

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF LABOUR IN AN AFRICAN PUBLIC ENTERPRISE:
DOCK WORKERS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SIERRA LEONE PORT ORGANISATION

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ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with the problem of 'situating' lower paid workers within the political economy of an African state when these are workers in a public corporation which is in turn an integral part of a patron clientelist political and economic system. It is also a study of the responses of one of the largest groups of wage earners in Sierra Leone to their employment by a parastatal organisation. Two perspectives are considered: whether lower paid workers in African parastatals are employed (and exploited) in a capitalist mode of production (like Marx's proletariat) or, whether they are a part of a labour aristocracy (even a kleptocratic elite) which is parasitic on the peasantry. Neither of these perspectives seems fully appropriate. It is far from clear that parastatals (even in societies developing in the direction of capitalism) operate in the manner or by the criteria of capitalist enterprises, and consequently that the ideal or natural response of workers should conform to the classic Marxist model. On the other hand, it is far from clear that all public sector employees are non-productive, unexploited, or purely parasitic on the peasantry. A public corporation like the Sierra Leone Port Authority has, in the post-colonial state, been less geared to profit-making than to providing jobs for political clients. The provision of such political benefits via the public sector after independence has been limited less by financial than by political constraints and IMF pressure to reduce public spending on over-extended public bureaucracies. There is therefore a strong element of parasitism in the collective operation of such organisations and one from which lower paid workers might be considered in some ways to benefit. And, as we shall see, this does affect their attitudes. These factors are most accurately seen, however, as merely mitigating their exploitation since they do largely perform the labour entailed in providing a genuine service for commerce at low rates of remuneration (even when some graft is included). Moreover, there can be no doubt from socio-economic indices and from sociological observation of their way of life that they are very much a part of the urban poor. There are immediate differences between them and the peasantry over such issues as the level of official food prices but these are really subsidiary to the major conflicts between the interests of the political and administrative elite together with some capitalist business on the one hand and the low income rural and urban workforce on the other. This helps to explain the vitality of the trade unionism of the dockers.

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DFL

August, 1982.

ABBREVIATIONS

AALC	African-American Labour Centre
AFL - CIO	American Federation of Labour - Congress of Industrial Organisations
APC	All People's Congress
CDAC	Colonial Development Advisory Committee
COLA	Cost of Living Allowance
CPP	Convention People's Party
DICOR	Diamond Corporation
DIMINCO	National Diamond Mining Company
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JIC	Joint Industrial Council
JNB	Joint Negotiating Board
KPM	Kono Progressive Movement
NCNC	National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons
NCSL	National Council of Sierra Leone
NRC	National Reformation Council
PZ	Paterson Zochonis
SCOA	Societe Compagnie Occidentale Afrique
SLBS	Sierra Leone Broadcasting Services
SLFL	Sierra Leone Federation of Labour
SLIM	Sierra Leone Independence Movement
SLPA	Sierra Leone Port Authority
SLPMB	Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Board
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
SLTUC	Sierra Leone Trade Union Congress
TGNC	Trade Group Negotiating Council

TUC Trade Union Congress (of United Kingdom)
UAC United Africa Company
UDP United Democratic Party
UMWU United Mine Workers' Union
UNF United National Front
UPP United People's Party
WFTU World Federation of Trade Unions

A NOTE ON CURRENCY

In Section 1 of this study, monetary values are expressed in sterling. From Section 2, however, monetary values are expressed in sterling and in Leones and cents, the latter being Sierra Leone's national currency which was first introduced in August 1964.

Le2 = £1 sterling, a fixed rate of exchange until 1977, when the Leone was 'floated' and now fluctuates (officially) between Le2.15 and Le2.50 to £1 sterling.

INTRODUCTION

In most of the post-colonial states of sub-Saharan Africa, both the size and functions of the state bureaucracy has proliferated. This has allegedly (according to official rhetoric) been for the purpose of promoting economic development and social change. The centrality of the role of the state was, during the period of decolonisation and independence, lent intellectual respectability by fashionable 'progressive' economic thinking. This required that in order to transcend structural 'neo-colonial dependency', the direct participation of the state in the modern sector to the progressive exclusion of foreign capital was paramount. Much emphasis was therefore to be laid on developing import substitutive industry so as to increase national autonomy and lay the basis for 'independent' development. This strategy also involved the extension of state control over extractive industries and over rural economic activities so as to facilitate the appropriation of a large part of the value of the peasant farm produce.¹ As a result of the pervasiveness of the role of the state in social and economic life, the majority of wage earners in most African countries, including Sierra Leone, are employed by government or parastatal organisations.

1 An economic appraisal of the strategy with regard to Ghana has been provided by Tony Killick in his Development Economics in Action: A Study of Economic Policies in Ghana, London, 1978. A recent World Bank document, Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action, Washington D.C., 1981, is emphatic that the proliferation of public bureaucracies since independence has positively hindered the meeting of 'basic needs'. For an assessment of the consequences of such policies under successive post-colonial regimes in Ghana, cf. Richard Jeffries, 'Rawlings and the Political Economy of Underdevelopment in Ghana', African Affairs, (forthcoming), July 1982.

Whatever the economic rationale of these organisations, they do not exist and operate in a social and political vacuum. They are typically an integral part of a patron clientelist political and economic system on which the very foundations of government sometimes depend.¹ This is not simply or even necessarily to say that African governments preside over a 'spoils system' in which dictators give handouts to supporters and kinsmen from the treasury till. In the post independence era of inter-communal competition and growing inter-class cleavage which constantly expose the institutional fragility of the new nation-states, political stability can greatly depend on the extent to which governments can underwrite the competing claims of different sections of the populace. More particularly, there has been (and there is) a pressure for employment opportunities from a growing urban population which has generated the response from governments of providing jobs for political clients in public bureaucracies. It is against this background that government and parastatal organisations typically operate in the new African states.

In the now considerable literature on African labour studies, the problem of 'situating' lower paid workers within the political economy when these are workers in a public corporation, which is in turn an integral part of a system of political clientelism, has not received sufficiently detailed attention. Most studies of African workers have tended either to focus on workers in capitalist industries, or to treat the situation of workers in the employ of

1 Cf., e.g., Robert Bates, Markets and States in Tropical Africa: The Political Basis of Agricultural Policies, Berkeley, 1981, for a penetrating analysis of the socio-political context of policy-making in agriculture in post-colonial sub-Saharan Africa.

public sector organisations as equivalent to employment in capitalist industries. In the latter case, there has been a tendency to apply a theoretical model which implies that such organisations are, like capitalist industries, geared to profit-making via surplus appropriation, and that the proper or ideal response of their employment is therefore one of anti-capitalist protest.¹ On the other hand, there has also been a tendency to treat all employees of government and parastatals as 'parasitic' on the peasantry.² It is far from clear that parastatals (even in societies developing in the direction of capitalism) operate in the manner or by the criteria of capitalist enterprises. On the other hand, it is far from clear that all public sector employees are non-productive, unexploited, or purely parasitic on the peasantry and/or on the surplus appropriated from the extractive industries. Even less clear is it that, even if - by virtue of their employment - in a relatively favoured economic position, they are non-antagonistic towards the political and bureaucratic elite. The idea that as a 'labour aristocracy' all wage earners except the unskilled are closely allied to, or even part of, this elite has been effectively refuted by Peace for the case of Southern Nigerian industrial workers³ and by Jeffries for the case of Ghanaian railwaymen.⁴ This study is

1 Cf., e.g., the editorial sections in Richard Sandbrook and Robin Cohen (eds.), The Development of an African Working Class, London, 1975; or Peter Waterman, Division and Unity amongst Nigerian Workers: Lagos Port Unionism, 1940's-1960's, The Hague, 1982.

2 The most important influences here have been Franz Fanon (cf. The Wretched of the Earth, London, 1965) and John Saul (cf. Giovanni Arrighi and John Saul, Essays in the Political Economy of Africa, New York, 1973). In a more recent reply to critics, Saul accepts the 'danger of prematurely labelling the African working class' (cf. John Saul, The State and Revolution in East Africa, New York, 1979, p.345).

3 Cf. Adrian Peace, Choice, Class and Conflict: A Study of Southern Nigerian Factory Workers, Brighton, 1979.

4 Cf. Richard Jeffries, Class, Power and Ideology: The Railwaymen of Sekondi-Takoradi, Cambridge, 1978.

designed to examine the same question for the case of the Sierra Leone dock workers but also, hopefully, to make some theoretical advance.

