in which the owner currently interacts with the workers. The managers themselves refer to the nature of the previous managerial ethos as "paternal". As the Factory Manager's observations about management (quoted above) suggest, managers, prior to the "professionalization" of their role, occupied a far less prominent position in the organization of the company. It appears then that the workers, to a certain extent, view the emergence of a more professional managerial ethic as contrary to their interests and needs.

The last statement contains certain reservations. The workers do indeed expound the view that the current managerial ethos is contrary to their needs. However, virtually in the same breath, they refer to the "advances made by organized labour". A large

portion of the work force are fairly vocal about the "oppression of the workers" and other socio-political issues that contain rather tangible seeds of a fairly cogent and emotional political ideology. In a sense, there is a juxtaposition of different frames of reference.

On the one hand, the emergence of a professional, post-paternalistic managerial ethic is regarded as contrary to the needs and interests of the workforce. And yet, a related development, the increasing sophistication and power of organized labour, is seen as complementing the needs of the workforce. In a particular frame of reference i.e. the nature of the organization of management, the workers appear to aspire towards the "ways of the past" and in another frame of reference, in this case the role of labour unions, the workers speak of "advances" and the "role of unions in the future".

Granted, as the Action Theorists would suggest (Seymour-Smith:1986;2), we have to look at the "dynamic modes of political behaviour". We have to regard worker strategies in the light of their interests in maximizing their chances, rather than in simply being loyal to some abstract socio-political ideology. However, were it not for the manner in which the owner currently interfaces with the workforce, his "caring", "personal" and "concerned" disposition, the template for recreating the past managerial ethos would not be so readily available.

To a certain extent, the preservation of such a practice, and the associated imagery and symbols (see below) employed in establishing this relationship, are largely responsible for the 'dualist' system or juxtaposition of managerial ideologies that currently obtain within the factory. However, the ramifications of this evident juxtaposition appear to extend beyond worker-

management and worker-owner relations. In very important ways this situation impinges on the character of management-owner and intra-management relations as well.

During our discussions, the Factory Manager frequently remarked that the factory is experiencing a "management crisis". "No-one" he claimed, "was capable of adequately overseeing the maintenance of labour productiveness". The problem was allegedly one of authority and responsibility. Very few managers, throughout the management body, were prepared to assume the kinds of responsibilities that were necessary in order to adequately execute their tasks. Such accusations occurred at all levels.

As stated above, the Factory Manager believed that "no-one", obviously with the exclusion of himself, had adopted the sense of responsibility and authority necessary in order to perform to the level that was required of them. The Floor managers expressed the same concern; "Now that I have chargehands and supervisors beneath me, production levels are worse off than before", was Jayraj's comment, Dan was less forthright, suggesting "your charges need to be watched pretty closely if you really expect them to perform". Siva, the supervisor of the closing department in Factory A, felt that his chargehands "should be given a chance. Fellow-workers should make the chargehand's role easier by cooperating and facilitating his position".

On an intra-management level there appears to be little confidence expressed by managers, at various levels, regarding their subordinates' management capabilities. An incident I witnessed, involving various managers, seemed to encapsulise this feature of the management hierarchy quite succinctly. A question was raised by one of the workers from shoeroom C regarding the colour and texture of one of the socks (a fixed

inner sole) he was about to fit into a shoe. He initially raised the matter with the chargehand. The chargehand then approached the Floor Manager of factory B with the disputed sock. The Floor Manager then consulted with his counterpart from Factory A, officially regarded as his senior. Both Floor Managers then approached the Factory Manager who was on the factory floor at the time. Here the problem was finally resolved. The sock in question was considered to be of acceptable quality and was returned to shoeroom C.

Following this incident, the Factory Manager remarked; "they have over 30 years experience between them [the Floor Managers] and these are the kinds of decisions I have to make for them". The issue should have been resolved at the level of supervisor from where the 'sock' of dispute had emerged. However, "they lack the ability and sense of responsibility for effective decision-making", the Factory Manager asserted.

So pervasive is this theme of 'questionable confidence' that its influence extends into the field of owner-management relations as well. The most telling example of the lack of confidence, as a feature of owner-management relations at Cheval, was provided by the Factory Manager. Whilst discussing a proposal he had developed on the organization and structure of the management hierarchy (see Diagram B), I asked how the owner had reacted to the suggestions contained in the proposal. The proposal had not been shown to him. The Factory Manager had anticipated that the owner's approval would not have been forthcoming for "he lacks confidence in his management staff". As an explanatory remark he added; "he [the owner] had never afforded the opportunity for any of them [the managers] to really prove themselves".

On the whole, the crisis appears to stem from the contradictions

in the organization of the company. Implementation of the changes spoken of above, i.e. the "professionalization of management", have been severely impeded by the prevalence of a set of values, an ethos of sorts, that conflicts with the kinds of values that would necessarily accompany or even facilitate the implementation of these objectives. Such an ethos, I have argued, obtains as a result of the rather ambiguous intentions of the owner with regard to such changes. By maintaining the image of a 'patron', he seemingly provides recourse for the workers whose interests, in certain respects, appear to be better served by a more benign, familial style of management as opposed to the more legalistic, contractual and cold manner upon which 'professional' management ideology is premised.

Moreover, the control aspect of management appears to have fallen victim to this juxtaposition of organizational styles. Managers at all levels appear rather ambivalent in their understanding of their own roles within the organization. The changes allegedly undertaken were intended to empower these managers in order that they contribute in a more meaningful way to the 'managing' of the work process. However, the achievement of such objectives has been militated against by the owner's general lack of confidence in the management body at Cheval. What little responsibility is delegated down the management hierarchy is rarely undertaken with the sense of managerial professionalism that these changes were intended to engender. Rather, managers appear to still subscribe to an ethos of compliance, a central feature of the previous organizational system.

To understand how such a situation has developed, one must attempt to comprehend the kinds of changes that have been made. Determining the rationale for such changes may well reveal the obstacles or personal agendas that have prevented the company

from fully achieving these objectives, the failure of which has, I would argue, resulted in the present dualism of management styles. Before pursuing this explication of the reasons motivating such changes it is important to note that the programme for such changes, although openly referred to, was not, however, rigorously designed or intended for implementation within a specific time-frame. Although the objectives were reasonably clear, i.e. the professionalization of management, how this was to be achieved remained obscure.

4.3. Paternalism: the Former System

From as early as 1962, international organisations have been discussing the viability of sanctions against South Africa. The imperatives of such organisations have varied from limited financial sanctions (see Ovenden & Cole, 1989) comprehensive sanctions (Schoeman:1988). All, however, were united in their objectives; the abolition of Apartheid in South Africa and the creation of a democratic state. Early proposals emanated particularly from the Scandinavian countries while Western European and African countries followed closely behind (Schoeman:1988). The first co-ordinated and comprehensive action to be taken in this regard was by the United States of America (USA) where the Congressional Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act was passed, albeit controversially, in 1986. Commonwealth and European Community action of 1986-1987 soon followed the precedents set by the USA.

Such determined and comprehensive action, it has been argued, was precipitated by the increasing levels of political resistance following the South African government's proposal and subsequent establishment of the Tricameral Parliament. The new

parliamentary structure included representatives of the 'coloured' and Indian communities but excluded any representation for South Africa's African population. Resistance to this development was spear-headed by the United Democratic Front (UDF), an umbrella organization uniting the country's various democratic movements. The South African government's imposition of a state of emergency in 1986, and the alleged atrocities and human rights violations committed during its three-year existence, increasingly elicited the international community's condemnation. Many countries responded by calling for sanctions to be imposed against South Africa.

It is in this context of comprehensive sanctions against South Africa, and of political instability within the country, that the changes at Cheval were allegedly undertaken. Central to this need for change, as it was conveyed to me by members of management, was the lack of foreign capital flowing into the country. Opinions on the seriousness of such a situation vary quite remarkably. Some authors suggest that the "banker sanctions" and international prohibitions on new investment in South Africa severely constrained the country's ability to expand its economy (Shepard:1991;61), while others have drawn attention to South Africa's relatively low reliance on international investment, "contributing less than two per cent of all the country's domestic investment" (Ovenden:1989;75). Bloom's observations in this regard provide a rather reasoned appraisal of the need for financial investment; he claims that "perhaps it [South Africa] could manage without it, but it is undoubtedly better off with it" (1986;20).

A further development contributing to the need for change was an increase in trade union activity. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), South Africa's largest trade union

formation, held its inaugural congress in 1985. The inauguration clearly revealed the populist agenda of the emergent formation. The main thrust of the objectives discussed at the inaugural congress was the achievement of a "non-racial and democratic society" (Baskin:1990;49). Such a design was to be achieved primarily through the means of aggressive and extensive industrial action. Workers nation-wide were to participate in "strikes, protest marches and go-slows" aimed at bringing both national and international attention to the illegitimacy of the National Party (NP) government and the injustices of apartheid (Baskin:1990;127).

The exigencies of such developments placed increasing strain on the management system that obtained at the time. The need to introduce rationalization and effective labour relations revealed the company's lack of experience upon which to draw. A senior member of the management body claimed that, as the company was "reactive rather than proactive", such developments and contingent demands had caught the company by complete surprise; "no one really had the experience of such responsibilities" he remarked.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, the power of organized labour was relatively uninspiring. Local industry, although not exhibiting the same levels of success as in the immediate post-war period, was nevertheless operating in very favourable conditions with regard to local and international market forces as well as relatively propitious fiscal arrangements (Baskin:1990). The management style evident at Cheval during this period was to a significant extent shaped by, or within, these prevailing conditions.

The inadequate and inept organization of labour during this

period ensured that the workers lacked effective bargaining power. Fortunately for the workers at Cheval, however, the company offered rather generous wage rates (see chapter two) and boasted a markedly low labour turn-over². This context, I would argue, swayed the workers quite favourably towards the security and 'fairness' that the system was perceived to offer. Loyalty to the patron-like figure of the owner, and a patronage system upon which the organization of the company appeared to be patterned, represented a particularly appealing alternative to the workers, who were otherwise without effective support or leadership.

As Gellner has suggested, real patronage is "a system, a style, a moral climate" (1977:3). Although such systems exhibit features that are more or less comparable, there are not necessarily any absolute, basic features that will determine, definitively, whether such a system of power is based on patronage or not. Drawing from my own understanding, albeit limited, of such systems, the pervasive element appears to be the ethos that obtains within systems of patronage. Silverman, in an evocative essay on the ideology of patronage in Colleverde before World War II, observed that:

"...such relationships [patron-client] were surrounded by a rhetoric that magnified and distorted the real exchanges, while other relationships in which exchanges were minimal were couched in an idiom of patronage."

(Silverman:1977;11)

² About 45% of the labour force have been employed at Cheval for 10 years or more. Considering the company was founded only 20 years ago, such a figure is quite remarkable.

Actual exchanges that tend to form the basis of a more pedantic appraisal of systems of patronage were, in Silverman's experience, not easily quantifiable. But what was clear to him was the "reality" of patron-client relationships (1977:11). Such a 'reality' was similarly characteristic of Cheval in the period prior to the aforementioned changes. Although a system of dyadic relationships, and what might tentatively be termed 'exchanges', were discernible to some extent, the most idiomatic expression of the existence of such a system was, however, the ethos that obtained within the factory. The workers knew that this was the way of doing things.

To the workers, it was the owner who was singular in his ability to convey a sense of security and representation to their position of structural vulnerability. Organized labour, as it was, provided limited recourse for the workers' sense of insecurity and vulnerability. The owner, by providing security of tenure and competitive wages, drew his employees into a system of patronage. The workers were morally engaged in a system that operated in a climate of patronage. The vagaries of the 'outside' and the relative security of the 'inside' acted as sanctions against those that might have been tempted to exploit or challenge the system.

The owner himself developed a rather familial disposition redolent of personality rather than agency. The nature of his relations with the workforce appeared to exceed the conventional framework of formality that characterizes contractual relations in most western industrial milieus. (Dore:1973;286). Scott has noted that one of the distinguishing features of patron-client relationships is their "face-to-face personal character" as opposed to the explicit quality of impersonal contracts (1977;23). Workers at Cheval presently make a clear distinction,

on both a level of morality and status, when referring to the owner as opposed to upper-management personnel. The reference is characteristically discerning, suggestive of a more benign, caring quality as opposed to the typically exploitative reflections implicit in references to management personnel.

Regarding the question of status, the owner is perceived by many of the workers, notably those of longer service, as being "super-rich". Frequently, references to the owner's socio-economic status are rather grossly exaggerated. These apocryphal assertions, for instance, "Mr Von owns three farms and three beach cottages" and "he is a millionaire many times over and could afford to close up [the factory] when ever he wanted to", appear to emanate from a metaphor of power and control that the owner personifies, at least in the minds of the workers at Cheval.

The owner was, and to some extent still is, seen as being capable of successfully running the company regardless of the state of the broader economy within which it would have to 'flourish'. This exaggerated reference to status further contributes to the contrast between owner and managers. Managers in the system of patronage appear to have performed an ancillary role as 'functionaries' of the system as opposed to the more modern and conventional role of the manager as an agent with the "ability to originate" (Human:1981;17), and the "capacity to lead and inspire and move other men to act" (Lilienthal:1978;4). Although their role was prescribed to a significant extent, managers at all levels of the organization appeared to have manipulated such controls in the process of advancing their own interests (see below).

As suggested above, there were reasonably discernible exchanges

between the workforce and the owner that contributed to the maintenance of the system. The guarantee of job security (as reflected in the low labour turn-over) and the payment of relatively high wages ensured certain well-defined rewards for the owner. The workforce's relationship with the broader labour movements were tenuous; it appeared their loyalty lay first and foremost with the company. Competitive wages and job security provided by the company, coupled with the weakness of organized labour, rendered the need for extra-factory labour associations superfluous. Such needs, as defined in relation to the probability of attaining greater concessions within the prevailing industrial milieu, were more effectively addressed by the company itself as opposed to the possible gains of closer links with the broader labour movements.