The central concern is therefore to identify on the one hand the main features of the 'mode of appropriation and distribution' in post-colonial Sierra Leone (the political and sociological processes which are involved as well as the pattern of income distribution which has emerged) and on the other, to show how these influence the attitudes and political behaviour of the dockers in the employ of the SLPA. The first concern belongs to the realm of so-called 'objective analysis of class relations' and largely follows Kitching.¹ The second is sometimes denigratingly said by Marxists to belong to so-called 'bourgeois stratification theory' but seems worth the effort as attitudes are crucial for the understanding of past and (probably) future political behaviour. Moreover, Marx's concept of the dialectic surely emphasises the immense usefulness of understanding social and political change as the product of a continuous interplay between consciousness and 'objective' economic reality.

This study focuses, then, on the responses of one of the largest groups of wage earners in Sierra Leone to their employment by a parastatal organisation. Amongst the more important questions which are raised are the following: what are the economic and political dynamics, or rules of operation, of a public corporation such as the SLPA? How have these been affected by the development of a system of political clientelism (and associated corruption) in post-colonial

1 Cf. Gavin Kitching, Class and Economic Change in Kenya, Boston, 1980, especially pp.438-461.

Sierra Leone? To the extent that these rules of operation are not those of efficiency in profit maximisation, such as characterises capitalist enterprises, can the employees in such a corporation (or certain sections of them) be said to be (in a Marxist sense) exploited, and by what criteria? If lower paid workers, at least, can collectively be so described, what influence is exerted on their political perceptions and behaviour by the role of patron-clientalism in labour recruitment and managerial strategies of labour control? More especially, what have been the most notable features of their trade union organisation and action? And to what degree has their trade union activity led them into a conscious (or unconscious) confrontation with government over major policy issues?

As already stated, it is an assumption of this study that the economic position and political behaviour of parastatal employees need to be seen in relation to the role and nature of the Sierra Leone state. The latter issue has received inadequate and/or unsatisfactory treatment at the levels both of Sierra Leone politics specifically and of sub-Saharan politics generally. Despite a number of useful studies of various aspects of Sierra Leone politics, none of them has addressed itself directly to this question.¹ At the more general level, the issue has tended to be dominated by

1 One student of Sierra Leone politics has observed that the available literature leaves the impression that '...the state is non-existent in Sierra Leone'. Cf. Steve Riley, 'New Directions in Political Research on Sierra Leone', paper read at the 2nd Symposium on Sierra Leone Studies, Birmingham, 17-19 July, 1981. Topicality has evidently influenced the choice of research subjects to which this researcher also pleads guilty. Thus Martin Kilson focused on modernisation and political change in his Political Change in a West African State, New York, 1969; John Gartwright examined the phenomenon of party competition in Politics in Sierra Leone 1947-67, Toronto, 1971; Victor King also examined this phenomenon as well as the authoritarian trends in Sierra Leone politics in 'The Search for Political Stability in Sierra Leone 1960-72', PhD thesis,

Marxists or neo-Marxists, whose general conclusion has been that the post-colonial state is manned by a petty bourgeoisie and its role, in most instances, determined by metropolitan capital. The weakness of this characterisation is not only that 'petty bourgeoisie' is here used in a very different sense from that of Marx's classic usage or even that it is used as a somewhat residual category to include the political and bureaucratic (and military) elite with local entrepreneurs and school teachers, whose interests are by no means obviously identical. It is also that it implies an economic rationale (the development of capitalism or whatever) to the treatment of various economic groups of classes by this ruling class when it is far from clear, judging from the post-colonial expression of most African states, that there is any such developmental rationale or dynamic to their actions and decisions. As this objection implies, it is equally far from clear that the interest of metropolitan (or international) capital has predominantly determined such actions and decisions. The position taken in this study is rather that firstly, the treatment of various economic groups (or the process of class-formation and exploitation) needs to be understood as the product of relatively autonomous decision-making by the local state; and, secondly, that, to the degree to which there is a rationale to such

University of Manchester, 1975; Victor Minikin examined the communal culture and politics of the Konos in 'Local Level Politics in Kono District, Sierra Leone', PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1971; Abner Cohen applied a similar perspective to the culture and politics of the Krios in The Politics of Elite Culture, London, 1981; the military has been studied by Thomas Cox in Civil-Military Relations in Sierra Leone, Cambridge (Mass.), 1976; the relationship between political competition at the local and national levels has been examined by John Barrows in Grassroots Politics in a West African State, London, 1976. Chris Clapham's comparative study of Liberia and Sierra Leone, however, does, implicitly at least, rest on an understanding of the fundamentally 'clientelist' nature of Sierra Leone politics superior to that of the above-mentioned case studies (cf. Liberia and Sierra Leone: An Essay in Comparative Politics, Cambridge, 1976.)

decisions, it is political rather than economic.¹

This is not to deny that it is of the greatest importance to understand the role of the state in a country such as Sierra Leone in terms of its favouring and disfavouring what might be broadly termed various 'classes', but it is to suggest that the political considerations influencing this process has not been very well understood in the neo-Marxist literature. It is also to draw attention to the fact that such political considerations, and indeed the political process as a whole, centrally involve the preferment of certain individuals and communal groups rather than (or as well as) economic classes. There would seem a great deal to be said, indeed, for characterising the Sierra Leonean state (as those of many other African countries) as a 'neo-patrimonial' regime, its derivation stemming from Max Weber's concept of patrimonial authority.² In its application to contemporary African states, neo-patrimonialism captures the reality of the on-going struggle for power to control the appropriative mechanism of the state (and the consolidation of such power), a struggle in which the interests cemented by patron-clientelist relationships provide the foundations.

The resources of the neo-patrimonial regime are derived from control over trade and the regulation of the economy. Political relationships and patterns of political behaviour are highly personalised. Where loyalty to the dominant political figure or ruler is not directly based on ethnic and kinship ties, or piety to his person, they are based on a network of patron-clientelist

1 Cf. Robert Bates op. cit., especially the introduction.

2 Cf. Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, London and Boston, 1948 (repr. 1977), p.299.

relationships in which those involved agree to serve the ruler in exchange for a variety of rewards. This network, within and across communal groups, permeates all levels of society with the ruler being the most prominent patron of all. While recruitment in neo-patrimonial regimes is often through ability and professional expertise, the highest offices depend on the ability of the individual to gain the confidence of the ruler.¹

The post-colonial state's central role in development planning, making provisions for manpower training, building infrastructures, administering commodity exports, determining policy toward foreign businesses, allocating mining licenses, import licenses, foreign exchange, etc., has made access to its decision-making mechanisms a fundamental aspiration of the literate and educated elite² spearheaded

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- 1 For descriptions of the sociological characteristics of neo-patrimonial regimes, cf., e.g., S. Gellar, 'State-Building and Nation-Building in West Africa', in S. N. Eisenstadt and S. Rokkan (eds.), Building States and Nations, Beverly Hills and London, 1973, pp.348-426. For studies of neo-patrimonial regimes, cf. Chris Clapham (ed.), Private Patronage and Public Power: Political Clientelism in the Modern State, London, 1982; Donal Cruise O'Brien, Saints and Politicians, Cambridge, 1975, especially pp.149 ff.; and J. C. Willame, Patrimonialism and Political Change in the Congo, Stanford, 1972.
 - 2 The term 'literate and educated elite' (in contradistinction to notions of the 'ruling class', the 'bourgeoisie', or 'petty bourgeoisie') seems justified because a crucial characteristic of the modern state in African societies is that it operates in a language, and according to procedures, which are largely alien and incomprehensible to the majority of the population. Hence a description of the elite in this way identifies their initial and most essential qualifications. There is a further justification in the use of this description precisely because it is the state (i.e. political power) which largely determines class relations, both vertically and between different communities, rather than political power being merely a reflection of economic power or of the 'mode of production'. For an elaboration of this argument, cf. Colin Leys, 'The "Overdeveloped" Post Colonial State: A Re-evaluation', in The Review of African Political Economy, No. 5, January-April 1976, pp.39-48.

by its more politically committed members. Such people develop patron-clientelist followings in their competition for, and use of, state power because they do generally (and perhaps genuinely) feel a sense of obligation to their ethnic commitments and original 'backers' both in the educational as well as in the political stakes and also because of a need to consolidate support by making available tangible 'rewards'. Moreover, where different regions, areas, or locations (populated by culturally distinct groups) are competing for the same resources within the same nation-state (the availability of which does make a difference to the prospect for individual life chances), competitive communalism is likely to become the basis of political action.¹ Thus 'tribalism', far from being an index of an African's state fragility, may well be an index of its strength precisely because what the state has to offer is so important.²

1 Cf. R. Melson and H. Wolpe (eds.), Nigeria: Modernisation and the Politics of Communalism, Michigan, 1971, p.6.

2 Cf. J. Lonsdale, 'The State and Social Processes in Africa', paper presented to the 24th annual meeting of the African Studies Association, Bloomington, 21 October 1981, typescript, pp.57-8. Nonetheless, alliances may be made between communal groups (cemented via clientelism) and much energy expended on the assertion of platitudes relating to the desirability of national unity. Or, indeed, a nationwide organisation of political mobilisation may be maintained. (Cf. Richard Jeffries, 'The Ghanaian Elections of 1979' in African Affairs, 79, July 1980, pp. 397-414, p.412-3). For an account of the political fragmentation that results when there is an erosion of the means of preventing the destabilisation of the nation state, cf. Cherry Gerzel, 'Uganda after Amin' in African Affairs, 79, October 1980, pp.461-489. This, of course, underlines the fact that the legitimacy of a neo-patrimonial regime is, at best, doubtful, and procedures for maintaining accountability, tenuous. For an elaboration of this theme, cf. Chris Clapham, 'The Politics of Failure: Political Instability and National Integration in Liberia and Sierra Leone', in Chris Clapham (ed.), op. cit., pp.76-92.

An aspect of the operational logic of a neo-patrimonial regime is the use of the public sector to accommodate political clients. Not only does the state finance the salaries, wages, and perquisites of public sector personnel, over and above this, such personnel might quite literally dip their hands into the till. The diversion of resources from public and parastatal organisations to private consumption and investment, the deliberate overmanning of the corporation to accommodate political clients or, the failure of such organisations to operate like typical capitalist enterprises, might more usefully be viewed as the inherent operational logic of the neo-patrimonial regime.¹

One of the most thorny and inadequately answered questions in the study of the political economy of African societies is that of the relationship between the patron-clientelist operations of government and the process of class formation. To what degree does the former necessarily inhibit the latter? There is perhaps no adequate answer at a general level; but it is the aim of this study to begin providing an answer at the level of the relations between the state and lower paid workers in Sierra Leone.

A note on the organisation of the study and the primary sources

This work falls into three sections and seven chapters. The

1 Thus a legal and moral definition of corruption is avoided. For a moralistic appraisal of corruption in West Africa, cf. M. McMullen, 'A Theory of Corruption' in Sociological Review, IX, June 1961, pp.181-200. Furthermore, while it must be acknowledged that Riggs' model of the operation of the 'sala' in 'prismatic' society is illuminating, it was however largely anticipated by Weber's description of patrimonial authority. Moreover, it does not seem helpful, in the interest of clarity, to adopt Riggs' neologisms (cf. Fred Riggs, Administration in Developing Societies: The Theory of Prismatic Society, Boston, 1964, especially Chapters 1, 7, and 8).

first section (and first two chapters) provide an historical background essential for locating the study in its proper perspective. Chapter 1 discusses the influence of laissez-faire economic doctrines on British colonial public administration and the consequent reluctance of the authorities to undertake responsibility for the development of the port or to bring the management of port services within the scope of its bureaucratic apparatus. The historical background to the development of a workforce at the port is narrated; the labour control strategies adopted by the colonial authorities and the sociological effects of changing labour market conditions are analysed. Chapter 2 takes this analysis of labour in the colonial state further, beginning with a narrative on the origins of modern trade unionism in Sierra Leone. Developments during the period of decolonisation, and in particular, the beginning of party politics and the reliance of aspiring politicians on kinship and clientelist relations to mobilise and secure support are discussed and analysed.

The case study of the political economy of labour in the Sierra Leone port organisation effectively begins with the two chapters in the second section. A public corporation such as the Port Authority, providing what might be tenably construed as a 'public service', should not perhaps be assessed as regards either its 'efficiency' or its 'exploitation' of its employees, by the strict capitalist criteria of relative profit. In the case of a quasi-monopolist organisation extracting fees and rent from commercial enterprises, however, the level of loss-making should obviously not be large, in the absence of strong countervailing economic arguments, in order to be regarded as permissible by either capitalist or 'socialist' criteria. It is extremely difficult in practice, and perhaps impossible even in theory, to decide precisely how to measure 'efficiency' or 'exploitation'

in such a context. But some light might be gained from a comparative consideration of the performance of the Port Authority (and its equivalent) over various historical periods. It is partly with this in mind that these two chapters examine and contrast the administrative and economic operations of the port organisation between 1954 and 1965 (Chapter 3) and between 1965 and 1976 (Chapter 4). For much of the first period when the port organisation operated under the colonial state, the authorities continued to exhibit some reluctance to expand the public sector and create an autonomous public corporation. The commercial viability of the port enterprise was the most important aspect of managerial policy. In the face of these constraints, the port management deliberately adopted an illiberal employment policy. This created the conditions for the formation of the Dock Workers' Union in 1963 as the means to present an effective challenge to this aspect of managerial policy. During the second period, and in the post-colonial state, the Dock Workers' Union was not only able to reverse some aspects of the employment policy of the port management, but was also able (via the channels of political clientelism) to secure for its secretary a seat on the Board of a new autonomous Port Authority public corporation. The commercial viability of the port enterprise, previously the cornerstone of managerial policy, increasingly assumed secondary importance. The involvement of the management and lower paid dockers in corruption and graft informs the argument that there is a strong element of parasitism in the collective operation of the corporation. This of course also casts serious doubt on the extent to which the principles of capitalist organisation was maintained.

The third section (and last three chapters) attempts to resolve the theoretical problem. In developing a 'sociological profile' of

the dockers, Chapter 5 follows Kitching in identifying the 'exploiting' and 'exploited' classes by indices of national income distribution. While it is not suggested that the involvement of the dockers in corrupt practices is sufficient to make them a part of the 'exploiters', the ambiguity reflected in their attitudes to elite corruption (and hence their 'class consciousness') can be related to this. This involvement however, is most accurately seen as merely mitigating their exploitation since they do largely perform the labour entailed in providing a genuine service for commerce (cargo handling and related functions) at what are pretty low rates of remuneration (even when some graft is included). Moreover, there can be no doubt from socio-economic indices and from sociological observation of their way of life that they are very much a part of the urban poor. This helps to explain the vitality of their trade unionism (Chapter 6). They have not in the past engaged in frequent strike action primarily because of their awareness of their 'dependence' on a government much stronger than themselves alone. The pervasive tentacles of the political clientelist system has attempted to 'capture' their trade union leadership but with only limited success in the face of their solidarity over maintaining an accountable and responsive leadership. The union leadership of the dock workers, however, has inevitably been influenced and constrained in its strategy and decisions by the policy and orientation of the Sierra Leone trade union movement as a whole. It is therefore necessary to situate their trade union behaviour in the context and orientation of the trade union movement in post-colonial Sierra Leone (Chapter 7). An important aspect of this has been the use of the channels of political clientelism in order to secure and defend gains made through the

formal processes of collective bargaining. However, it is also clear that the national trade union leadership has failed - as a result of their co-optation (in part at least) into the ruling elite - to consistently assert their right and duty to criticise government policy and performance publicly. More recently, however, the steady erosion in the real value of wages, coupled with an increasing trend in the scale and magnitude of elite corruption, created the conditions which made possible, in September 1981, the first general strike in the country's history in which dock workers played a leading part. The latter episode also illustrates the dynamising potential of a more truly expressive labour leadership as well as the limits of government tolerance. A conclusion summarises the main concerns of this work.

A variety of primary sources form the basis of this study. These include material from the archives of the London Chamber of Commerce; Ocean Transport Limited (the parent organisation of Elder Dempster Lines); the National Workshop Corporation (formerly the Sierra Leone Railway Administration); the Sierra Leone Port Authority; the Sierra Leone Dock Workers' Union; the Sierra Leone Labour Congress; the Sierra Leone Teachers' Union; the Artisans, Ministry of Works Employees' Union; and the Sierra Leone House of Representatives. Material from the Sierra Leone National Archive is also used. Newspapers, official reports, formal interviews, informal extended conversation with the dockers themselves and the results of a questionnaire survey of a sample of dock workers provide other sources.

SECTION 1

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Chapter 1

The early organisation of the port of Freetown and the emergence of a workforce before 1954

The influence of laissez-faire economic doctrines in the theory and practice of the administration of British colonial possessions was as pervasive as it was profound. The primary concern of colonial administrators was the establishment of a seemingly reasonable infrastructure and administrative services, and the raising of sufficient revenue to maintain them. The involvement of the colonial authorities in Sierra Leone in large-scale ventures was therefore effectively precluded. Even by the standards of adherence to this policy, the colonial authorities were extremely cautious. The modest Government Wharf, built between 1870 and 1873, is an example of such fiscal caution. Several proposals to develop the port to meet the requirements of the increasing trade in produce failed to materialise as successive colonial administrations felt unable either to put up a part of the capital required or to guarantee loans. For instance, a scheme (strongly supported by the major 'merchant' firms which complained of congestion at Government Wharf) to move the site of the port to its present location remained on the drawing board of the engineer who had been sent out from Britain to make the preliminary surveys in the early part of 1911.¹

Early organisation

This principle of restricting the colonial administration's

1 London Chamber of Commerce Archive, File No. 16597 2, Minutes of the Joint West African Committee of the London, Liverpool, and Manchester Chambers of Commerce, 19 July 1911.

involvement in the economic life of the dependency to the barest minimum was reflected in the early organisation of the port. Its functional areas were separated between government departments and the local representatives of the shipping companies, the most important being Elder Dempster. Since successive colonial administrations were reluctant to extend the public sector more than appeared necessary, a fully integrated port organisation was slow to emerge.