As such, the factory itself came to represent the boundaries of the workers' 'world'. This was a process of encapsulation assisted as it was by very conducive socio-economic conditions. Extra-factory linkages were considered unnecessary or perhaps even detrimental to the preservation of the system. The resultant system was premised largely on a moral order as opposed to being maintained by a set of rules and regulations. Interaction between patron and client was conducted on a very personal level with minimal interference by the existing body of managers. In certain significant ways the system was comparable to the position of the "charismatic" leader vis-a-vis his followers as described by Weber (1970)³.

³ Gerald Mars, in his article 'The Stigma Cycle' observed how upper management were rather flexible in their decision making while lower\middle management were rather more cautious or "legalistic" (Mars:1979;144). Comparatively speaking, the owner of Cheval is in a position to exercise such 'flexibility' according to the nature of the circumstances while management is not.

Weber observed that a "genuinely charismatic situation is direct and interpersonal". The followers of such persons "are those that need to follow the leader because they believe him to be extraordinarily qualified" (Weber:1970;52). The exaggerated standing of the owner lent him such extraordinary qualities. The predicament of labour was such that the owner was perceived, in a reflection of the relatively attractive conditions of employment, as the only alternative for a markedly disorganized labour body. The offering of 'protection' from potential exploitation by an industrial condition that heavily favoured industry as opposed to labour was rewarded by a profound sense of loyalty. The workers believed the owner possessed "extraordinary" qualities and in the prevailing conditions, a figure thus construed had powerful and emotive connotations. Compliance to any of the owner's demands was almost certainly forthcoming.

This ethos of loyalty contained, in a sense, an element of self-perpetuation, operating largely on the basis of the good reputation of the owner amongst the workers. It was incumbent on the workers, on a practical level, to protect the good of their 'patron'. To ensure the preservation of the system which, in relation to the broader context, appeared to be in the workers' best interests, they had to campaign for him. The workforce had to preserve his reputation amongst the other workers in order to maintain the system. In no small way, the system was self-perpetuating and mutually rewarding.

4.4. The "Changes": the dualist system emerges

As Scott and others have pointed out, any changes in the legitimacy or acceptability of a patron are largely "a function

of changes in the objective balance of goods and services changed individually and collectively between the strata" (1977:25). Typically, a client's subjective evaluation of the relationship and its rewards will determine the legitimacy of the patron. In the case of Cheval, the increasing strength of organized labour witnessed in the early 1980s provided the juncture where the moral climate of patronage and the ethos of compliance, came under unbearable strain. Such developments were compounded by international sanctions against South Africa and the global recession that gripped the world's markets from the late 1980s. These emerging conditions played a central role in breaking down the system of patronage and to a large extent, shaping the managerial system that was to emerge in its place.

What was required in response to these national and international developments was a more economically expeditious approach to production management and more formal industrial relations. To this end, the appreciation of the need for change in managerial strategies was shared by upper-management personnel and the owner. However, on the question of the extent and character of such changes, the two appeared to diverge. Upper-management, most vocally represented by the Factory Manager and Floor Manager of factory B, were of the opinion that the role of management should be altogether transformed. Managers should be required, and permitted, to adopt a more professional ethic as opposed to the charter of their former role as '*apparatchik*', discharging policies in the formulation of which they played little or no role⁴. The dynamics of the emergent industrial

⁴ Max Gluckman identified a similar process occurring amongst government magistrates and the Native Commissioner in Zululand during the 1930s. Magistrates were observed not only applying government policy but rather, in what they perceived as "the interests of the Zulu", working towards the progress of the district in which they were responsible for administering the law. Of the Native Commissioner, it was said that he had come to

milieu required a more flexible and professional style of management, in which the scope of managerial responsibility and authority was to be significantly expanded.

The owner, on the other hand, appears to have envisaged amid the changes a rather different scenario emerging. Although he seemed to have acknowledged the need for certain changes in order to mediate the economic constraints imposed by international sanctions and the global recession as well as the demands of a more galvanized and organized labour force, his appraisal of the demands of such a situation appear to have diverged considerably from those of the management body. Although managers, of necessity, were to adopt a more active and professional role within the management process, such a process was off-set to a large extent, by the owner's intent on retaining maximum control over the operation of the factory.

Management's interests in such changes tended more strongly towards the complete bureaucratization of the organization. In his appraisal of the manner in which "modern officialdom" functions, Weber asserts that:

"There is the principle of fixed and official jurisdictional areas, which are generally ordered by rules, that is, by laws or administrative regulations." (Weber:1970;196).

The proposal outlining certain changes in the structure of management (see Diagram B), developed by the Factory Manager,

stand for many of the new values and interests influencing the Zulus (Gluckman:1963;152-3) These 'functionaries' had adopted a professional ethic which at times conflicted with official government policy.

was principally aimed at more rigorously defining administrative tasks. There appeared to be a consensus amongst upper-management personnel on the need for more specific job descriptions. The proposal explicitly endorsed the principles of hierarchy and of levels of graded authority that are symptomatic of bureaucratic organization. Three departments, each to be administered by present members of the upper-management body, were to emerge in place of the then current predicament where departmental divisions and personnel responsibilities or jurisdictional areas were uncertain.

As mentioned above, the proposal was never shown to the owner. The Factory Manager had predicted that the proposal would be resisted by the owner on the assumption that the present management body were not capable of fulfilling the tasks outlined in the proposal. The owner did not share the view that a complete bureaucratization of the organization was the solution to the emerging managerial difficulties. It appeared that the owner envisaged a solution that combined essential elements of the two systems. To a certain degree the need for a more bureaucratic organization on the basis of its "technical superiority" was acknowledged. However, complete bureaucratization would have curtailed his powers, insofar as power is a product of control. Were responsibilities or "jurisdictional areas" rigorously defined, implicit in this process is the granting of a certain 'minimum independence' to those appointed to manage such 'areas', the corollary of which is the weakening of the owner's level of control.

In attempting to maintain an optimum level of control, the owner appears to have gone only as far as developing the status component of a bureaucratic hierarchy, avoiding endowing such positions with the necessary functional attributes. Such an

arrangement stems from the owner's maintenance of a sense of dependency upon himself in all matters of the company, a feature central to the system of control prior to the 'changes', As an upper-management personnel remarked;

"James [marketing manager] has lots of potential for the position of marketing manager, yet Mr Von won't let go [afford him any sort of independence] and what results is that James appears expendable".

The emergence of the kind of ethos or climate that would facilitate the process of bureaucratization has been militated against by the owner's reluctance to delegate responsibility. The tradition of compliance, managers as 'functionaries' of the system, appears to have survived, by dint of the owner's efforts, the transition from a system of patronage to what was, to some extent, intended to be a bureaucratic organization. The existence of this 'ethos of compliance' in upper-management has further repercussions for lower management⁵. Although this question will be dealt with more thoroughly later in this chapter, suffice it to say that the lack of responsibility accorded upper-management personnel was duplicated in the case of lower-management personnel.

The relationships between upper-management personnel and the

⁵ Bozzoli (1977) claims that management is not a "monolithic" entity. That in every enterprise there exists two levels of managerial activity: the upper level where managerial ideologies are evolved and broad strategies conceived; and the lower 'supervisory' level where the actual control of workers within the resulting structure is carried out. In the case of Cheval, reference to "upper-management" is clearly then one of status rather than function, for their actual role appears to conform more closely to that accorded lower supervisory level management.

owner are of a dyadic nature, each departmental manager being drawn into a dyad with the owner. The dependence that is characteristic of this relationship ensures that the owner has full control over information and the pattern of decision making. This set of relations was used at times as a foil for the maintenance of good relations between the owner and the workforce. The control afforded the owner by the dyadic relations he had with his management personnel enabled him to promote [or maintain] a familial disposition towards his workers. By maintaining a veneer of bureaucratic organization, suggestive of independent authority, the owner can maintain good personal relations with the workers while his body of managers are seen to be the ones "causing all the trouble". An example of this was the early retirement of some of the elderly employees. The Factory Manager was responsible for 'breaking the news' to those employees selected for early retirement. It was he who was to discuss the terms of such retirement, the packages etc.

The prospect of having to inform elderly employees, many of whom had been in the employ of Cheval for long periods, is an unenviable task. That such employees would not find alternative employment due to their age and the high level of unemployment⁶ is almost a foregone conclusion. The indignation caused by such a decision would be focused on the Factory Manager rather than the owner. Kapferer witnessed similar 'scapegoating' in the

⁶ Estimations of the level of unemployment in South Africa frequently contradict one another. Concepts such as 'formal' and 'informal' employment as well as 'unemployment' and 'underemployment' lack the necessary refinement to accurately quantify the magnitude of the crisis. Such confusion notwithstanding, the poverty, level of retrenchments and low levels of sustained economic growth evident within the country, all point to a crisis of escalating proportions. Moreover, the situation in Natal is widely regarded as being far more severe than in most of the other provinces within the country.

course of action open to the manager of an African factory in Kabwe, Zambia. A partner, whose managerial responsibilities necessitated a high profile on the factory floor, frequently called upon the other partners to negotiate with the factory workers. Should the resulting settlement favour management, which it usually did, these individuals became scapegoats for the failure of the workers to attain their goals. As such, the conspiring partner's ability to manoeuvre quite freely was preserved (Kapferer:1972;219).

Although the owner has high visibility on the factory floor, he is rarely observed participating in any form of decision making on the factory floor itself. During the entire research period no illustrations to the contrary were observed. In his capacity as the owner he frequently interfaces with clients in both a formal and casual manner. However, his own dress code sides more to the casual than it does to the formal. On the factory floor he is frequently observed speaking to the workers in what appears to be a very informal manner, with the workers very much at ease in his presence. The rapport he enjoys with the work force in general, is in no way threatened by action instituted under his authority, for such action is the product of decisions made in private. The avoidance of public decision-making effectively obscures his relationship with action taken at the expense of the workers. Again, such actions are ascribed by the workers to the management body and not to the owner. In the imputations that emerge, the owner's reputation is preserved, or even strengthened, at the expense of management.

The employment of such stratagems promotes [or maintains] the paternalistic character of the organization. Changes in the balance of the relationship between the owner and the workers compelled the owner to employ certain strategies in an effort to

restore a system, which in the past appears to have provided him with a level of flexibility unobtainable within a genuinely bureaucratic organization. The workforce at Cheval had developed extra-factory linkages with the National Leather Workers' Union and, on a more abstract level, increasingly identified with the abstract notion of the 'working class'. Such developments threatened the balance of the relationship between the workers and the owner. In order to maintain this balance, to negotiate the changes, the owner employed certain strategies that would assist him in maintaining good relations with his workforce. The 'scapegoating' and private decision-making are illustrative of these efforts at work. In maintaining this paternal relationship the owner is in effect expanding his options. After all, a system of patronage is far more flexible than a bureaucracy, characterized as it is by rules and regulations.

Similarly motivating is the nebulous though perceptible sense of gratification garnered by the relationship of dependence that the owner enjoys with his workforce. Although no more than an impressionistic observation, the extra-factory linkages developed by the workforce at Cheval threatened this relationship of dependence, and in turn the sense of gratification derived from it. The system of patronage was being subjectively re-evaluated by a workforce whose bargaining power and position of relative structural strength had increased significantly. In order to maintain the balance of this relationship, the owner used limited bureaucratization as a buffer between himself and his work force.

⁷ Although largely rhetorical, the notion of belonging to a 'class' of similarly oppressed people threatened the boundaries of the factory as an encapsulated entity. Sentiments expressed by the workers clearly began to cross-cut this 'arena', uniting, themselves, at least notionally, with the mass of people assumed to be experiencing similar conditions beyond the confines of the factory.

As a buffer, the now seemingly bureaucratized management body deflected any criticism away from the owner, on to themselves. An employee hired in part due to his experience in industrial relations performed a similar function, parrying any criticism away from the owner. On the surface, the owner appears to have succeeded in preserving a system from which he derives considerable benefits. He has been able, through the employment of various strategies, to maintain good relations with his workforce, while having to simultaneously institute various policies potentially detrimental to this relationship. However, dynamic behaviour is not the exclusive preserve of the owner. Upper and lower level managers have similarly reflected such dynamism in their individual efforts at defining a position or identity in the increasingly ambiguous environment in which they find themselves.

The owner's efforts at maintaining a monopoly on decision-making by appropriating managerial functions and obfuscating the source of such action, instills a profound sense of ambiguity in the role of management. Such ambiguity is at times quite shrewdly mediated by these management personnel. The appearance of dispensability that obtains as a result of the owner's usurpation of their functions has to be shed. Managers employ various strategies in order to promote their apparent value to the successful operation of the company.

Upper-management personnel frequently accuse their subordinate supervisors of "incompetence", "stupidity" and "unreliability". Such imputations emerge largely as a result of the lack of a clearly defined system of responsibility and function defining each managerial level or personality. On numerous occasions I witnessed managers complaining to their subordinates about not fulfilling their ambit of responsibility. However, these

subordinates in turn complained that, when they did assume the kinds of responsibilities outlined by their superordinates, they were again reprovved, this time for acting *outside* their area of responsibility.

Managers throughout the hierarchy displayed a similar lack of confidence in their subordinates. Such attitudes obtain, I would argue, as a result of their seemingly negligible role or restricted responsibility they contribute, formally, towards the managing of the company's operation. It is not specifically their subordinates' behaviour that concerns these managers but rather, the sense of self-importance that stems from the notion that these subordinates cannot be relied upon. It is not so much a question of 'cannot manage' as it is question of 'may not manage'. Thus management are engaging less in the management of operations than they are in 'impression management'.

By depriving their subordinates of the opportunity to manage, their own contribution to the managing of the operation is seemingly enhanced. In the ambiguity and confusion that results from a lack of formal bureaucratization, these management personnel interpret 'responsibility' in accordance with their own interests. They, at times symbolically, manipulate the existing authority constellation at the expense of others, literally misappropriating power in order to mediate their sense of dispensability. By stigmatizing lower-management, the contribution of upper-management appears all the more valuable. Connors and Romberg observed a similar course of action adopted by middle-managers whose authority was threatened by the introduction of quality controls in a US corporation. Such management personnel were observed by the authors manipulating these directives "to symbolically reaffirm their superiority" (1991:126).