This meant that the workforce at the port was for many years fragmented between different employers. The Customs Department, the main source of government revenue until it was replaced by receipts from the mining industry in the 1930's, was responsible for the coordination of the activities of the various port users. It maintained a prominent presence and its warehouses became the clearing centres for both imports and exports. The Port and the Marine Department, also formerly an important source of government revenue through harbour dues and fees collected for pilotage, was responsible for the regulation of shipping traffic in the harbour and the maintenance of navigational aids. The Railway Administration maintained the cranes and other cargo handling equipment at the wharf which were first introduced in 1909.¹ The Public Works Department (formerly known as the Royal Engineers) undertook maintenance work on the sea wall and jetties. While the government departments provided the services ancilliary to cargo handling, the shipping companies and large trading firms were directly involved in the latter activity. Consignees and consignors - especially the large trading firms - also undertook some shore cargo handling and portorage in clearing and forwarding their consignments.

1 Cf. R. Best, A History of the Sierra Leone Railway 1899-1949, Freetown, 1949, p.35.

In addition to its cargo handling activities, Elder Dempster, as part of its corporate strategy of establishing itself as the leading organisation in West African shipping, had since the early 1900's provided a 'feeder' and lighterage service in the more important trading areas along the West African Coast under British influence. A wholly owned Elder Dempster subsidiary, the West African Lighterage and Transport Company, was eventually formed in 1910 to manage this area of its corporate activity.¹ In Freetown, this company had a virtual monopoly over the provision of a lighterage service between the jetties at Government Wharf and the ships anchored at mid-stream in the harbour, until the 1930's when the United Africa Company group (UAC) introduced their own fleet of lighters to service their own ships. Elder Dempster also owned and operated a dry dock at King Tom which was for many years the only site along the Freetown Waterfront where repairs on lighters and small crafts could be undertaken. Another firm, the Sierra Leone Coaling Company, formerly a subsidiary of Elder Dempster, provided a bunkering service to ships calling at the port.²

The data provided in Table 1.1 shows that for the selected years before and after the First World War, the British shipping companies, and among them Elder Dempster in particular, were the major users of the port. The country of origin of these shipping companies also gives some indication of the direction of trade before and after the First World War as is evident in Table 1.2. The most important exports by value and volume between the turn of the century and the development

1 Cf. P. N. Davies, The Trade Makers: Elder Dempster in West Africa 1852-1972, London, 1973, pp.114-116.

2 Cf. Laurens van der Laan, European Commercial Enterprise in Colonial Sierra Leone 1896-1961: A Preliminary Survey, Leiden, 1978, p.8.

of the mining industry in the 1930's were oil palm produce and kola nuts.¹ In 1925, Henry Goddard, an official of the colonial administration, wrote in his encyclopaedic Handbook of Sierra Leone that

'the trade...exists and has for many years existed on the exploitation of forest products. Sierra Leone has no industries capable of assisting in the stabilisation of its prosperity...The main, almost the sole prop, of the country's financial existence is, and has long been the oil palm.'²

The biggest export markets before the war were Germany and other West African territories which took in the bulk of the oil palm produce and kola nuts respectively. During the war, trading with Germany ceased. The oil palm trade was diverted to Britain where Lever Brothers swiftly occupied the vacuum left by the German firms.³ Imports mostly came from Britain.

During the years before the Second World War, therefore, the shipping companies and trading firms were directly involved in the movement of cargo at the wharf, while the government departments maintained the port infrastructure and collected the tariffs associated with the use of the port and the import and export trade. The private firms for the most part employed the labour required as and when needed. Of the government departments, only Customs and Port and Marine maintained a small number of permanent workers; the Railway Administration and the Public Works Department deployed workmen to the wharf to undertake specific projects. Developments

1 Cf. N. A. Cox-George, Finance and Development in West Africa: The Sierra Leone Experience, Oxford, 1959, pp.171-179; M. H. Y. Kaniki, 'Economic and Social History of Sierra Leone 1929-39', PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1972, Ch. 2.

2 Cf. J. N. Goddard, The Handbook of Sierra Leone, London, 1925, p.35.

3 London Chamber of Commerce Archive, File No. 16506 2, Annual Report of Chairman Sir Owen Philips, 7 July 1916; Annual Report of Chairman Sir Owen Philips, 19 April 1919.

TABLE 1.1

Frequency distribution of the country of origin of steam ships engaged
in commerce calling at Freetown in 1913 and in 1923

COUNTRY	1913	1923
Britain	461	343
France	-	13
Germany	189	75
Italy	-	9
United States	-	32
Holland	-	56
Miscellaneous	52	89
TOTAL	702	617

SOURCE: Compiled from T. N. Goddard, A Handbook of
Sierra Leone, p.151.

during the war fundamentally changed these arrangements. In particular, the system of recruitment of dock labour was formalised. These developments are discussed later in this chapter. The following section examines the emergence of a workforce at the port during the years before the Second World War.

TABLE 1.2

Direction of trade in 1913 and in 1923 by share of total value (in percentages)

COUNTRY	IMPORTS		EXPORTS		TOTAL	
	1913	1923	1913	1923	1913	1923
U.K.	65.06	74.71	13.29	71.15	39.31	73.10
British West Africa	9.32	0.85	14.65	8.87	11.98	4.47
France	1.04	2.32	0.01	0.18	0.53	1.35
Germany	9.95	3.14	47.49	2.46	28.62	2.83
Holland	5.12	2.07	-	-	2.57	1.14
United States	3.09	9.52	-	3.28	1.55	6.70
Foreign West Africa	1.81	6.00	18.74	3.92	10.23	5.06
Others	4.61	1.39	5.80	10.14	5.21	4.47

SOURCE: T. N. Goddard, op. cit., p.147.

The development of a workforce at the port before 1939

It is clear that, before the development of the mining industry in the 1930's when the Sierra Leone economy took its present structure, the port, railway and public works were the only areas of relatively large-scale employment.¹ The early produce trade did not provide much employment as 'middle men' traders bought directly from the peasant farmers in the interior in order to sell to the large trading firms established in Freetown and other main towns.² No plantations were established. It did not even appear necessary to the colonial authorities to create a specialised agency for the regulation of labour. It was not until 1940, following two years of Youth League labour unrest and the promulgation of war-time emergency legislation associated with the use of Freetown as a naval base, that a Labour Department was formed. The first figures it published on employment trends show that the demand for labour in Freetown among the larger employers hovered around a monthly average of 10,000 during the first few months of 1940.³

The agents of the shipping companies and the larger firms have traditionally employed men from the Kroo tribe from the southern coast of Liberia in stevedoring, cargo handling and portering. According to Fyfe,⁴ the Kroos, renowned for their ability in

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- 1 Cf. the annual Blue Book for the years between 1900 and 1939.
 - 2 Cf. Laurens van der Laan, European Commercial Enterprises, pp.3-4; M. H. Y. Kaniki, 'Economic and Social History of Sierra Leone', Ch. 2; M. J. H. Sibanda, 'Colonial Policy and Development in North-West Sierra Leone, PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1978, Ch. 4.
 - 3 Labour Department, Labour Report 1939-40, p.1.
 - 4 Cf. Chris Fyfe, A History of Sierra Leone, London 1962, p.78; the word 'Kroo' is also spelt 'Kru'. In this study the former spelling which is used by the people themselves in Freetown will be adopted. For a survey of the involvement of Kroos in West African shipping, cf. G. E. Brooks, The Kru Mariner in the

undertaking arduous tasks, first came to Freetown in 1793, a few years after its founding as a settlement for liberated slaves. Originally a transient people who only sought a few material possessions to take back to their villages, an area was reserved (by a special ordinance of 1816) in order to encourage them to settle in Freetown. This area, in central Freetown, has come to be known as Kroo Town. By 1819 an informal system of political and administrative leadership, the headmanship, had developed among them. Over the years, Kroo labour was recruited through these headmen who trained, supervised, and regulated the men on behalf of the employers. Headmen also adjudicated disputes within the community. In 1905, at the time of the consolidation of colonial rule over the whole country, the institution of headmanship, which had had a parallel development among other ethnic groups in Freetown, was given formal recognition by legislation.¹ While headmen were not formally recognised as labour contractors as such, it was intended that, in addition to adjudicating disputes within their communities and acting as the general mouthpiece of the government vis a vis their communities, they would also act as a two-way channel of communication between employers and workmen. Furthermore, under the Vagrancy Ordinance of the same year, they had the power to recommend the deportation of 'idle and disorderly' persons back to the areas from which they came.² The position of 'tribal headmen' in Freetown was thus a very powerful one, and they effectively occupied an intermediary position between the government, employers, and their communities. These

Nineteenth Century: A Historical Compendium, Newark, 1972; for accounts of Kroo society in Freetown, cf. Michael Banton, West African City: A Study of Tribal Life in Freetown, London, 1957; and Barbara Harrel-Bond et al, Community, Leadership, and the Transformation of Freetown (1801-1976), London, 1979.