Other strategies employed by managers at Cheval, in order to negotiate the prevailing confusion was the accusation that subordinate supervisors and workers in their charge possessed what was commonly referred to as the "R.C. complex"; resistance to change. Although the national and international developments discussed above had forced the company to make certain changes, the substance and ramifications of such changes were often invented or embellished by these managers. Workers and lower-management personnel were often accused of struggling to come to terms with the 'changes'. Although the substance of such changes were unclear, managers complained that they had to intervene on behalf of the supervisors and workers in order to "assist them in making the changes". Furthermore, failure to meet certain production quotas or targets were frequently attributed to the "R.C. complex", a particularly severe 'affliction' allegedly affecting the workforce.

The only apparent solution to this costly malady was inevitably the advice and instruction (general supervision) that these managers could offer. Again, such strategies enhanced the role played by upper-management at the expense of their subordinates. The problems the factory faced were portrayed, by upper-management, as emanating almost entirely from lower management incompetence. The role of upper-management was portrayed as crucial to the resolutions of these, at times indiscernible, problems. Lower-management personnel similarly had to mediate the ambiguities of their roles. The most apparent strategy employed to this end was the alternation of "idioms of interaction".

The lack of authority granted these individuals left most of them grappling to reconcile their status with their function. Attempting to exercise challengeable authority over a work force that enjoyed a good relationship with the owner could not be

considered auspicious conduct. Furthermore, their responsibilities were unclear and often contested by their superiors. Their authority was so limited that they tended to identify more closely with the workers than they did with management. Charge-hands, occupying the bottom rung of lower-management often worked alongside their charges and sat and ate together with them during tea and lunch breaks.

Although they frequently identified and interacted with the workers, certain situations demanded a greater exhibition of authority. When interacting with other management personnel or myself, they appeared to adopt a veneer of authority and responsibility. The white coats they wore were frequently buttoned up and pronounced and the language and tone resonated with a sense of authority. One particular chargehand, who before his promotion had been a shop steward, informed me that he now "saw things differently". He was no longer a worker but rather, a manager. However, at lunch break he always sat with the workers or other chargehands and confided in me that he found it extremely difficult instructing his "fellow workers" on how they should perform.

Chargehands, and to a lesser extent supervisors, were forced to shift idioms of interaction in order to mediate the ambiguous and liminal character of their roles. Rather than estrange themselves from the work force with whom they had most in common, they frequently interacted as equals. On the other hand, they had a certain obligation to fulfil with regard to their status as 'managers'. Such obligations were discharged with highly selective exhibitions of authority, where their performance as lower-managers least threatened to compromise their relations with the general work force.

4.5. Conclusion

These various strategies adopted by upper and lower management personnel presented the most expedient way of negotiating the ambiguity inherent in their roles. The lack of formal bureaucratization has set these positions afloat in the ambiguity that has resulted. All management personnel are forced to adopt coping strategies in order to instill in their roles a sense of meaning, whether real or not. The much touted bureaucratization has failed because it appears that the owner never intended, for various reasons, that such a formation should crystallize. Perhaps of most importance is the obvious lack of faith he has in his management body. As an observer for only a limited period of time, it was impossible for me to determine the veracity of such scepticism. Whether the management body were indeed 'unreliable' was impossible to tell. What was apparent however, was the very real consequences that emanated from this belief.

That people both need and enjoy a level of meaning in their lives is not, I think, a particularly challenging statement to make. Most people appear quite determined to create an identity for themselves. Although managers at all levels are expected to contribute to the 'managing' of the operations, the character of such expectations are poorly defined. The lack of job descriptions and role expectations force these managers to create an identity of their own, often, albeit unintentionally, at the expense of the company. The act of appearing to contribute to the managing of the company frequently conforms to a logic of its own. Goffman's (1973) concept of "impression management" is particularly germane to an understanding of such logic.

The lack of meaning instilled in such roles fosters the need for the development of an alternative source of meaning. Because the

relationship between the concept of management and that of actual control is to a significant degree broken, managers have to resort to 'fixing' this relationship through the appearance of being in control. They convey the impression that they are in control, although the substance of such efforts is largely contrived.

Drucker has asserted that "function rather than power has to be the distinctive criterion and organizing principle of management" (1977:59). As is frequently the case, discourse or 'classic' representations of phenomena frequently diverge in character from the actual cases which they are generally purported to define. The issue is more complex than merely the exercising of control or discharging of function. Managers at Cheval were compelled to convey the appearance of 'being in control'. It was not simply a matter of managerial 'function', but rather the appearance of functioning as a manager.

The functional or control element in the managerial predicament was not as implicit as is implied by the discourse of management. Although the function of management is inextricably linked to the notion of control, such control is obtained not necessarily through the direct application of managerial function but possibly, as in the case of Cheval, through the direct manipulation of managerial function. Bozzoli's observations are particularly pertinent in this regard.

"It is revealing how management adapts itself to the degree and sophistication of consciousness and organization of the working class. While management presents itself as being evolutionary it is in fact the workers' initiatives which provide the basis and the reasons for change...management is essentially reactive rather than innovative." (1977:33).

At Cheval however, it was not the reaction of managers themselves that brought about the changes, but rather the owners manipulation of managerial function, aimed at containing worker initiatives, that precipitated the changes. The management body came to represent a buffer zone between the owner and his workforce. That the owner was allowed to preserve his image of benevolence ensured that he enjoyed good relations with the workforce regardless of the local and national changes taking place within industry.

Managers were deprived of their 'classical' functions by the efforts of the owner to maintain control. They were not required to "set objectives" as Hodgetts (1990:3) suggests, or "to make things happen by virtue of his special and particular human qualities" as Litterer (1978:7) discerns, but rather to act as scapegoats in order that the company would function along the lines set out by the owner. Managers were in a sense compelled to develop their 'function' to a level commensurate with that of their status. Management may be about control, but how such control is obtained is not simply an abstract question of managerial function but necessarily includes references to the situation in which such managers functions. As Dore has remarked; "There are certain conditions which mould and influence the nature and practice of industrial relations" (1973:73).

CHAPTER 5. TRADE UNIONISM: ITS ROLE IN THE FACTORY EXPERIENCE

5.1. Introduction

Throughout the preceding chapters the position or activities of the workforce, management body and the owner have been discussed under various headings including worker-management interaction, management-owner relations and worker-owner relations. The pivotal focus of this chapter is on the role of trade unions in the working lives of these three agencies. Although the following sections focus on specific sets of relations, for instance worker-union relations, such sets of relations are not mutually exclusive. The dynamics of one set of relations are often influenced by the dynamics of the other(s). As the ensuing discussion will demonstrate, the constantly alternating character of relations between these agencies incorporates a particular logic, or follows a pattern of interaction, which is governed to a large extent by local industrial conditions.

5.2. Worker-Trade Union Relations

The significance of trade union intervention or representation in the work experience of labour at Cheval varies in differing contexts. As observed in the preceding chapter on management at Cheval, relationships between individuals and interest groups are dynamic as opposed to constant or homogeneous. The relationship between the trade union and the workforce at Cheval exhibited similar dynamism. Contrary to management's understanding of this relationship, which often reflected the belief that such a

relationship was characterized by an unquestionable loyalty, the workers at Cheval had a rather 'flexible' relationship with the trade union that represented them, as well as with the broader leather worker association with which it was assumed they were closely aligned.

In various ways, workers at Cheval regarded themselves as a specific interest group. Although trade union intervention in particular disputes was often at the behest of the workers, in their capacity as members of the broader leather workers union, such appearances were often strategic guises under which the workers at Cheval pursued particular objectives specifically rewarding to themselves. As suggested, the workers' relationship with their trade union was rather shrewdly expedient. Such a pattern of 'strategy and flexibility' was similarly evident in various other aspects of worker-trade union interaction. The election and roles of the shop stewards were determined by various worker imperatives above and beyond the stereotype of the shop steward as the union representative on the factory floor.

On the whole, relations between the trade union movement and the workers at Cheval were characterized by a considerable flexibility. The duality of the management system, discussed at some length in the preceding chapter, facilitated, to a significant extent, the ability of the workforce to successfully manipulate its relationship with the external labour movement and other agents. Concepts such as general 'worker solidarity' and 'class consciousness' are too often rhetorical terms that obfuscate the dynamic interplay of differing interests and objectives.

Trade union developments in South Africa since the mid 1980s, discussed at some length in the preceding chapter, have had a

dramatic influence on the character of industrial relations. The 'de facto' right to strike, evident under the former NP government has given way to specific rights now enshrined in the Transitional Constitution. The escalation of strike activity not only attests to these rights but furthermore reflects labour's increasing perception of its ability to participate more assertively in the structure of the country's economy. However, although more militant industrial action appears to have emerged as the dominant form of industrial protest, and consequently has attracted increasing media attention, this impression has considerably distorted the evident diversity of accessible forms of industrial protest available to labour.

Labour's current utilization of power-based forms of industrial protest has, I would argue, augmented rather than replaced forms of industrial protest evident prior to the resurgence of 'power protests' in the late 1980s. The now expanded arsenal of 'weapons of protest' was rather deftly exploited by the labour force at Cheval. Incidents such as that concerning 'short time' (discussed at some length in chapter three), evoked images of labour that projected a certain pathetic quality. Labour portrayed itself as the hapless victim of market vicissitude. It then appears that management are penalizing those [the workers] who merely occupy the periphery of the economy. The impression of powerlessness is more redolent of the period prior to the strengthening of labour's position within the economy. However, the incorporation of the image of the 'victim' does not necessarily contradict the observation that the character of industrial protest has been strengthened. It rather, suggests that labour has not abandoned strategies of industrial action that have borne fruit in the past.

The contrasting images of power and powerlessness were rather

aptly conveyed in the words of one of the shop stewards. He virtually enjoined management to heed the "potentially transformative capabilities of labour power", referring to organized labour's ability to transform the structure of the industry. Similarly emotive was his condemnation of management for their "insensitivity towards the position of labour", a way of alluding to the victim status of labour in the economy. This dualism of power and impotence was clearly manifest in the various kinds of strategies employed by the workforce at Cheval in their endeavour to achieve or maintain certain defined interests and needs.

Kapferer's (1972:120) use of the concepts of "field" and "arena" in his discussion of industrial disputes in an African factory affords some interesting parallels with my own observations. Perhaps Bailey's discussion offers a more succinct and comprehensible summation of the meaning and the context within which these concepts have been applied:

"Society is an arena (or field) in which men compete for prizes; to control one another; to achieve command over property and resources...and, negatively, to avoid being controlled by others and to retain such resources as they already possess" (Bailey:1960;10).

Kapferer asserts that these fields vary in the degree of their expansion and contraction across what he refers to as the "arena" (1972:120). A field expands when a large number of resources or agents are involved, in some relation to one another, within an arena of all possible resources. Similarly, when relatively few elements from the arena are involved, the field of action contracts. Relating this more specifically to the context of Cheval, when the shop steward requests the trade union's

participation in the context of a particular dispute, he intentionally expands the field of action to include resources (the power of trade unions, labour law, etc) that exist in the broader industrial arena. The workers opt for expansion, I would argue, when it presents itself as the most expedient strategy available to them in their efforts to achieve and/or protect certain defined interests. It is a strategic choice, informed as it is, by the nature of the interests or factors involved.

Similarly, the workers may choose to contract the field of action by involving only the work force and management (and/or owner) at Cheval. By excluding the involvement of the trade union and other extra-factory resources and agents, the workers are intentionally narrowing the field of action in the context of a particular dispute. What follows are two particular examples of industrial disputes that will, hopefully, illustrate the actual circumstances that determine the kind of strategy that labour will adopt in its efforts to achieve a settlement that reflects in their favour.

The first illustration concerns the dispute surrounding the issue of 'short time' and the effects this policy has on the worker's weekly attendance bonus (see chapter three). Essentially the character of the workers' opposition to this policy was insidious rather than overtly confrontational. The field of action had been contracted to include only the workers and management at Cheval. The hypothetical extent of the arena must be understood to include such external agencies as trade unions, industrial councils, as well as the provincial and national labour ministries. No such bodies were included in the field of action that circumscribed the workers' strategy, resulting in what Kapferer refers to as a "contraction across the arena" (Kapferer:1972;123).

For various reasons, management was seen to be occupying a position of relative strength with regard to the retention of the 'short time' policy and maintaining its negating effect on the workers' weekly attendance bonus. First, a 42 hour working week was a figure accepted by the union and as such, affords management an edge in the bargaining process. Secondly, the factory has over the years established for itself the reputation of being, as one worker described it, "a fair payer". The reputation stems from the company's policy of paying up to 10 per cent above the Industrial Council's minimum wage recommendations. Intervention by the National Leather Workers' Union (NLWU) may have been perceived as 'heavy handed' and inappropriate considering the reputation of fairness and generosity the company has garnered for itself.

A third contributing factor was the union's prior intervention over the proposed implementation of a quota-based incentive scheme. The union had successfully supported the workers in their objection to the proposal and further intervention with regard to the only existing incentive scheme, the attendance bonus, may have been misconstrued by the owner and management as the union's rather irresponsible effort to promote the workers' 'rights' regardless of the consequences.

Finally, and possibly most significantly, the nature of the "special circumstances" to which the workers referred, i.e. circumstances necessarily precipitating an employee's absence from work, would have had to be subjected to serious scrutiny were the union to intervene on the workers' behalf. It was my impression at the time that any attempt to introduce some form of limitation with regard to the nature of these "special circumstances" would have been fiercely resisted by the workers.

Ideally, this category of "special circumstances" was to remain unspecified and non-negotiable. Although some workers cited various hypothetical situations that they regarded as legitimate grounds for condoned absenteeism, which would ensure that they received their attendance bonus and which the author believed were perhaps quite unreasonably excluded from consideration, they appeared to be in the minority. A considerable majority of the workers spoken to, quite openly referred to circumstances that could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be officially condoned.

A group of workers, with whom I had developed a certain confidence, spoke openly about their occasional "all nighters" that precipitated, as a matter of course, their late arrival at work. Although they regarded themselves as "responsible" and "committed to their work", they also realized that they were "no angels". They felt that, although they were not without fault and occasionally made a mistake, the penalty of having to forfeit their attendance bonus was too harsh.

Had the union intervened in this dispute, such sentiments might not have evaded detection. The participation of the union might have plumbed the issue with the kind of rigour that would not have accommodated, for instance, the "all nighters" recounted above. The workers were intent on ensuring a 'general' flexibility rather than any level of prescription, a position to which management had previously intimated and one that might have been obtained had the union participated in the dispute.

It was in labour's interest to assess the relative merits of the strategies at their disposal and, quite obviously, to adopt the most expedient of these options. By expanding the field of action to include trade unions (or other external agents), labour would,

quite knowingly, have subjected themselves to a potential outcome that would have favoured the owner to a greater extent than it did labour. That this process reflects a certain dialectical quality distinguishes itself from Neuman's concept of the "Zero-Sum game" (Von Neumann:1947;112). The dialectical element is contained in the manner in which labour regards the possible 'longer' term repercussions with the utmost caution. The dispute itself might achieve an immediate settlement but the kinds of strategies employed by labour in their efforts to achieve such a settlement might have had repercussions of their own. For the workers, it is not necessarily a 'winner-takes-all' situation.

Achieving certain concessions with regard to the issue of condoned absence, through, for argument's sake, the persuasive power of trade unionism, might have triggered a shift in the owner's apparently fair disposition to his workforce. The owner is by no means obligated to pay at the rates that he does, although that he does so obviously tends to suggest that it bodes well for both parties. However, he may choose to alter the wage rates to offset the potential costs incurred by the workforce's achievement of certain monetary concessions. Were he to do so, the workers' 'victory' would be a pyrrhic one indeed. And on a more general level, the owner's perception of and relations with labour on the whole, which were previously described as good, could have been adversely affected.

The preponderantly negative repercussions of trade union involvement informed the workers' choice to restrict the field of action. The strategy was characteristically subtle, operating along what Dyer refers to as "primary relations" (1988:80). These primary relations involved close personal involvement and interaction between employer and employee. The workers were attempting to appeal to their employer's sensibilities as opposed

to any formal employment responsibilities. Reflecting back on some of the ideas discussed in the preceding chapter, it appears that the workers believed that their strategy should be conceived in the paternalistic framework, emphasizing the 'informal', the 'generosity' and the 'victim' status. Activating formal channels of protest would not have facilitated the achievement of their objectives, i.e. flexibility in the application of the attendance bonus. The transparency necessitated by a formal objection by the union on behalf of the workers would have unveiled the, at times quite censurable, interests in 'flexibility'. Possible damage to employer-employee relations may have significantly outweighed the potential benefits derived from formal union representation in this matter. All these factors dictated the need to approach this issue within the framework of paternalist relations between employer and employee.

The second case involves the National Union of Leather workers' strike in 1992¹. The union and the employer association, of which the owner of Cheval is a member, were locked in a dispute over the annual Industrial Council wage increment. Industrial Council wage rates for this sector are renegotiated annually in June. In 1992, the Employers' Association tabled an offer of 10% across the board which the union rejected for a 15% across the board settlement. During the dispute, the National Union of Leather workers called for a general strike to be continued until such time as a 'fair' settlement was achieved.

The only sign of solidarity or compliance with the union expressed at Cheval was the workers' agreement to adopt a policy of 'go slow' which lasted two or three days. Thereafter,

¹ Cheval has experienced very few strikes. Although strikes often do 'threaten', they rarely materialize.

production was continued at normal production rates, despite the union and employers' association only reaching an agreement some two weeks later. This prompt restoration of the work process resulted from a deal offered by the owner, whereby, if production was normalized, workers would receive back-pay based on the outcome of negotiations between the union and employers' Association for the duration of the proposed strike. On the surface, it appears that, as in the former case, the workers opted to constrict the field of action within the context of a dispute, involving only groups on the intra-factory level. However, further analysis will show that the workers quite deftly played off the concept of two fields against each other.

At first, the workers at Cheval appeared to expand the field of action to include extra-factory resources; the trade union, the Employers' Association etc, in the arena of the dispute. Although overtly a display of extra-factory solidarity as opposed to focusing on internal grievances, the workers did, however, adopt this course of action largely as a foil for their efforts at strengthening their position within the factory. The workers' support for the national strike was tentative rather than firm. Choosing not to strike but to 'go slow' as it were, they signalled their industrial accountability while simultaneously reaffirming their relationship with the broader group of leather workers. A blanket rejection of the union's request for solidarity regarding this issue would have unnecessarily alienated the workers at Cheval from what is widely perceived to be an important resource. On the other hand, total compliance with the strike call may have seriously jeopardized employee-employer relations. Both sets of relations are regarded as important, although as we shall see, for differing reasons.

As stated, within 48 hours of adopting a policy of 'go slow',

the workers at Cheval were approached with an offer formulated by the management body and the owner. The alacrity with which the issue was resolved is a reflection of both labour and the owner's ability to retain the initiative. Although labour, to a degree, threatened to expand the field of action by complying with the trade union's call for a general strike, such 'intentions' amounted to no more than "impression management" (a concept discussed previously in chapter four). The workers never intended to comply fully with the union's call, although some allusion towards such actions was considered to be a necessary palliative. Such allusions served not only to exhibit a degree, albeit superficial, of solidarity with the broader group of leather workers but moreover, signalled to the owner or management that 'all was not well' and that something should be done lest they be forced into taking firmer action².

The owner's prompt reaction served to remind the workers of his "caring" disposition, suggesting that, with him, workers do not have to resort to radical industrial action to draw attention to their grievances. Again the initiative was not lost on the owner. According to Kapferer's analysis of the arena of industrial dispute and fields of action, the work force at Cheval seemingly adopted, in this particular dispute, two contrasting fields of action. In the first, they appeared to expand the field of action across the arena, involving linkages with extra-factory

² Central to an understanding of the nature of employer-employee relations at Cheval is the view that the owner and the workforce represent competing interest groups. Although such relations are frequently described as "good", the balance of these 'industrial relations' has to be constantly reaffirmed. In varying situations, these competing interest groups contest and challenge the boundaries of the relationship. Each situation or 'confrontation' contributes towards or detracts from this "good" relation. Although relations are indeed good, this is a product of on-going social processes.

organizations and later constricted this field of action to include only the intra-factory parties of employer and employee. This dualism obtains as a result of, I would argue, the workers' maintenance of a distinction between political relations and industrial relations³. Although such a distinction is not mutually exclusive, the dynamics of this particular dispute demanded a rather deft handling of two different relationships simultaneously.

Relations between the work force at Cheval and the National Union of Leather Workers are essentially political⁴. The broad based character of worker-union relations in general are often unsympathetic towards local work conditions. Consequently, in matters specifically industrial, the workers tend to rely on their own ingenuity and experience rather than calling upon the union to represent them, although this remains a well publicised

³ Such a distinction is made between specific local interests, best served as they are by local solutions, and collective or broader interests. Both Kapferer and Epstein observed similar distinctions emerging between local and macro politics in urban African communities. Kapferer observed how mine workers in Kabwe resisted efforts by UNIP, a political party with broad based national support, to gain control of local organizational structures (1976:63). Such structures were perceived by the mine workers as more effectively representing their interests as miners rather than Africans. Similarly, Epstein (1958) in analysing the changing patterns of African leadership in the towns, noted how the changing demands of an urban milieu, effected a change in the composition of Tribal Councils. Tribal elders were replaced by "trade union officials, congress officials, and other leading urban personalities" (1958:230).

⁴ An illustration of this 'political' relationship between workers and their union is the manner in which the union is called upon to represent individuals, notably in disciplinary matters. The line of reasoning often adopted by the union in such matters focuses on the socio-political issues of oppression and prejudice, capital verses labour, etc; macro political allusions as opposed to micro industrial conditions.

option. Manifest support for the union was necessary in order to reaffirm their loyalty to the national group of leather workers. Politically the workers at Cheval are clearly aligned with their union, endorsing similar socio-political sentiments. However, they utilize local industrial techniques for maintaining or achieving their 'local' objectives. Were the "good" relations between employer and employee irredeemably destroyed, there is little doubt that local industrial relations would become increasingly politicized, with the workforce at Cheval increasingly engaging the support of the national union.

As suggested, the appearance of expanding the field of action not only serves to reaffirm relations with the national union but more importantly, provides a foil for improving the chances of a local settlement emerging from the dispute. As suggested, the distinction between industrial relations and political relations is largely predicated upon the propitious extent of local industrial conditions. The workers, I would argue, never really envisaged that the resolution of this issue, as it affected Cheval, would be totally mediated on a national level. Alluding to the option of expanding the field of action represents no more than a catalyst for local solutions to what was perceived by the workers to be, essentially, a local issue.

The industrial component of this issue was to be most effectively resolved by constricting, as far as possible, the field of action. After two days of 'go slows', the purported extent of the field contracted to include only the employees and employer at Cheval. In this dispute the workforce at Cheval, with the complicity of the owner, narrowed the field of action and by doing so excluded the influence of the trade union in order to "avoid being controlled by others and to retain such resources as they already possess" (Bailey:1960;10). Furthermore, they also

succeeded in conveying a sense of good will between them and their employer, a resource to be drawn upon in the future, if necessary.

Both of the preceding illustrations of industrial disputes reflect to a greater or lesser extent, the malleable character of worker-union relations at Cheval. The relationship is necessarily flexible due to the highly particular local circumstances of industrial relations. The distinction between local and macro, or industrial and political, relations is intentionally obfuscated, affording greater expedience on the part of the workforce at Cheval. Although local solutions to all industrial disputes is the workers' ideal, the potential or actual failure to achieve this ideal stimulates the interplay between industrial and political relations.

5.3. The Shop Steward

It would be naïve to suggest that the existence of good industrial relations between employer and employee and more fundamentally, the distinction between industrial and political relations, would altogether preclude the role of the shop steward. The characterization of industrial relations at Cheval as "good", is a blanket or general reference to an, admittedly, dialectic process. Not only is the presence of shop stewards on the factory floor a component of formal trade union administration but, moreover, it embodies certain valuable local functions. At the same time however, these 'functions' must be understood to vary according to the availability of suitable personnel and the nature of the circumstances within which such personnel must operate.

The specific functions of a shop steward are premised largely on the general labour force's estimation of the calibre of particular shop stewards. Currently there are three shop stewards, two of them are generally regarded as "successful" while the third (see profile, chapter three) is not highly regarded. Yet both categories of shop steward are expected to perform particular roles. Ram is presently the scape-goat of worker-management interaction. His inarticulate manner and lack of social skills coupled with a dogged sense of determination define his position as something of a 'fall guy' for industrial relations. The remaining two shop stewards, Martin and Jaffal, are more articulate and 'management friendly', presenting a mien of the shrewd but fair minded arbitrators of worker-management interaction.

Most of the workers refer to Ram as 'necessary'. They feel that someone has to "constantly get at management", which appears to quite succinctly circumscribe Ram's role. Ram, although not disliked by the work force, lacks a sense of social integration, which partially motivated his initial interest in the position of shop steward. As Ram could not integrate through what Mars has referred to as "normal social mechanisms" (1981:6), he had to attempt to integrate in another way, as a "popularly" elected shop steward. Ram is constantly at odds with management. Objection by the workers to the introduction of the formal wage banking proposal (chapter two) was spearheaded by Ram. As suggested in the discussion of this issue, formal objections to the proposal simply provided a creditable veneer for the illicit activities that would have been effected by the introduction of a system of banking. It was Ram's task to 'defend' the worker's interests, although such interests were largely illicit.

Generally it is Ram's role to constantly keep management in

check. He is what one might call an agitator, constantly snapping at the heels of management⁵. Such a role obviously carries some serious risks for the participant. As Mars noted, "there is always a tendency to penalize the bearer of bad news, particularly if he tends to make a habit of being the bearer"(Mars:1981;6). Ram is literally detested by management largely, I would argue, as a result of having to perform this role of agitator. His chances of promotion are nil. Not unlike Japanese kamikaze pilots during World War II, Ram has had to sacrifice [almost] everything for the benefit of his fellow workers. One might be tempted to argue that the preceding description is indeed the 'job' of a typical shop steward. However, the performance of the remaining two shop stewards will suggest that the 'job' of a shop steward can vary quite considerably.

Martin and Jaffal, the remaining two shop stewards, appear far more casual and conciliatory in general discussions about industrial relations. They see their role as simply representing the needs of labour. They do not accommodate, within the interpretation of the scope of their role, a place for 'initiative', but simply follow or represent the interests of the workers. In contrast to my conversations with Ram, these two shop stewards spoke about management-worker issues without a trace of suspicion or animosity in their content or tone. Although acknowledging the potential for dispute, they regarded such situations as ultimately soluble.

Martin and Jaffal's attitude towards Ram contained a distinct

⁵ Ram is not necessarily cognizant of this role. Such a role is largely defined by dint of his dogged application and what seems like a rather desperate need to be socially integrated.

trace of ambivalence. Ram's tenacity was "appreciated" and regarded as an unenviable but necessary feature of worker-management interaction. However, they regarded his direct involvement in formal industrial negotiations with management as a political risk. Most of the workers agreed that these two shop stewards were the most effective worker representatives in formal negotiations. Consequently, Martin and Jaffal usually represented the workers in discussions with management while Ram chiefly played the role of antagonist.

Management's perception of Ram has ranged from "irrational" to "stupid". He is "constantly mumbling about everything but knows nothing" was one explanation given for the animosity shown by management towards this particular shop steward. However, Martin and Jaffal are described as "reasonable" and "far easier to deal with". Such compliments are not without consequence. The animosity shown towards Ram's "objectionable persistence" is so frustrating and engaging for management that dealing with Martin and Jaffal becomes, for management I would argue, an almost gratifying experience.

The contrast between Ram on the one hand and Martin and Jaffal on the other is turned to good account for the workers at Cheval. Although the majority of Ram's clashes with management appear to peter out with little ceremony, those issues that do however, gain support and develop into formal grievances are, for the most part, handled quite skilfully by Ram's colleagues. The good standing enjoyed by these two shop stewards in the eyes of management increases the workforce's chances of a settlement that reflects in their favour. For management, Ram's actions act as a kind of bench-mark by which the actions of his colleagues are considered reasonable. But Ram is not merely a foil. His role as 'agitator' is considered necessary in order to persistently

remind management that the conditions of employment and position of labour can always be improved. As in the case of the distinction between industrial and political relations, labour's relative contentment with work conditions at Cheval must be concealed from management or the owner behind a facade of resistance.