1 Michael Banton, op. cit., p.14.

2 Ibid, p.15.

arrangements constituted a classic case of the 'cheap government' practice and 'divide and rule' strategy of British colonial administration. Moreover, in the absence of a specialised labour department, effective responsibility for the recruitment and regulation of labour was delegated to the headmen.

These arrangements may have also delayed a more pervasive development of trade unionism until the Youth League years. As a part of the colonial government, the headmen had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. As a contemporary writer observed, 'the headmen had many opportunities of making money'.¹ Given the long association of the Kroos with the shipping industry, these measures, and in particular, the provision that headmen could assist in recruitment and investigate disputes between workmen and their employers, created the conditions for them to monopolise employment opportunities therein. The shipping companies and large trading firms, with an overriding interest in preventing delays in the loading and unloading of ships at the port, preferred to deal with the Kroos with whom they already had a long association. Indeed, as early as 1893, a Captain Walsh, commander of the Matadi, (a ship belonging to the British and African Steam Navigation Company, one of the shipping companies out of which the Elder Dempster group was formed), wrote to the Sierra Leone Weekly News to suggest the formalisation of the recruitment of Kroo labour by the formation of a 'committee of influential Kroo men with King Peter as president' to fix hours and rates of work.² The Kroos for their part also had a vested interest

1 Cf. F. W. H. Migeod, A View of Sierra Leone, London, 1926; p.13.

2 The Sierra Leone Weekly News, 4 March, 1893; King Peter was then recognised as the leader of the Kroos in Freetown.

in reaching some form of arrangement with the shipping companies. Employment opportunities in cargo handling depended on the number of ships calling at the port. It was casual work. Casual work meant lower earnings and low contributions to their community social insurance fund. Whatever work was available at the port, therefore, the Kroos strove to keep within their own community. This they could only achieve by cooperating fully with the employers. The tight grip which the Kroos maintained on employment opportunities in the docks has been a constant source of friction with labourers from other ethnic groups. It was not until the Second World War, when the demand for dock labour dramatically increased, that labourers in the latter category were employed in significant numbers.

It is difficult to estimate the number of Kroos who have been employed in cargo handling in Freetown. However, the Kroo population in Freetown grew from 1,234 in 1891 to 4,460 in 1931 (see Table 1.3). Kroo workers maintain that the able-bodied men among them have worked almost exclusively in the shipping industry.¹ This suggests that about a third, over 1,100 Kroo men in 1931, might have been available for casual work. Indeed, some contemporary travellers arriving at the port leave the impression that stevedores, lightermen and other dock labourers were almost exclusively Kroo.²

While the Kroo monopolised employment in cargo handling at the port, the clerks, artisans and other labourers employed by the shipping companies, commercial firms, and government departments

1 Interview of a small group of Kroo stevedores, 3 March 1980. In this group were two Kroo men who had worked at the port since 1942 and 1945.

2 Cf., e.g., Graham Greene, Journey Without Maps, London, 1937, p.37; Katherine Fowler-Lunn, The Gold Missus: Journal of a Woman Gold Prospector in Sierra Leone, New York, 1938.

invariably came from other ethnic groups. Again, it is difficult to estimate the number of workers who were involved in these functions. It is certain, however, that the figure was well below the 10,000 estimated as the total wage-earning population of Freetown by the Labour Department in 1939 at a time of increasing opportunities for wage employment. It is also clear that the Krios,¹ who had ready access to the long-established schools in Freetown and who had long experience as skilled workmen, at first dominated the subordinate positions in government departments and commercial firms. With the introduction of modern education into the interior of the country, and with more workmen of indigenous origins acquiring skills over the years, this situation had by the 1920's begun to change.²

Towards the re-organisation of the port

During the First World War, Freetown had been used as a naval base by the British colonial authorities. Given the uncertainties and anxieties surrounding the defence of the Suez Canal in time of war, Freetown, lying on the alternative route to the Cape, India, and the Far East, was chosen to provide water, provisions, bunkers and repairs for the Royal Navy engaged in manoeuvres in the South Atlantic. In his autobiography, Kossoh Town Boy, Robert Wellesly Cole

1 Throughout this study, the word Krio, which is also spelt Creole, will be used to describe the descendants of liberated slaves who settled in Freetown during the latter part of the eighteenth century. The former spelling which emphasises the pronunciation of the word by the people themselves in Sierra Leone, carries the connotation that Krio culture is essentially rooted in African traditional experience. For an elaboration of this theme, cf. Akintola Wyse, Searchlight on the Krio of Sierra Leone: An Ethnographical Study of a West African People, Institute of African Studies, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, Occasional Paper No. 3, 1980.

2 Cf. M. Kilson, op. cit., Ch. 5; F. H. W. Migeof, op. cit., pp.13-14.

TABLE 1.3

The Kroo population in Freetown 1891-1931

	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931
Kroos	1,234	1,903	1,551	4,744	4,460
Total Freetown Population	30,033	34,463	34,090	44,142	55,358

SOURCE: M. Banton, op. cit., p.24.

has described the contribution of Freetown to the war effort:

'Throughout the war, Freetown was an important watering station for the British Royal Navy, and an important station for the Atlantic Fleet. The water was obtained from the Freetown Water Works for which my father was responsible. It was about this time that I first heard the statement that this our Bay on which Freetown stands was large enough to contain the entire British fleet at anchor.'¹

Indeed, the use of Freetown as a naval base generated much economic activity and created severe problems after the reduction of the war-related public expenditure at the end of the hostilities. Freetown's ideal location also acquired it the status of 'the headquarters of the African Station of His Majesty's Navy and a Defended Port'.² During the inter-war years, before the discovery of minerals and the development of the mining industry, the port was regarded by the Colonial Office as the country's most important

1 Cf. R. W. Cole, Kossoh Town Boy, London, 1962, p.113.

2 British Parliamentary Papers, CMND 2744, Report by the Hon. W. G. A. Ormsby-Gore MP (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies) on his visit to West Africa during the year 1926, HMSO, 1926, p.55; cf. Allister MacMillan, The Red Book of West Africa, London, 1920, pp.233-4.

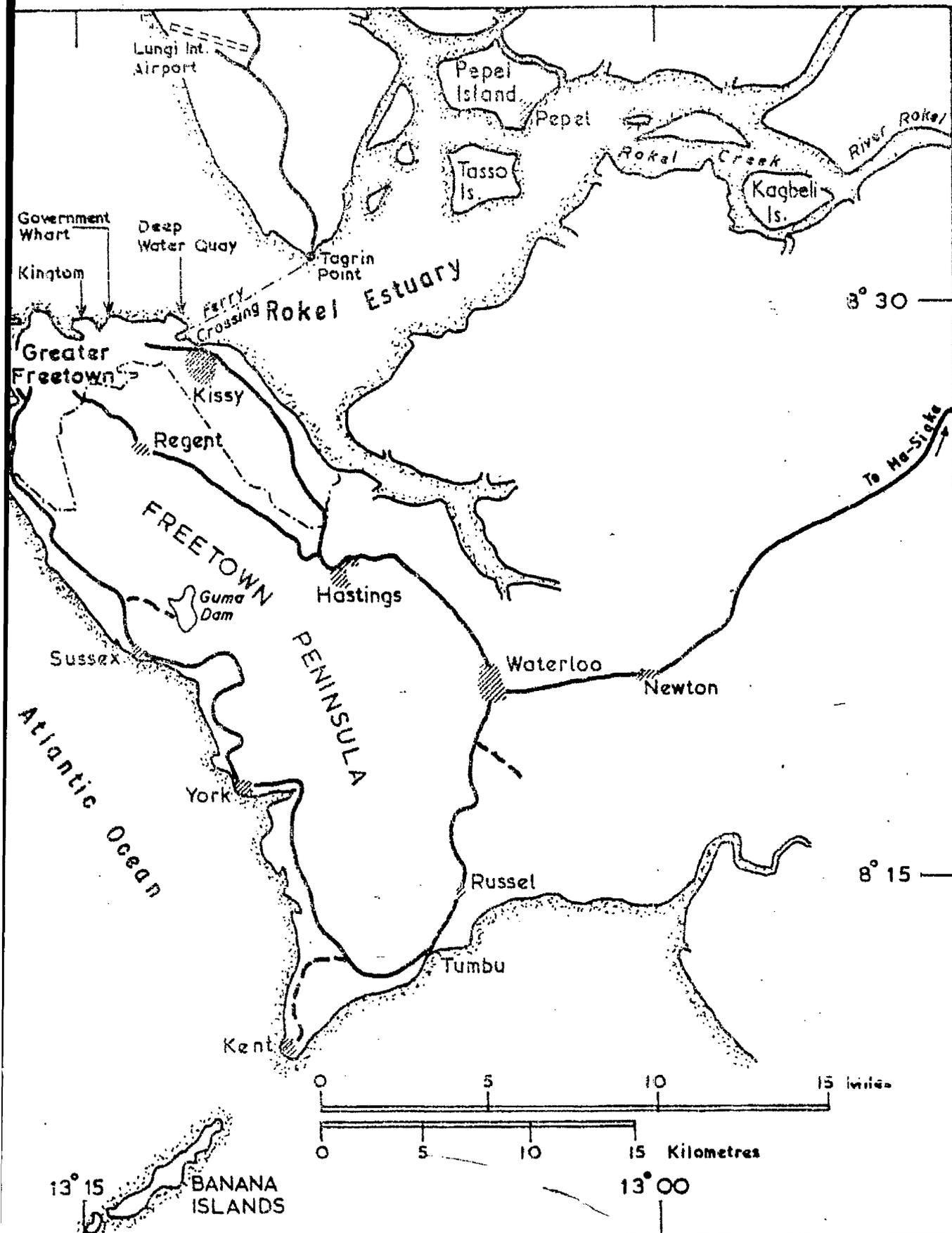
natural resource.