Although not intended to be exhaustive, the above discussion is illustrative of the different roles of the shop steward. Furthermore, the discussion attempted to reveal the relationship between such roles and the popularity or perceived calibre of the individuals engaged in such roles. Ram's role as agitator operates largely within the framework of formal industrial relations. The resentful and suspicious manner by which he interacts with management accords quite closely with the stereotype of management-worker animosity that tends to characterize formal industrial relations. In the juxtaposition of formal and paternal industrial frameworks, Ram largely provides the pivotal point between the two. Management's caricaturing of Ram as "stupid" and "irrational" ensures that the remaining shop stewards and the work force in general evade the repercussions of an irate management body, as such ire is largely channelled away from them and onto Ram. Moreover, the association of Ram with formal union relations clears the way for more interpersonal negotiations with Martin and Jaffal, who, largely because of Ram, are perceived as "fair and reasonable". The relative affability of these two shop stewards and management's frustrations with what they perceive to be the "union instructions", can shift the locus of a dispute from the formal to the paternal framework of industrial relations. Essentially, the differing roles of the shop stewards are determined by the situational needs of the work force. The interplay between formal and paternal frames defines the prominence of one or the other

shop stewards in worker-management relations.

The lack of any substantive cases of formal union intervention raised in discussions on 'unions' is a curious though explicable feature of the extent of trade unionism at Cheval. The National Union of Leather Workers is a non-aligned trade union organization. The union lacks the political\organizational base of its trade union counterparts affiliated with COSATU or NACTU. In a sense, it is something of a 'toothless tiger'. However, as the section on union-management relations will illustrate, the *image* of the trade union is an important feature of worker-management (and\or owner) interaction. Frequent union intervention might expose the union's relative weakness and undermine the workers' ability to manipulate the image of the union as a political strategy.

5.4. Union-Management Relations

The manner in which the work force consciously veils its true relationship with the National Leather Workers' Union has direct implication for management-union relations. The dynamics of worker-union relations are concealed by an overt display of loyalty, although in practice, the workers do make a discernible distinction between industrial and political relations. This process of obfuscation is, in this instance, a mechanism employed to frustrate management-union relations. As Leonard Mars (1979:60-61) has suggested, formal, bureaucratic relations between management and unions or work committees are apt to develop into relationships of understanding. Such developments had to be rigorously prevented were, the work force at Cheval to maintain the scope of flexibility, which currently enables them

to manipulate the extent of union intervention in relation to the context of a particular dispute. Such an ability remains crucial to the alternation of formal and paternal frames of industrial reference and interaction.

Although relations between management and unions in general are characterized by a fair amount of suspicion or animosity as a product of their competing interests or, in the capitalist mode of production, of their structural opposition. Relations may over time, however, acquire an ethos of understanding or a sense of predictability. The likelihood of such an understanding between management and the union developing at Cheval is severely mitigated by the work force. For the workers, relations between the union and management body should ideally remain confrontational and suspicious. Such antipathy generates the necessary conditions in which labour may more effectively negotiate its interests from a position of strength.

In order to maintain the discord and suspicion between the union and the management body, labour employs various techniques. What follows are two illustrations of such techniques. The first concerns the blurring of the distinction between political and industrial relations, while the second involves the differentiation of the roles of shop stewards, described above.

The distinction between industrial and political relations was largely predicated on the specificity of local industrial circumstances (see section on worker-trade union relations). Workers at Cheval believed that a local settlement in, at times national, industrial disputes would more effectively accommodate their interests than those settlements negotiated on a national level. For this and various other reasons discussed above, workers at Cheval made a conscious and manifest distinction

between industrial and political relations. However, the actual dynamics of the interplay between these two sets of relations was intentionally blurred, preventing management from manipulating the mechanics of this relationship to its own advantage. Management's knowledge of the workers' objectives would have deprived them of the bargaining edge afforded by such industrial strategies. The perceived threat of the workforce's full compliance with union politics often galvanized management into taking local initiatives in an effort to break the extra-factory alliances over which they patently lacked control.

Were management made aware of the workers' prevalent intent of forcing a local settlement, it might have discerned the workers' situational opposition to trade union involvement. Such an observation would have deprived the workers of their foil for promoting their chances of a local settlement. The impression of unity between workers at Cheval and the National Union of Leather Workers had to be maintained at all costs. However, management's attitude towards the trade union had to be controlled as well. Were the trade union perceived to be 'reasonable' it would no longer provide an effective foil for internally negotiated settlements.

The image of the National Union of Leather Workers, or trade unionism in general, was dominated by the continual contrast of local responsibility and national irresponsibility, between control and chaos. Reference to "trade union muscle" and the ability to "transform the economy" contributed to an exaggerated and seemingly ruthless metaphor of power. Workers frequently threatened, at times overtly, to engage "outside forces" in support of their efforts at achieving a local settlement. There was a conscious aura of power conveyed in references to trade unionism. Such an image was particularly prevalent during periods

of national strike or where similarly threatening actions were imminent.

This contrast was turned to good account by the workers' or shop stewards' willingness to distance themselves from the trade union and engage in internal negotiations over issues in which a more formal trade union participation might have been legitimately invoked. The perception of trade unions as 'uncompromising', 'unsophisticated', entertaining 'separate agendas' is reinforced by the participation of trade union representatives in certain local union matters on the factory premises. Management personnel often express the view that the trade union is "biased", they "lie", "fabricate evidence" and are generally "difficult to do business with". This 'arrogant' behaviour of union officials contributes towards management's negative perception of the trade union, an attitude which at times is quite deftly exploited by the shop stewards⁶.

A second technique employed by the workforce in their efforts at controlling local images of the union was the differentiation of roles among the shop steward complement. Ram, as the 'agitator', was regarded as the 'hard option'. His dependence on political rhetoric to articulate general worker grievances imbued local management perceptions of trade unionism with a particularly heavy ration of politicization. Although Ram did not appear to be a communist or social revolutionist of any sort of conviction, his language was, however, loosely peppered with Marxian buzzwords. Marx's concept of "the means of production" as well as the reference to capitalism's "exploitation of the

⁶ This may simply be the discourse of management in which a very fixed image of the trade union is fashioned. Either way, however, workers are able to use these impressions in manipulating management-trade union relations

workers" featured quite repeatedly in our conversations. It is my impression that there is quite a stereotyped 'opposition' between capitalism and Marxism. In a country, such as South Africa, where 'communism' has been banned in almost every form for approximately three decades, the South African public, notably the European population, entertains certain 'aversions' to communist sentiments and allusions. Management's general disdain for trade unionism literally established the local boundaries within which formal disputes or grievances were inevitably phrased.

Ram's proclivity for power and social recognition often produced passionate threats of trade union action against management. This passion and pretension provided a radical contrast with the relatively temperate and constructive approach of the remaining two shop stewards. Martin and Jaffal were regarded by management as representing the practical needs of workers. They were seen as "the average worker" with reasonable concerns about job security and general conditions of work. In contrast to Ram, their manner attained a bearing of righteousness. They were not unsophisticated trade unionists or idealist revolutionaries; they were normal people with normal problems. Their representations were treated with more respect but, more importantly, the image of the trade union, so readily associated with Ram, had retreated in the eyes of management.

It would be naïve to conclude that relations between the union and the management body at Cheval are hostile and suspicious solely because of the workforce's efforts at undermining the possibility of a relationship of understanding developing between these two interest groups. Such efforts, although significant, are merely tributaries to an historical process, that more adequately illuminates the current relationship between industry

and trade unions, or capital and labour, in South Africa. Both groups, in a sense, represent different sides of the same economic coin. However, largely because of this relationship, they espouse fundamentally different values and beliefs. The history of the dominance of capital over labour has reached what might be termed, a 'minor juncture'. The prospect of ushering in a new political and economic order has, whether it materializes as envisaged or not, has generated new determination that will, and currently is, challenging this status quo. However, beneath these rather verbose macro-structural observations, there exist a multitude of different personalities, situations and experiences. Often contrary to macro-structural 'realities', individuals and groups confront their own micro-structural predicaments in varying ways. The preceding discussion attempts to illuminate the manner in which one such group has confronted a situation particular to its experience. The kinds of relationships and strategies employed by this group of workers have a particular character of their own. Although not quite divorced from the macro-structure, these relationships and strategies often operate according to a logic of their own. They are local responses to a national condition, i.e. the subordinate position of labour in the structure of the economy. They are illustrations of the kinds of "coping strategies", or "control strategies" (Molstad:1988;354), that workers may employ to their advantage within a particular industrial setting. And it is in this context that the workforce's efforts to establish and maintain distance between the union and management acquires a very particular significance.

5.5. Union-Owner Relations

I have intentionally dealt with union-owner relations separately

from union-management relations because they differ in some very significant respects. The highly visible asymmetrical interaction between the workforce and the management team at Cheval dictates, to a significant extent, the character of union-management relations. Relations are largely of the kind associated with formal industrial relations which, theoretically, draw in trade unions as representatives of worker interests. The owner, on the other hand, portrays the image of being above management-worker interaction. The distance he establishes between himself and management-worker interaction is reproduced in the case of union-management interaction. Formal interaction with the trade union is largely the responsibility of upper-management personnel. Although union-management interaction is infrequent, such meetings did take place during the research period. On no occasion was I aware of any formal and direct participation by the owner in such meetings.

The obvious distance between the owner and the trade union was premised on the need to avoid being directly associated with the outcome of such meetings. That is not to say that the outcome would invariably be unwelcome by the workers but rather that, should such circumstances prevail, the necessary distance would protect the owner from being directly implicated. This spatial distance does not necessarily preclude the owner's indirect involvement, but merely controls the public image of such participation. There is little doubt as to the owner's influence in all matters industrial as he is a very hands-on and forthright industrialist who brooks no managerial incompetence or dissent. However, the cautious, if not at times astute, manipulation of impression and culpability by the owner results in an organizational process that, in certain circumstances, presents an expendable front while entrenching the good reputation of the owner.

The preceding summation of owner-trade union relations is necessarily brief. I have extracted only those features of owner-union relations that differ markedly from manager-union relations. Although such a distinction is fundamental, one cannot however, lose sight of the fact that the owner and the management team do frequently act in tandem and that there is not a systematic divergence between these two agencies, but rather a situationally expedient one.

CHAPTER 6: INFORMAL RELATIONS ON THE FACTORY FLOOR

6.1. Introduction

In an effort to fully comprehend workplace behaviour, the anthropologist must attempt to discern and explain the extra-organizational, or informal, relationships that are in operation on the factory floor. Illustrative of the importance of this area of study, Mars quite rightly asks;

"How can we look at marriage and the family, for example, and ignore extra-marital affairs which maintain the very existence of many families" (Mars:1982;7)

The concept of 'holism', raised in the introduction, endorses such sentiments in its emphasis on the total social and cultural context in the explanation of human behaviour. To understand, for example, why certain management directives are opposed, it might be just as important to understand the nature of informal relationships as it is to understand formal relationships. This chapter analyzes two particular sets of informal relations. The first set involves individuals and groups engaged in what has been referred to as 'joking relationships'. The various types discussed include those intended to create social distance and those joking relationships geared towards overcoming social distance. The second set of informal relationships discussed are those that obtain between members of the 'stokvel' associations in operation at Cheval. Contrary to previous studies, the analysis reveals the mirroring of formal relations by these informal associations and attempts to establish why this

replication of social relations does occur.

6.2. Joking Relationships

Graburn (1971:133) has noted that Anthropologists have long been interested in joking relationships. Tylor (1889) and Lowie (1920) pioneered some of the earliest studies of this phenomenon. As part of a more general interest in kinship systems and categories of relatives, joking relations were regarded as examples of 'special' social relations that facilitated the functioning of social systems. Structural problems that emerged and that had led to ambivalence were contained or resolved by such 'special' social relations. Although largely a structural-functionalist approach, there was however a certain discord evident amongst scholars on the basis of interpretation and, in some cases, function of these special relationships. Such conflicts notwithstanding, there was considerable consensus as to the basic social composition of these relationships. Radcliffe-Brown, in an analytic essay on joking relationships, asserted that what is meant by the term 'joking relationship' is:

"...a relationship between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence. It is important to distinguish two main varieties. In one the relation is symmetrical; each of the two persons tease or make fun of the other. In the other variety the relation is asymmetrical; A jokes at the expense of B and B accepts the teasing good humouredly but without retaliating..." (Radcliffe-Brown:1940;195).

Although certain scholars may object to Radcliffe-Brown's efforts to so precisely circumscribe the phenomenon, few however would challenge the basic social configuration of such relationships. Joking relationships do engage opposing individuals or groups in a relationship characterized by 'teasing', 'sexual licence', 'obscenity' etc. And such relationships are generally symmetrical or asymmetrical, with obvious accommodation of degree. However, the perceived function and interpretation of such relationships remains quite disputed.

6.2.1. Overcoming Social Distance

It is generally assumed that joking relationships between people of different sex are found only between people who are potential partners in marriage or in sexual relations. By contrast, avoidance relationships¹ exist between those that are in a taboo relationship to each other as regards marriage and sexual relations. Lowie claimed that "licensed familiarity generally obtains between potential mates" (Lowie:1949;97) and that there is "ample evidence for the reality of the correlation...between social and sexual taboos and between social license and the possibility of sexual relations (Lowie:1949;99). Radcliffe-Brown has stated that joking relationships occur "between people who may marry, avoidance between those who may not" (Radcliffe-Brown:1940;197). Christensen has endorsed these beliefs, suggesting that "the joking between Watani that permits highly suggestive or obscene comments thus may be utilized to ascertain

¹ Avoidance relationships are characterized by strict rules of decorum or even of complete avoidance between individuals which, unlike joking relationships, restrict interaction between certain individuals. Avoidance relationships occupy an antithetical position to joking relationships

the availability of the mtani as a sexual partner..." (Christensen:1963;1319).