With the outbreak of hostilities again in 1939, measures were taken to secure the defense of the port and to provide facilities for visiting convoys engaged in the protection of British trade in the South Atlantic. The wide estuary of the River Rokel (see Map 1), and the docks at Government Wharf once again presented the scenery of an extremely busy port. W. H. Salkied, at the time an official of the Railway Administration, recalls that 'whereas in normal times our average number of ships in the port was five, during convoy periods, together with base ships, we had well over three hundred. I believe our maximum number was around the 380 mark. I well remember one occasion when my office which was on the river front seemed to be blacked out by the passage in line of the 'Queen Mary', 'Mauretania', 'Andes', and 'Empress of Britain', followed by smaller crafts of about 25,000 tons each.'¹

This phenomenal increase in shipping and port activity during the war set in train a series of events which eventually led to the re-organisation of the port and the centralisation of the employment of dock labour. As an emergency measure, a Port Executive Committee was formed in May 1942 as the ultimate Port Authority. Under the chairmanship of the General Manager of the Railway Administration, its membership included the Comptroller of Customs, the Harbour Master, and representatives of the commercial firms, shipping companies, and the Admiralty.² The committee was primarily a policy-making

1 Ocean Transport Archive, Item 740, W. H. Salkied, 'Sierra Leone's Important Role During World War II', Sea, Journal of Elder Dempster Lines Ltd., Vol. 4, No. 4, Winter 1961-62, p.4.

2 National Workshop Archive, 'Public Notice No. 62 (The Defence and Control of Traffic in the Port of Freetown)', 5 May, 1942.



A Nelson

By courtesy of S. J. A. Nelson, Cartographer, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone)

Map showing the location of the port of Freetown on the estuary of the Rokel.

body, but was also charged with the responsibility for administration of the port for the duration of the war. The significance of the formation of this committee was that the existing decentralised system of port administration - stemming from the reluctance of the colonial authorities to extend the public sector - was greatly modified. With the formation of a Port Authority, official recognition of the status of the port as a public utility was implied, and the responsibility of the state for the port - beyond the collection of dues and tariffs - was affirmed.

As a result of the frequent congestion and delays to ships calling at the port, the war also demonstrated the impracticality of the long-standing practice of using lighters to load and unload ships lying at anchor in the estuary. Accordingly, one of the most important policy decisions reached by the Port Executive Committee was its recommendations of the need for a deep-water quay, alongside which ships could be berthed, thus facilitating an easier and more modern method of taking supplies and of cargo handling. This was recognised as of vital importance for the speedy turn-around of ships and for the future development of the trade of the country. It was further recognised that, as a public utility, the colonial administration was best placed to make the necessary investments in quay construction at the port. This proposal was neither new nor novel, but it had a much better chance of implementation than ever before. Shortly before the outbreak of World War I, a British engineering firm had undertaken preliminary surveys of the Freetown waterfront with a view to the construction of a deep water quay. The project was eventually abandoned in 1921 as a result of lack of interest on the part of the colonial administration and inadequate finance.¹ The evolution of colonial economic policy during the

1 Captain C. Wilson Brown, 'Historical Notes on Freetown Harbour',

inter-war years, however, had created the conditions in which the colonial authorities in Sierra Leone could now undertake this kind of investment in capital formation.

A Colonial Development Act was passed in 1929, during the Great Depression. It provided a fund of £1 million a year for the use of colonial governments to stimulate economic development in their areas. At first a direct linkage was established between development in the colonies and the U.K. economic crisis. In the debate in the Commons over the Bill, it was repeatedly stressed that investment in the dependencies could stimulate commerce with the U.K. and help solve the domestic unemployment problem. The slump, however, proved far more severe than had been anticipated - by the end of 1931 some 2.6 million people were out of work - and removed this strategy from the centre of the attempts to create an economic upturn. It was evident that more direct measures had to be applied. Thus 'colonial development as a solution for unemployment was irrelevant and the cabinet committee on employment no longer referred to it from 1931'.¹ Nonetheless, the Act of 1929 qualitatively changed the official ideology on the economics of imperialism. As Keynesian economic thought became more 'respectable' and influential during the 'thirties, laissez-faire economic orthodoxy was undermined. The Act also created a body, the Colonial Development Advisory Committee (CDAC), to administer the fund. Throughout the 'thirties, CDAC channelled some £6.5 million to the colonies. British West Africa's share amounted to £500,000, of which the largest single sum, about £250,000, was given to the

Sierra Leone Studies (Old Series), Vol. XX, Dec. 1936, pp.96-122.

1 Cf. D. Meredith, 'The British Government and Colonial Economic History 1919-1939', Economic History Review, Vol. 28, 1975, pp.449-487, p.484.

colonial administration in Sierra Leone to invest in the mining of iron ore in partnership with a British Firm.¹ During the war, a further £5 million a year was set aside for colonial development, under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940. Malcolm MacDonald, the Secretary for the Colonies, in piloting this Bill through the Commons, emphasised the need to replace the assumptions surrounding the 1929 Act with an unadulterated ideology of colonial welfare and development. With a victorious conclusion to the war in sight during the early months of 1945, and with plans for the reconstruction of Europe - to be financed partly by American aid - on the agenda of the Allies, the 1940 Act was amended to increase the fund to £120 million over a ten-year period ending in March 1956.²

It was against this background that the colonial administration in Sierra Leone committed itself to the construction of a deep-water quay at the end of the war. David Carney, the Sierra Leonean economist, has identified two important considerations for this radical change in the traditional policy of Britain towards her colonies. Not only had the colonies made important contributions to the war effort in material and manpower, he has argued, but the events in French North African Territories subsequent to the fall of France on 13 June 1940, had brought home the realisation of the possibility of a colony going neutral, if not actively hostile to the imperial power, in the event of an invasion of the former by another power.

1 Cf. A. Hopkins, An Economic History of West Africa, 1973, p.261; cf. M. H. Y. Kaniki, 'Economic History of Sierra Leone', Ch.3-4.

2 Cf. B. Niculescu, Colonial Planning: A Comparative Study, London, 1958, pp.60-63.

'The British government as a result was spurred to promises of eventual self government and economic development... and backed up these promises with an appropriation of £120 million...The active role of the colonial government in economic development was stressed for the first time, as each government was asked to produce a ten-year plan of economic and social development.'¹

Accordingly, the construction of a deep-water quay was to be financed out of the country's grant from the CD & W Fund featured in the Sierra Leone Plan which was drawn up in 1946.² The plan contained no strategy or consistent philosophy of economic development, and merely listed items deserving of government finance.