While there appears to be a considerable body of evidence to support such an hypothesis, there remains however sufficient evidence to the contrary, that suggests that such hypotheses should not remain unchallenged. Nor have they. Sykes, after investigating the character of joking relations in a particular industrial setting, concluded that although joking relationships between young men and women who were potential sexual partners did indeed exist, there was however "a degree of restraint shown" (Sykes:1968;193). Such restraint, however, was not evinced by the "gross obscenity" and the "horseplay" which were characteristic of the joking relationships between those men and women who were not potential sexual partners (Sykes:1968;193).

While in that particular industrial setting, potential sexual partners did indeed engage in joking relationships, the 'non-sexual' joking relationships exhibited to a greater degree the kinds of features imputed to be indicative of 'potential sexual partners'. Such features were similarly evident in certain kinds of joking relationships observed between individuals on the factory floor.

What follows is a transcript of a conversation between two workers on the factory floor. The conversation took place during lunch break and did not, at least intentionally, involve anyone else. Rose is a middle-aged female African charge-hand in the closing department, while Mike is a young Indian machinist from the making tracks.

Rose: "How's your cookie?" [girl friend]

Mike: "You know they never last."

Rose: "You shouldn't go with the younger ones." [her pose suggesting that she was available]

Mike: [clearly joshing her] "Pity you're married, Rose."

Rose: "I can handle two."

Mike: "okay"

After Mike's last remark the two of them walked off together laughing at what they had just said. Clearly, there was no seriousness in this brief exchange, it was a rather typical example of a joking relationship. A closer look at the social profiles of the actors involved suggests that they cannot 'realistically', be considered to be "potential sexual partners". Rose is about 50 years old, while Mike is in his early twenties. Rose is African, while Mike is an Indian². Moreover, Rose is married and although she does allude to the possibility of a 'union' between the two of them, such allusions remain patently jestful.

This then appears to be an example of a joking relationship between two unlikely sexual partners. But before challenging the assumption that joking relationships involve potential sexual partners, it is important to determine whether the above conversation is an example of "formalized" or "unformalized" joking (Radcliffe-Brown:1940;210). Radcliffe-Brown has made a clear distinction between 'formalized' or standardized joking relationships and 'unformalized' joking relationships. Such a distinction is crucial in ensuring an analytical separation

² Although different racial classifications by no means preclude the possibility of a 'potential sexual relationship' developing between two people, it does however limit such possibilities, as reflected in the relative preponderance of intra-racial marriages as opposed to inter-racial marriages.

between 'casual' teasing and joking, surely a feature of every society, and formal or standardized joking, in which the function of such activities is regarded, in some way or other, as purposive behaviour geared specifically towards social harmony.

The conversation transcribed above, although singular in specific content, was one of many such joking relations that I observed taking place between individuals that could not readily be considered 'potential sexual partners'. Invariably the actors involved were of opposite sex and, in terms of age, separated by at least one if not two generations. There was no correlation between the age and sex of the participants. Older men and younger women were quite frequently engaged in such joking relationships, as opposed to the age-sex configuration of the preceding illustration. The relative frequency, and the pattern of social composition of such relationships, suggests that the phenomenon is indeed an example of what Radcliffe- Brown has referred to as "formalized" joking relationships.

Relationships between individuals who could conceivably be regarded as potential sexual partners were not evident. Although young workers of different sexes interacted, such interaction was not in any way characterized by 'sexual licence', 'abuse' or 'horseplay', beyond what may reasonably be considered quite normal or 'informal'. As such, the kinds of joking relationships described above were not premised upon any obvious conjugal or sexual function. However, all "formalized" joking relationships, as suggested above, do perform 'some' social function. And it is this 'function' that we must now attempt to explain.

Mayer has noted that "verbal teasing...is generally characterized by a variable combination of apparent good humour and calculated ambiguity" (Mayer:1970;307). The conversation

transcribed above contains an element of what Mayer has referred to as 'calculated ambiguity'. Rose apparently propositions Mike. However, the proposition is made in a manner that leaves no doubt as to its jestful nature. Rose is tempting the impossible. She is suggesting that the two of them do precisely what they cannot do and she speaks from the certainty of that knowledge. Sexual relations ideally take place between persons of the same generation and between persons that are not married³.

Yet it is precisely this notion of 'impossibility' that motivates this joking relationship. The social\cultural distance between these two individuals has to be mediated on the same basis as that from which it is derived. Common ground, such as 'potential sexual relations', has to be 'rediscovered' or invented. Custom and convention has established distance between two people who work alongside one another, who in certain respects share the same concerns, who like or dislike the same people, etc. Rose and Mike share similar work predicaments yet they are, in very significant ways, different. To a certain extent society's conventions, whether by consensus or imposition, places these two individuals in a very ambiguous relationship towards each another.

Given that both Rose and Mike work at Cheval, sharing certain beliefs and values derived from a similar work experience, one might tentatively say that they share a similar 'working class' culture. They both participate and interact within a specific

³ The inclusion of racial differences is not essential, although it was, in that particular incident, another variable. Such relationships, as suggested, exist between individuals of the same race or categorization. There are numerous social characteristics that can establish, wilfully or not, social distance. Race is merely one of these.

social stratum. However, that sense of commonality is significantly compromised by the cross cutting influence of other social strata. They are of different racial groups and generations. The social distance established by the latter cross-cutting social strata has to be overcome by the reaffirmation of social 'closeness'. By lampooning the organizing principles of society, these two individuals, through a blend of humour and ambiguity, symbolically overcome this social distance. They become equals or artfully, 'potential sexual partners'. It is an attempt at "establishing and maintaining social equilibrium" (Radcliffe-Brown:1949;316).

In an industrial environment, animosity, tension and 'social distance' are quite effectively militated against. From a political point of view, worker solidarity is arguably the most effective weapon that workers have at their disposal. Politically and economically, although circumstances may improve, workers are traditionally 'under-empowered'. As Marx would hasten to add, they are removed from the 'means of production'. As such, worker solidarity is the key to labour's success. Its success is predicated to a significant extent on unity, on power by numbers. From the social perspective, although workers may share certain values and beliefs, there are numerous diacritical elements that may militate against actual unity. Apartheid rather convincingly instilled within the country's population a quite militant sense of social and cultural distinction. Blacks are often not first and foremost 'African', but rather Xhosa, Zulu, Tswana, etc. Indians are 'second class' citizens while Africans are 'third class' citizens. But not all forms of social distinction are residual features of the policy of Apartheid. Age and experience divide people. The notion of the 'generation gap' is not a product of apartheid but of socialization in general. Gender 'roles', a further product of socialization, are too,

considerably divisive. These are just some of the kinds of diacritical elements that the workforce has to overcome in its endeavour to achieve or maintain unity.

However, the repeated characterization of workers, or 'labour' as necessarily political is analytically perilous. Although the political requisites of labour may go some way towards explaining the existence of joking relationships, as mechanisms facilitating social unity and subsequently, political unity, one cannot lose sight of individual social needs. Workers are not political zealots. Overcoming social distance does not necessarily contribute towards some ultimate political objective. Social interaction is important for its own sake. It is not necessarily a means to an end but rather an end in itself. Overcoming social distance may be intrinsically rewarding for workers who stand for eight hours in the same spot, five days a week.

Overcoming social distance may have various functions, in differing contexts. However, as the following discussion will show, not all individuals and groups are intent on overcoming social distance.

6.2.2. Accentuating Social Distance

The preceding discussion focused on an example of a symmetrical joking relationship geared towards overcoming social distance. The rationale of the relationship is, in the general sense of the term, equality. It is essentially a means of managing difference. The following illustration involves relationships that are asymmetrical in character and are primarily aimed at accentuating social distance. They are efforts geared towards the maintenance and accentuation of inequality, or perceived inequality.

The faking department (Diagram A) is something of a focal point of lower management interaction. Chargehands and supervisors from factory A and B regularly interact in the course of discharging their duties. The nature of the work process largely facilitates such interaction, although a significant element of this interaction could be regarded as informal and contrived. Central to this core or locus of lower-management interaction is an individual called Vijay. Vijay is the "chief faker" of the faking department and, importantly, an unsuccessful trainee chargehand.

Of the six chargehands and supervisors who frequently meet around Vijay's faking department, four are Indian males, one is an African male and the other, a recently appointed Indian female. Vijay is an Indian male. Vijay is a significant component of this interaction because he essentially performs the role of facilitator in intra-management interaction. He spared no effort in reminding those around him, author included, of his previous position as trainee chargehand, a position denied to him because, in the words of one of the managers, "he is totally irresponsible with authority".

In certain significant respects, he still regards himself as a chargehand. He interacts virtually exclusively with other chargehands and supervisors and frequently instructs fellow workers in an authoritative manner becoming a chargehand which, to all intents and purposes, he is not. On numerous occasions, I witnessed him disrupting the work process on the pretext of some 'official' business, such interruptions were clearly nothing more than blatant attempts to assert his rather egoistic sense of self worth. Although rather psychological in presumption, it seems however, a reasonable observation to make, that Vijay exhibits a clear 'status inferiority complex'. The fairness of such an accusation or 'diagnosis' is borne out in the manner in

which Vijay manipulates lower-management intra-action as a means of enhancing his own status within the factory.

The predominant profile of the lower-management complement is male Indian. There are only three exceptions; one female Indian chargehand, one female African chargehand and a male African chargehand. In certain respects, Vijay virtually qualifies on the basis of social profile and experience alone. He is an Indian male and, as he frequently remind us, was once a trainee chargehand. By manipulating the criteria of a chargehand, he enhances the perception that he is indeed a member of the lower-management complement. One of the mechanisms he employs to this end is the accentuation of distance or inequality between the male African chargehand and his Indian counterparts.

As mentioned, at least six of the chargehands interact, formally and informally, in and around the faking department where Vijay is permanently located. On no less than ten occasions I witnessed or overheard Vijay 'joking' with the African chargehand. The subject of such joking relationships was invariably sexual. Most frequently containing allusions to an African male's alleged penchant for many sexual partners. Other sexual references involved the size of the "African penis" and the problems of over population caused by the male African's 'appetite' for sex. Although the joking was one-sided in its initiation, the African chargehand did respond quite often, and such conversations would last for anything up to ten minutes. Although the content of such jokes was potentially invidious, the tone however was patently humorous. I never perceived any sense of resentment or taking offence reflected in the African chargehand's reactions to such teasing.

Vijay used to co-opt other Indian chargehands into the joking

relationship. It appeared that his intention was to make the Indian chargehands laugh at the African chargehand. He would say to one of the Indian chargehands, "I wonder who John fucked over the weekend". The other chargehands would quite willingly join in this 'joking relationship', together mocking John. John would quite wilfully reciprocate, by saying something to the effect that "you're just jealous". Such a line of teasing would split the joking groups along racial lines. Indians would be perceived to be "monogamous", "faithful" and "normally endowed" [sexually], while African males, represented by John, would be associated with "polygamy", "infidelity" and "abnormal endowment". In a sense, Indians were portrayed as normal, in terms of sexual etiquette, while Africans were barbarous or even 'animalized' because of their alleged 'large penises' and ungovernable sexual appetites.

Such 'animalization' would establish social distance between John and his male Indian counterparts'. Establishing social distance between these two racial groups was Vijay's, and to a lesser extent, the Indian chargehands', intention. If male African sexual activities and predilections were 'barbarous' or 'animal-like' Africans were by implication inferior. Such perceptions were extended into the realm of management. African chargehands were inferior to Indian chargehands. Indians became then the archetypal chargehand and Africans their social

⁴ Kapferer (1972) noted how "much fun and teasing" was directed at an employee because of the incongruity contained in the employment of a man of his age in a position which consisted of mostly older workers. Their age was the primary distinguishing feature from which they derived their status. The employment of a relatively young man threatened this source of social identity. Making fun of and teasing him provided a means of publicly distancing themselves from this young recruit and in doing so, maintaining their identity or status (Kapferer:1972;229-230).

inferiors. In the prevailing interaction, Vijay's role as facilitator would elevate him to an 'equal' of the Indian chargehands due to his 'normal' sexual etiquette and his association, symbolic and real, with such personnel. It was literally upon the back of John that Vijay elevated himself. He had manipulated the criteria for being a chargehand. He had, essentially through the medium of humour, determined that being appointed a chargehand was, in terms of status, inadequate for being *considered* a chargehand. Ideally, one should be, as Vijay is, an Indian male, espousing, insofar as sexuality is concerned, 'normal' standards as he allegedly did. Obviously any deviation from such 'norms', albeit derived exclusively from the subject of sexuality, could be and would be generalized across all social activities.

As it was, Vijay had retained the remuneration structure of a chargehand, which is in accordance with company policy. What he clearly lacked was status. By manipulating the criteria by which a 'chargehand' is identified, ideally an Indian male espousing 'normal' sexual and other values [essentially Western or European], he informally or socially claimed such status for himself. Although the joking relationship did invent and preserve social distance, this was done through the innocuous medium of humour. John participated quite willingly in such joking relationships although clearly not as an equal.

Although it has been said that John did willingly participate in such relationships, his motivation was quite different to that of his joking partners. As suggested, the predominant social profile of the lower-management body was male Indian. Being African, John was required to integrate through an alternative mechanism. Participation within these joking relationship, despite their invidious intentions, provided precisely this

'alternative mechanism' that John required for social integration. In a very important respect, this particular joking relationship was asymmetrical. John never initiated the teasing. Were he to attempt to do so, he would only succeed in deprecating himself. The chargehands were not interested in humour for its light hearted qualities, for the social 'lift' it might provide. In this case, it was employed as a mechanism for accentuating social distance and, if John were to attempt to initiate this relationship, it would only succeed if utilized for the same purpose. I am not suggesting that relations between John and the Indian chargehands was so utterly antagonistic that any genuine humour between the two 'sides' was impossible. I am merely suggesting that John would not succeed in utilizing this particular joking relationship in an attempt to divide, say, the Indian chargehands. John's role within the joking relationship was at the very best, the good natured victim. John's need for social integration placed the sense of initiative and social dominance squarely in the hands of the 'Indian male', making for a very asymmetrical or lopsided social relationship.