With the revocation of the emergency measures at the end of the war, the Port Executive Committee was dissolved and the administration of the port re-organised. The concept of the Port Authority was retained and vested in the office of the General Manager of the Railway Administration. A Wharf Superintendent was appointed as head of a specialised port department within the Railway organisation, to be responsible for the day-to-day management of the port, and to report directly to the General Manager.³ His principal functions were to act in liaison with consignees and consignors, government departments and the shipping companies. He was to be in charge of

1 Cf. D. C. Carney, Government and Economy in British West Africa, New York, 1961, p.93.

2 Sierra Leone, An Outline of the Ten Year Development Plan of Sierra Leone, Sessional Paper No. 4, 1946. For criticisms of the Plan, see H. H. Gaffney, 'Administration and the Administrative Service in Sierra Leone', PhD thesis, University of Columbia, 1967, Ch. 12; for more general criticisms of the attempts at 'planning' in the years immediately after the war, cf., e.g., D. Dosser, 'The Formulation of Development Plans in the British Colonies', Economic Journal, June 1959, pp.255-266, and W. E. H. Stanner, 'Observation on Colonial Planning', International Affairs, July 1949, pp.318-328.

3 National Workshop Archive, Government Notice No. 385, Sierra Leone Royal Gazette, 31 May 1945.

the allocation of cranes, the coordination of rail and road transportation to and from the docks, and the enforcement of all rates, orders, and directives relating to the use of the port. A new advisory body, the Port Advisory Committee, made up of largely the same membership as the former Port Executive Committee, was appointed on January 1, 1946.¹ Its terms of reference were to advise the government 'on matters relating to the future development of the port...on recommendations submitted for the improvement of its facilities...on the best use to which existing facilities may be put...and as to the best methods to be adopted for the sound and economic use of the port'.² (See diagramatic representation of the re-organisation in Diagrams .1 and .2). Parallelling these developments, work had begun towards the end of 1946 on the construction of a deep-water quay at the waterfront of the Cline Town area in the east end of Freetown and was scheduled for completion in 1954.³

The re-organisation of the port stopped short of the creation of an autonomous public corporation with full responsibility for its management and organisation. The colonial government continued to utilise existing administrative machinery (in this case the Railway Administration) to manage the port. However, the principle of the responsibility of the state for the provision of port services had been recognised, and it was envisaged that the role of the port department would be enlarged after the opening of the new quay.

1 National Workshop Archive, Sierra Leone Royal Gazette, 31 Dec. 1945, 'Dissolution of Port Executive committee and appointment of Port Advisory Council'.

2 Ibid.

3 Colonial Office, Major Capital Works in the Colonial Territories, Colonial No. 285, HMSO, 1952.

DIAGRAM 1.1

The decentralised system of port organisation

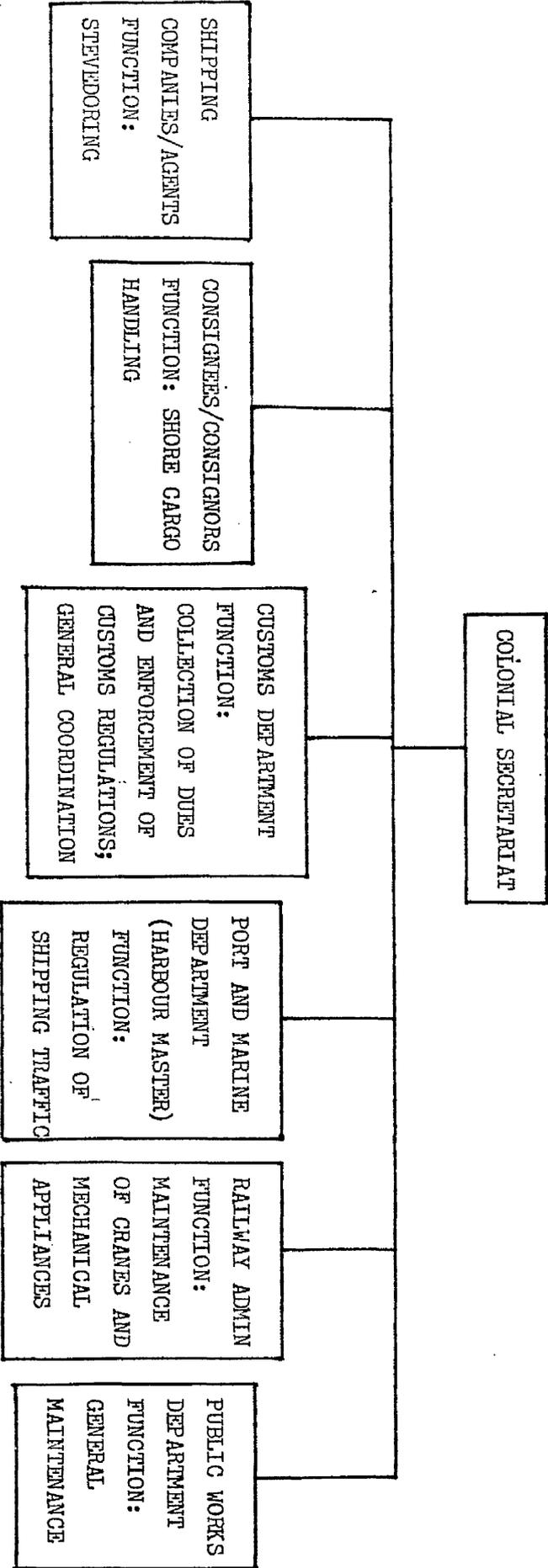
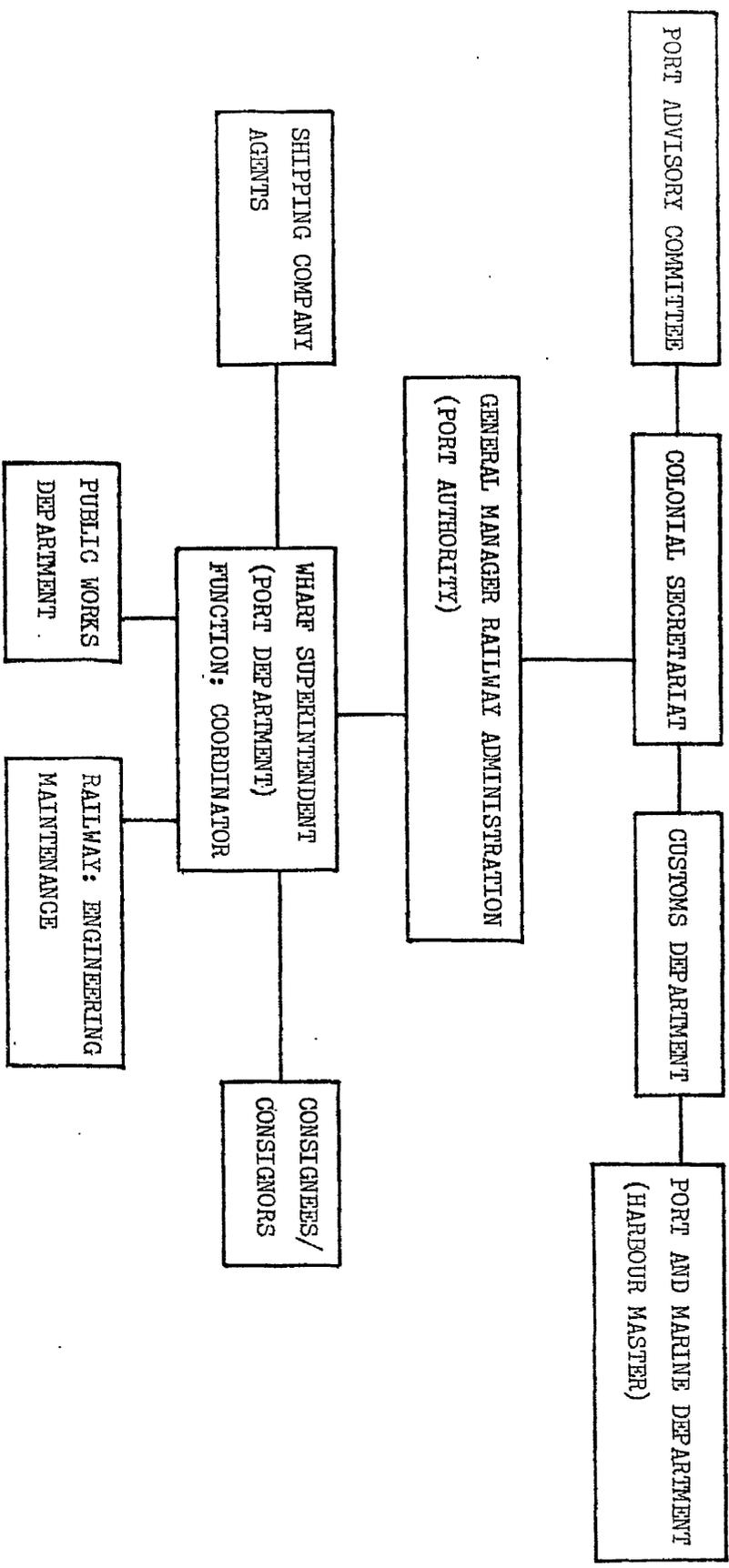


DIAGRAM 1.2

The 1945 reorganisation



A port is primarily a service organisation; a public utility. As a commodity, the service a port provides cannot practically be sold like any other commodity. Moreover, a port has tremendous monopoly potential. Because of these complexities, the finance, development, management, and pricing policy of a port is normally undertaken by government and typically through a public corporation. A. C. Pigou, whose Economics of Welfare is the locus classicus of the economic case for government intervention to improve the market-determined allocation of resources, argued that 'the main part of a modern government's activities...is dominated by services of a general sort which cannot be practically sold against fees to individuals'.¹ After the opening of the new quay, it was made clear that, while revenue derived from the users of the port was not expected to be paid back to the government for the initial capital outlay, the port was nonetheless expected to operate along sound commercial lines and cover its operating and recurrent costs. It was also envisaged that any remaining surplus would be paid into the Treasury as a contribution to the development fund.