A further illustration of an asymmetrical joking relationship directed at accentuating social distance was the kind evident between European managers and their immediate Indian subordinates. There is always a tendency for smaller hierarchical distinctions to blur as the scale of reference expands. For instance, workers often fail to differentiate hierarchical relationships when referring to management in general. As Mitchell has stated, "the more distant a group of people is from another, both socially and geographically, the greater the tendency to regard them as an undifferentiated category and to place them under a general rubric..." (Mitchell:1956;28).

Although the statement refers to tribal constellations on the Zambian Copperbelt in the 1950s, it contains however, certain generalisable qualities. It is part of a particular social process. The process is one by which superficial relationships "between people are determined by certain major categories within which no distinctions are recognized" (Mitchell:1956;28). Such a process of categorization or 'telescoping' produces social constructions informed by certain prevailing values, experiences and beliefs. The hierarchical inequality between factory manager and floor manager is, for the worker, an arbitrary one. Both are clearly members of upper-management and such indiscriminate categorization suffices for the basis of worker-management interaction. To categorize managers together provides an adequate basis for action. Such actions are not necessarily influenced by the idiosyncratic qualities of particular management personnel but, more significantly, by the structural inequalities of worker-management relations. The kinds of responsibilities and duties that provide the basis upon which the upper-management hierarchy is devised are, for the workforce, subordinate to the overall structure of inequality upon which worker-management relations are premised.

Although management values or, more specifically, upper-management values exhibit a discernible congruence in the context of worker-management interaction, there is however evidence of a segmentary shift in times of intra-management activity. Racially, upper-management is comprised of male European and Indian personnel. And it is along these lines that the segmentary shift tends to occur. In accordance with the workers' general perception of management 'unity', it is tacitly assumed that managers will support each other in situations of worker-management interaction. The appearance is that of a 'united front'.

However, the appearance of unity or equality is situationally defined. Although managers 'stick together' in situations of worker-manager interactions, such equality is explicitly undermined in intra-management interaction. As described in chapter four, white managers frequently convene meetings at which the attendance of their non-white counterparts is excluded. Such exclusions serve, among other things, to establish a level of intra-managerial differentiation. A further mechanism, albeit informal, employed to this end is the utilization of joking relationships in reaffirmation of authoritative and social distinctions.

As mentioned, these joking relationships take place between European managers and their immediate subordinates. The 'joking' aspect is characterized by swearing and ridicule. Non-white managers are persistently reminded of their incompetence and unreliability. Rarely does a 'formal' conversation take place without some direct or indirect reference to incompetence or expendability. "You're just like them [the workers]" was one particularly common form of ridicule. Yet such ridicule was not expressed in any overtly offensive manner. The Indian managers were in no way expected to accept such remarks without some retort of their own; however, the initiative clearly lay in the hands of European manager

Phone calls were particularly abusive. Although quite obviously I could not account for the reaction of those on the receiving end of such phone calls, it would be a cautious act indeed to assume that they were no more courageous or challenging than those remarks proffered in response to the European manager's efforts at face-to-face ridicule. Instructions or requests conveyed over the phone were frequently done so in either a condescending or very authoritative manner. Each and every

incident that occasioned intra-management communication appeared to be utilized in reaffirming this sense of inequality.

It appeared as if the situational premium placed on management cohesion in times of worker-management interaction needed to be occasionally offset to some degree by the reaffirmation of the intra-managerial hierarchy. This was partially obtained through the medium of joking relationships between European and Indian upper-management personnel. By swearing at and ridiculing Indian managers, European managers garnered the impression of superiority. They established social and authoritative distance between themselves and their Indian counterparts that would have otherwise been lost or blurred by the situational need for management cohesion or 'equality'.

6.2.3. Conclusion

There is a certain pattern evident in the preceding examples of joking relationships. The first case, i.e. concerning the workers' efforts at overcoming social distance, involves workers. The second case, i.e. the accentuation of social distance, primarily involves members of management. One possible explanation for the existence of these patterns are the social and political exigencies of worker unity. The sense of solidarity garnered from worker unity may be turned to good account as a political 'weapon'. Such a weapon may compensate for the structural power accorded capital in the framework of market-capitalism. Or socially, the routinization and the monotony of the general 'work experience' may place a premium on informal interaction as a means of offsetting the general monotony of their work. It becomes a kind of coping strategy.

The management complement at Cheval do not necessarily derive their power\authority from unity. The management's charter affords adequate authority over the workers, negating any exigent need for management unity. Furthermore, the intrinsic position of 'status' in the management ideology further militates against the likelihood of solidarity occupying a primary position within the management value system. Individual advancement appears to be far more highly regarded than sticking together. But these are very local explanations of a phenomenon that occur in a wide variety of situations and types.

Some of Radcliffe-Brown's earlier general ideas relating to 'joking relationships' seem particularly germane. He stated that joking relationships "occur in structural situations of a very general kind in which there are two groups, the separateness of which is emphasized" (Radcliffe-Brown:1949;133). We might wish to read this statement with a certain analytic latitude. The 'group separateness' of such structural situations may be interpreted as the 'given', or the constant, while the 'emphasis' on this may be utilized to accentuate the separateness or to overcome it. Although the general tenor of the statement points towards the accentuation of 'separateness', there is however, evidence to suggest that accentuation may not necessarily be the principal aim of such relationships.

Indeed, Radcliffe-Brown's hypothesis in his first article on joking relationships accommodates this very possibility. He suggests that; "joking is a manner of organizing a stable system of social behaviour in which conjunctive and disjunctive components are maintained and combined" (Radcliffe-Brown:1940;200). Obviously, "a stable system" is a subjective evaluation. European managers may argue that by accentuating social distance between themselves and their immediate

subordinates, they are contributing towards the creation of a 'stable system' by reaffirming the various lines of authority upon which the success of the company is purportedly based. Such assumptions may well derive from the managerial ideologies within which they have honed their beliefs.

European management's immediate subordinates, however, may not share their views on how the 'stable system' is to be achieved. Greater equality and mutual respect, in all situations, may be an approach they would prefer to stress. Clearly, the perception of 'the stable' system would be considerably influenced by the position of a particular individual or group within that system. As such, Radcliffe-Brown's hypothesis analytically accommodates various functions and permutations of this phenomenon, the 'joking relationship'.

In a somewhat similar vein, some authors have suggested that the function of the joking relationship is to 'let off steam' at the stress points of a social system (Keesing:1981;318, Loudon:1970;329). As potentially useful as such observations may have proved to be, there is ample evidence to suggest that, while certain parties may be utilizing the joking relationships for such purposes, the corollary is that frequently individuals on the receiving end of such relationships may be left with more 'steam' than they apparently started out with. It is quite logical to assume that in certain asymmetrical joking relationships, the sense of 'relief' is one-sided.

Perhaps Loudon's response to this varied and, at times, contradictory social phenomenon contains in some way the solution to the analytic discord that this phenomenon tends to evoke. He argues that;

"Any attempt to assess the relative reality of the hostile and friendly components of teasing behaviour therefore requires close examination of the context and content of a series of particular incidents. It would also seem to demand some attempt to analyse the apparent motivations of the individual actors concerned in what must be regarded as purposive behaviour" (Loudon:1970;305).

6.3. STOKVELS: Systems of Organization and Control

Much has been written on the existence and function of saving societies in both urban and rural settings. Articles by Hellman and Krige, although certainly not the earliest, date back to the early 1930s. In South Africa, increasing African urbanization, among other things, has resulted in a fair amount of academic interest being invested in the study of the nature and function of these associations. Capital accumulation, alleviation of poverty, the development of a 'culture' of saving, financial acumen, the maintenance and development of social networks, self development and various other factors have been stressed by academics and other interested persons, in their attempts to determine the role of these associations. It is not my primary intention to add to this already distended explication of these associations. My aim here is to illustrate how the organization and composition of these informal associations at Cheval mirror or reflect the formal organizational structure of the factory. Alternatively, the aim is to show how the formal relationships that comprise the model of Cheval's organizational structure are replicated in the pattern of these informal associations.

Gluckman's use of the 'social situation' approach, in his analysis of Black-White relations in Northern Zululand during the 1930s (Gluckman:1940), provides an interesting framework through which this mirroring of organizational principles may be fully appreciated. However, before commencing with the analysis a few clarifying remarks about the nature of such 'monetary activities' at Cheval are necessary.

The analysis will focus specifically on rotating credit associations, or 'stokvels' (a term more widely used in reference to such associations). A stokvel is a type of credit union in which a group of people enter into an agreement to contribute a fixed amount of money into common pool on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis. Participants receive, in turn, the accumulated pool. The many evident permutations of such associations has prompted Lukhele to remark that "the term 'stokvel' is a catch-all phrase for saving clubs, of which there is a great variety" (Lukhele:1990;16). The most common form of stokvel evident at Cheval is the rather simple rotating credit association. Membership is usually restricted to five or ten participants in any particular association. All the stokvels are in operation between February and November of each year, a period of ten months. The cycle of these associations is so confined, due to the official holiday period which straddles the months of December and January, a period over which the associations' activities are inevitably suspended.

The particular association used for purposes of analysis is a rather standard illustration of these associations at Cheval. There are ten members in this group, all contributing R50 a week into the 'pool'. At the end of each month, beginning February, one particular member receives the entire pool, a sum of R2000. The order in which participants are 'on', i.e. in which they

receive the money, is determined by a draw at the beginning of the year. Ten pieces of paper bearing the numbers 1-10 are placed in a bag. Each member draws a number from the 'hat' which will determine his or her position, the number one representing the month of February.

6.3.1 The Social Situation

On Fridays the Factory closes half an hour earlier than usual, half-past three as opposed to four o'clock. It is during this period that the contributions of members are collected and, if it happens to be the fourth Friday of the association's cycle of operation, the member that is 'on', receives that month's accumulated pool. The 'social situation' in question, took place on one such Friday in the last week of August.

At about half-past three on that Friday, the chargehand from making track A left the factory floor to collect the wage envelopes for himself and those in his charge. By the time he had returned from the offices with the wages of his charges, work in the factory had formally ceased. At that point I was talking to the workers on the making-track who were rather casually awaiting his return. Some were smoking, others clearing up their workplace while talking to their colleagues. The chargehand, immediately on his return, handed out the wage envelopes to those under his supervision. Once he had completed this, he again went around, collecting the R50 weekly contribution of those members under his supervision who were also members of the association of which he was banker. After having collected R450, he openly added R50 of his own to the collection. This was all performed in a very casual manner with no-one really 'scrutinizing' the procedure. After placing the R500 in an envelope, he produced another

envelope, the contents of which was R2000 cash. Teasingly he asked, "whose on again?". The other workers just laughed. A man standing some way away came forward and snatched the envelope from the chargehand's hand, again much to the amusement of his colleagues. Clearly it was his turn to be 'on'. Almost immediately after this, the association dispersed as quickly as it had assembled. Some members hurried off to catch their lifts, others remained to talk for a while. It was quite evident that the group gathered, in such a manner, for one reason and one reason alone.

The association's ten members all worked on making tracks A and B. All had worked on the tracks for over eight years and received weekly wages of R275 and above. The association's banker was the chargehand who collected and distributed both wage envelopes and stokvel contributions and claims. All members were male and over the age of 25. The paying of wages, collection of contributions and the payment of the pool was a procedure accomplished in no more than 10 minutes. There were no defaulters or complaints by any of the members, a very smooth procedure entirely free of any interruption and performed in a casual perfunctory manner.

6.3.2. Analysis of the Social Situation

Unfortunately, the incident was rather brief. However, there remains sufficient sociological data on roles, profiles and the organization of the group to facilitate a useful analysis. I have chosen to use the technique elevated to some prominence by Gluckman, i.e. the situational analysis, for I believe that the workings of the informal associations are premised largely on pre-existing sets of relationships, with pre-established meanings and functions, that are a feature of the formal organization of

the factory. It appears as if the formal model of organization extends into an area that one may regard as 'informal'. The organizing principles of these informal associations are not random or arbitrary, but rather purposively patterned on the organizing principles of the formal workings of the factory, within which they operate. Such a statement or observation begs the question 'why do the patterns of these informal associations appear to replicate the formal organizational structure of the factory'.

Hellman, in her study of the 'mohodisana', a variant of the stokvel, argues that it is, in its simplest form, "*an association of friends* who contribute a weekly or monthly amount...[my italics]" (Hellman:1946;411). In Hellman's and other's discussion of stokvels, there is a recurring emphasis on social solidarity or friendship. Kuper and Kaplan have observed that "the party or social is a very marked feature of the stokvel" (1944;181). More recently, Lukhele has remarked on the existence of what he describes as a "stokvel sub-culture", with associations designing their own uniforms, holding weekly parties and competing with other associations purely on the basis of 'lavish social indulgence'. Stokvels in Lukhele's words "are more than just money making ventures" (Lukhele:1990;28).

This recurring social theme is in marked contrast to the rather tacit and brief exchanges evident in the operation of the stokvel described above. The concise manner in which the stokvel operates is completely unceremonious. Members hand over their contributions to the banker and he in turn, hands over the pool to the member who is 'on'. After which, there are no further official association dealings. However, it would be extremely naïve indeed to assert that this is entirely anomalous. Hellman noted in her study that the smaller stokvels had desisted from

"arranging the tea party"⁵ (Hellman:1946;413). It had proved less financially viable for these smaller stokvel associations to hold 'tea parties', a euphemistic term for a social event of a scale and nature quite beyond the image of the quaint, suburban 'tea party'.

But to understand the significance of the lack of any real or intentional social intercourse associated with the stokvels at Cheval, we have to attempt to understand the role or roles, in general, that such social activities fulfil. Default in payment is a particularly problematic issue. Members in most cases have little recourse available to them in their efforts to ensure that other members maintain their payments. As the editor of the *City Press*, Mr Khulu Sibiyi, remarked in an editorial, [preceded by numerous reasons as to why he has never lasted as a member of a stokvel] "...The last straw was when our first member decided that he could no longer continue with us, after receiving R2000. We could not do anything about it. There was no legal document" (Lukhele:1990;35).

This is generally the case. Stokvel associations are not protected by law. Members are forced to rely on the conscience of their co-participants to ensure against default. This, I would argue, goes some way towards explaining why many stokvels have such a pronounced social dimension. Members are often friends. Where there is no law to protect against default, one's conscience is expected to be one's biggest sanction. As Kuper and Kaplan noted, the introduction of new members was made on personal

⁵ In Rooiyard, where Hellman's study was conducted, the smaller stokvels often chose to limit their size in order to restrict membership to close and intimate friends and family. Insofar as the 'tea party' served to reaffirm social bonds between stokvel members, such a function was made superfluous by the intended intimacy of the small group.

introduction. Aspirant members had to be "vouched for as reliable and honest" (1944;180). The emphasis here is on security. Participation of complete strangers in these stokvel associations involves a risk members can ill-afford. The lack of any legal representation compelled the stokvel members to establish other grounds for control, and the insistence on a certain element of social affinity is a manifestation of such efforts⁶. This is not a simple *a priori* observation, that the social events of these stokvels were mere efforts geared towards the maintenance of social accountability. Such events were important for the gratification of social and recreational needs as well. Numerous scholars and other concerned agencies have frequently described the abject recreational conditions of township life. The lack of recreational facilities and amenities in African Townships means that these 'socials' associated with the stokvels, fulfil a vital social need amongst the urban Africans.

However, one can simultaneously infer that within the pronounced social matrix of these associations, there exists a certain assurance against default. Participants are essentially friends that interact on a regular basis. Although a rather tentative form of guarantee against default, it remains the most assuring for an association operating outside the protection of the law. In the case of the workers at Cheval, there is little sense of 'community'. An interest in kinship and extra-factory relations revealed that residential patterns of workers at Cheval are markedly diffuse. Moreover, individuals residing in those few areas exhibiting a higher concentration of fellow employees had

⁶ More succinctly, stokvels operate on the basis of 'multi-stranded' relationships. Reliance on the purely economic nexus will not sustain them. The single strand, the economic relation, must be buttressed by other relations, in this case, the 'work relationship' is stressed, cultivating a multi-stranded relationship.

little to say that would, in any significant way, detract from the increasingly apparent notion that employees at Cheval did not enjoy much social interaction amongst themselves, outside of the workplace.

The patent lack of extra-factory interaction of employees at Cheval poses a potential threat to the security of these stokvel associations. How are individual members to ensure that others in their group are honest and reliable? The stigma of the poor "social credit rating" (Kuper & Kaplan:1944;180), which was frequently employed in deterring potential defaulters is hardly appropriate in a situation whereby a fellow employee of 10 years may never have had the opportunity of visiting your house. Or, how effective would be a deterrent such as "the opinion of society turning against you" in a context such as Cheval where, regardless of your stokvel activities, you will receive your wages and any other benefits accruing to the most honest of stokvel participants?

There is little recourse available to members of such groups other than appropriating the mechanisms of formal factory organization in their endeavour to insure against duplicity. By appointing a member of management as banker or coordinator, the group automatically infuses the association's operations with a sense of authority⁷. One may argue that such authority is, in practice, no more than symbolic authority, for surely such informal activities of the workers at Cheval is no more accountable to the company's formal control as it is to the law,

⁷ That the worker does not get his paypacket directly from 'the office' but receives it from the chargehand who doubles as the stokvel banker, creates the impression that the pay is relayed through the stokvel via its offices. It is almost as if the 'stokvel' holds the threat of a 'stop order' on ones pay.

a position previously discussed. However, such authority remains far more persuasive and compelling than its symbolic appearance.

The number of times that I was informed of the value of remaining on the 'good side' of management, attests to the potential influence these managers may exercise in the operation of these informal associations. Promotion and movement may be closely linked to the attitude of certain managers to their charges. And here I am not referring to upper-management. These bankers and managers were for the most part chargehands, the lowest managerial rung on the hierarchy. However, as I was informed, they can exert a great deal of influence, particularly when their immediate superiors may be very sympathetic to their efforts.

The position of banker entitles that person to keep the interest if he or she wishes to bank the takings each week. More senior managers may be very willing to assist their junior managers in taking action against those who intentionally default on payments. In a certain symbolic manner, default is considered tantamount to undermining the authority of management. Chargehands may be appointed precisely because of the authority 'baggage' they bring with them. Disregarding such authority is tantamount to insubordination. And managers at all levels, particularly those situated on the factory floor, where insubordination is generally regarded less as a transgression of the factory's code of conduct as it is a personal affront, react quite strongly to such actions.

A more cynical view may discern the participation of managers as an attempt to extend their authority into an arena where ordinarily, the exercise of such authority would be deemed inappropriate. And such a view is not without insight. However,

whether these management personnel are exploiting the parameters of their job description or not is a separate question altogether. The fact remains, irrespective of their motives, that their participation instills within these informal associations the sense of security or guarantee denied them by the lack of any meaningful social nexus beyond the parameters of their working lives⁸.

The mirroring of organizing principles extends beyond the mere participation of management personnel and the implications of such participation. Incorporated within the structure of these groups are certain features of the formal system of job classification. As stated in the description of the social situation, all the members of this particular stokvel earned over R275 per week. There are other employees working on Making Track A and B that earn less than this figure, although none are members of this particular stokvel.

The weekly contribution⁹ of the various stokvels in operation at Cheval differ quite significantly. The most 'affluent' stokvel sees members contributing R100 per week while the lowest figure recorded was R20 per week. Members of the stokvel described above claimed that by extending membership to employees with jobs paying less than R275 per week, they are "asking for trouble".

⁸ Without totally ignoring the very real relationship of working together for eight years or more, such 'relationships' are however, buttressed or fortified by the operation of other relationships. I was informed that a year prior to my study, a 'stokvel' member who had accumulated a rather heavy debt, had absconded with the stokvel takings. Although representing a rather drastic measure, it remains a possibility that needs to be 'managed'.

⁹ All the stokvels at Cheval, that I was aware of, operated on a weekly basis.

Most members believe that earning a weekly wage less than R275, increases that member's chances of defaulting on payments. The lowest paid member of the stokvel receives about R280 per week, working as a 'seat and side laster' on making track A.

Existing members have refused requests by other workers on the making tracks for membership of their stokvel. Membership is quite strictly based on wage rates, and, by implication, job classification. Furthermore, a higher salary is often associated with a certain term of employment. All the members have been employed at Cheval for eight years or more. Allowing individuals with a shorter term of employment to join as members of the stokvel exposes the group to new risks. There is quite a consensus of opinion regarding the potential mobility of a certain category of employee. Younger employees or those with a term of service less than four years, are regarded as a risk category. Their wages are relatively low and if another job elsewhere were brought to their attention, they would, according to these men, "not think twice". If a member were to leave during the 10 month cycle of the stokvel, the remaining members may have to make up the difference in order that those still to receive the pool will realize an equal amount.

A further aspect of stokvel composition that essentially derives from the formal organization of the factory, is the appointment of members on a departmental basis. All 10 members, of the stokvel under analysis, work on making-tracks A and B, in the same physical space. Indeed, this is one of the organizing principles for most of the stokvels at Cheval. Of course, there is an obvious logic contained in such a process of selection. Why choose members for the association if one rarely sees them or interacts with them in any way on the factory floor? But then again, if one were related in some way or perhaps as a neighbour

or close friend, then selection on the basis of departmental employment would be inferior for the purpose of control. But the former scenario, i.e. a certain social affinity, does not appear to obtain at Cheval. And therefore, I would argue, selecting members from the same department not only guarantees a base level of interaction, but furthermore, brings such personnel under the direct influence of the chargehand\banker.

6.3.3. Conclusion

The preceding analysis has attempted to show, through the application of Gluckman's technique (the analysis of a social situation) that, in the operation of these stokvel associations, the organizing principles are adaptations or extensions of the Cheval model of formal organization. Furthermore, the analysis has suggested that such a system of organization obtains largely as a result of its situational expedience. The use of kinship and social identity would be wholly inappropriate in a context such as Cheval. A large majority of the workforce have no knowledge of their colleagues over and above their work identity. Although kinship, as Graburn states, "is very often the major organizing principle" (Graburn:1971;3), such an idiom of organization is rendered entirely inappropriate in a situation where residential, cultural and social patterns are so diffuse and unrelated to workplace experience.

In the context of restricted social interaction, the system of organization appears most effective if patterned upon existing relationships, both symmetrical and asymmetrical, within the factory. The precedence in structure and meaning offered by an extension of the formal system of organization, projects a sense of order and control into that area of interaction which is so

patently lacking the necessary social accord. The construction of a worker's identity, in relation to his or her colleagues, is premised heavily upon an individual's work predicaments. Certain features of one's work position are the building blocks of one's work identity, a form of identity most accessible to and appropriate for the interaction of workers who share little in common other than their work experience.

6.4. Illicit Monetary Activities

The stokvel associations and similar saving societies have over recent years engendered for themselves a certain public approbation since the formation of the National Stokvels Association of South Africa (NASASA) in 1988. This has been a public relations exercise of sorts, that has aroused the interest of several major banks, whose involvement with NASASA has brought new opportunities for both the organization and its members. However, other informal monetary activities, that are pervasive in both rural and urban areas, have garnered for themselves attention of a completely different sort. These are the illegal activities of the loan sharks and the lottery operators.

At Cheval, such illicit monetary activities are to be detected, though well concealed. Workers who were willing to speak about the operation of such illicit activities categorically stated that they themselves had no dealings with the people involved and were unable (or unwilling) to furnish details. Consequently, there was little information to work with. What was clear however, was that despite management's efforts to eliminate illegal monetary activities, they still remained, although the extent to which they currently operated was indeterminable.

I was informed that such operations were usually run by individuals who were members of households or families comprised of two or more wage earners. There was little to suggest that high wage earners or members of management, considering their authority and earning potential, were involved in any conspiratorial manner in such activities. Unfortunately, the shrouded manner in which such activities were conducted, and the apparent stigma associated with being a 'client', largely prevented my gaining access to the kinds of information necessary to attempt any sort of meaningful analysis of such activities.

CHAPTER 7: SUMMARY

Perhaps the most important theme developed in the body of the text is that of the 'dualism' that obtains within the system of industrial relations at Cheval. This organizational dualism generates certain conditions which enable the various interest groups to alternate idioms, from the formal to the informal, or bureaucratic to the paternal, of action. Industrial strategies are designed to reflect the character of one or the other of these frameworks of organization and to shift freely between them. The choice of frameworks is not arbitrary or random, but situationally purposive. The nature and context of a particular dispute will determine for a particular group the most expedient framework within which to negotiate the dispute.

Not all interest groups are able to successfully exploit this dualism. As the thesis shows, it is the position general management group that appears to be the most compromised by workforce and owner's ability to alternate idioms of interaction. However, managers have a certain recourse of their own. The concept of 'impression management' is one such tool that the managers appropriate in order to negotiate the ambiguity of their position, the ambiguity arising precisely from this inability to alternate idioms of interaction. The position of management is intended to represent the 'change'; evidence of having successfully transformed the organization of the company.

A second but related theme that deserves further attention in this summary is the structure and existence of informal relations on the factory floor. There are covert institutions as well as informal groups that have emerged around certain worker

interests. Occasionally such interests run contrary to the formal rules and regulations of the company, or for that matter, standard industrial practices. Such contrary interests are frequently expressed in a language that is more acceptable in terms of current industrial practices. Issues such as work hours, remuneration and benefits are just a few of the issues around which 'legitimate' or normative worker-management disputes emerge. However, these grievances are frequently conduits for the expression of 'illegitimate' or 'abnormal' worker interests. The lack of acceptable channels through which such grievances may be alteratively expressed results in this process of deceptive sublimation.

A further issue regarding the existence of informal organizations on the factory floor is the manner in which certain informal practices have developed around the existing structure of formal factory organizations. Although such practices are not considered by management to be illicit or unacceptable practices, management is however, largely unaware of the existence of such practices. A more thorough understanding of such practices may assist management in coming to terms with frequent worker opposition to wholesale changes in the structure of formal organization in the factory.

More generally, the participation within these informal or covert structures and institutions is a central feature of the 'world of the worker'. Creating meaning, rules and regulations is not the exclusive preserve of the manager or the owner. Workers create their own organizations with their own imperatives and interests. Without reflecting on the legitimacy of such practices, their mere existence is sufficient to confound any manager who fails to acknowledge that there is generally more to 'what meets the eye', or for that matter, the ear.

Finally, the thesis points to an inconsistent relationship between the micro and macro levels, or in the classic representations and actual representations of phenomena. The anthropologist, given the emphasis on micro level analysis, is generally in a position to discern how small-group behaviour is considerably influenced by the local conditions within which they operate. Significantly, the 'theory' is frequently challenged by the ethnography.

The distinction between micro and macro level analyses often illustrates shortcomings in the assumptions of certain theories. The generality of theoretical constructions necessarily lacks the refinement to adequately capture the particularities of local conditions. Essentially, such an opinion operates on similar imperatives as those distinguishing emic and etic analyses. In the thesis, the use of the concepts of *field* and *arena*, offers an insight into the nature of the relationship between the micro and macro world of the worker. The relationship appears generally expedient, reflecting certain linkages that are, dependent upon the circumstances, either accentuated or overlooked. Furthermore, the reader is encouraged to look beyond the rhetorical connotations of certain concepts, such as *management* and *class*, and to grasp just how the 'small-group' exhibits a level of dynamism not connoted by the actual discourse underpinning such concepts.

However, this perspective is not intended to undermine the value of macro level analysis, or the importance of the diachronic and synchronic perspectives. On the contrary, the 'larger picture' as it were, constitutes an important component of much of the analysis. The main contention here is that the largely deterministic relationship often assumed to exist between the macro and micro levels must acknowledge the macro generality on

the one hand and the micro particularity on the other.

Generally, the question of gender has become an increasingly important and popular theme of social studies. Although I do acknowledge its importance, the issue did not feature prominently in the kinds of intergroup relations and formations observed at Cheval. The fact that the 'gender question' did not assert itself is perhaps in itself deserving of the researcher's attention. However, it was felt that such an enquiry would remain nevertheless gratuitous as it did not appear to integrate with or complement the prevailing themes around which the thesis is constructed.

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