Following the opening of the new Deep Water Quay in 1954, responsibility for the handling of cargo from shore to ship and vice versa was transferred from the Shipping Companies, consignors, and consignees to the port department. This development was precipitated by a fast rising trend in cargo pilferage associated with the unemployment situation in Freetown at the end of the war

1 A. C. Pigou, 'The Range of Government Expenditure', in R. W. Houghton (ed.), Public Finance, London, 1970, pp.176-180, p.176; other useful general works on public finance include, Usurla Hicks, Public Finance, London, 1947; Alan Prest, Public Finance in Developing Countries, London, 1973; A. H. Hanson, Public Enterprise and Economic Development, 1959; and Alan Prest, Transport Economics in Developing Countries, London, 1969.

and by a need to provide an integrated system of master portorage at the new quay. The following section discusses this centralisation of the employment of dock labour.

The centralisation of the employment of dock labour

In the years before World War II, Sierra Leone did not have a large wage-earning population. Before the development of the mining industry, the largest employers of labour had been the railway, public works, and the port. Even as late as 1940, when more comprehensive figures on employment trends became available (see Tables 1.4 and 1.5), the total wage-earning population excluding the security forces was only about 30,000. The population itself had been estimated in 1931 at just over 1.7 million, and that of Freetown at 96,422. (See Tables 1.6 and 1.7). The 1931 census established that 66,962 persons (about 65% of the population of the city) living in Freetown were between the ages of 16 and 65 and may therefore be said to constitute the labour force. (The age composition of the population of the whole country was not provided by the census but it can be reasonably assumed that at least 60% of the population were between the ages of 16 and 65). The availability of this huge supply of labour had effectively weakened the bargaining power of wage labour. Indeed, the railway men, who were employed in a key sector of the economy, and who had, in the years following World War I, exhibited a strong trade union consciousness, could not sustain their union organisation. By 1927, following several stoppages, the union had been disbanded and its leaders dismissed or posted to the more remote parts of the country. So confident had the colonial authorities become in dealing with labour unrest that they had perceived no need to create a separate labour department to secure the regulation and control of

TABLE 1.4

The wage labour force in Sierra Leone circa 1940

SECTOR	NUMBER
RAILWAY	1,490
(a) Engineering	762
(b) Locomotive	411
(c) Traffic	317
PUBLIC WORKS	5,410
AGRICULTURE	445
POST OFFICE	92
MEDICAL	370
CIVIL SERVICE (CLERICAL)	495
MINING	11,567
TOTAL	20,869 ⁺

⁺ Excludes workers employed by commercial firms, shipping companies, and the Security Forces.

SOURCE: British Parliamentary Papers, CMND 6277, G. St. J. Orde Brown, Labour Conditions in West Africa, 1941, pp.136-139.

TABLE 1.5

Estimate of wage earners employed by commercial firms and shipping companies in Sierra Leone, circa 1940

SECTOR	NUMBER
Commercial	8,000
Port	2,000
TOTAL	10,000

SOURCE: Estimate is based on size of the sectors.

TABLE 1.6

Population of Sierra Leone, 1931 census

Freetown	96,422
Provinces	1,672,058
TOTAL	1,768,480

SOURCE: R. R. Kuczynski, Demographic Survey of the British Empire, Volume 1, London, 1948, pp.159-161.

TABLE 1.7

Sex and age composition, population of Freetown in 1931

SEX	AGE	NUMBER
Male	16-65	38,246
Female	16-65	28,716
TOTAL	16-65	66,962

SOURCE: R. R. Kuczynski, op. cit., p.175.

lower paid workers. It was not until after the arrival of Wallace Johnson in Freetown in 1938, and the formation of the Youth League out of which modern trade unionism in Sierra Leone evolved, that the colonial authorities responded by creating institutions to channel labour grievances.

In adopting this strategy, the colonial administration implemented a host of labour policy measures which had gradually been developed over the years by the Colonial Office at Whitehall. These measures themselves had been stimulated by the need to conform to International Labour Office (ILO) conventions, and by the experience of considerable and often violent labour protests in various parts of the empire during the inter-war years. Furthermore, the Fabian Society, the intellectual conscience of the Labour Party, was also a driving force for change in its criticisms of colonial labour policies, and in its suggestions - often originating from detailed research - for reformist policy measures. The Society also often acted in close cooperation with the British TUC, another important

pressure group in the colonial lobby. The colonial administration in Freetown could therefore draw on the experience available at Whitehall.¹ In July 1939, legislation was passed giving legal recognition to the trade unions which had been set up under the auspices of the Youth League, and establishing procedures for the arbitration of disputes. Two years later, on the recommendations of Major Orde-Brown, the Labour Advisor at the Colonial Office (following a visit to Sierra Leone to study labour problems), the administration established a fully-fledged Labour Department to implement its new labour policy.² The war itself, and the 'defended port' status of Freetown initiated a phenomenal increase in the labour force and added some urgency to the development of a coherent labour policy. The unprecedented demand for labour, both skilled and unskilled, was due to the special work undertaken in connection with the defence of Freetown and its significance as a convoy port (see Tables 1.8 and 1.9). Demand for unskilled labour was very easily met by recruitment from the provinces, but a severe strain was imposed on the available supply of skilled labour. Thus the newly established Labour Department in its first annual report stated that:

'...in normal times, facilities for training tradesmen in Sierra Leone were meagre, consisting only of those afforded by the Railway workshops, the Public Works Department, and the mining companies... there is no doubt that many of the so-called artisans now employed have really no claim to term themselves tradesmen as their qualifications are of the most amateurish kind. It is certain that the ranks of the

1 For the evolution of Colonial Office labour policy, see, e.g., B. C. Roberts, Labour in the Tropical Territories of the Commonwealth, 1962; and M. Amolo, 'Sierra Leone and British Colonial Labour Policy, 1930-45', PhD thesis, Dalhousie University, 1977.

2 M. Amolo, op. cit., Ch. 5.

small number of competent artisans in Sierra Leone have been heavily diluted with ordinary labourers who profess to have technical knowledge, though in most cases, they have none at all.¹

As the fortification works were completed, retrenchments were made. The number of people in wage employment in Freetown fell by almost fifty per cent between 1942 and 1945 (see Table 1.8). The unemployment created was partly offset by the availability of jobs in road-building, construction, and other projects financed by the colonial administration at the end of the war. The competition, however, was extremely keen as the Labour Department reserved several of these vacancies for returning ex-servicemen.² Freetown therefore acquired a legacy of unemployment from the war, a condition which it has since not been able to overcome. It was around this time that a class of destitute urban wage labourers (and unemployed) became a permanent and visible part of the Freetown social scene. Recent research has revealed a continuing trend in the proletarianisation of the lower paid in Freetown. For instance, a sociological survey of dock workers undertaken by the researcher in May 1980 provided details on migration to Freetown from the rural areas among their numbers, and revealed the existence of severe overcrowding in their households, most of which were without electricity or running water.³ Other researchers have drawn attention to the phenomenal increase in the size of the informal sector over the years as the unemployed and underemployed of the city have attempted to generate means of self-

1 Sierra Leone, Labour Report 1939-40, p.1.

2 Cf. N. A. Cox-George, 'An Essay on Employment and Unemployment', Typescript, Freetown, 1950.

3 See Ch. 5 of this study which develops a 'sociological profile' of the dockers using the material from this survey.

TABLE 1.8

Average annual non-agricultural employment, 1939-45, in Freetown

YEAR	NUMBER
1939	10,000
1940	14,833
1941	28,841
1942	45,041
1943	35,558
1944	26,091
1945	22,451

SOURCE: N. A. Cox-George, Finance and Development in West Africa, p.223. (These figures have been compiled from Annual Labour Department Reports).

TABLE 1.9

Monthly averages during peak year 1942

MONTH	NUMBER
January	41,100
February	44,700
March	42,700
April	42,800
May	41,400
June	41,900
July	45,000
August	48,000
September	49,000
October	48,100
November	50,500
December	45,300

SOURCE: N. A. Cox-George, op. cit., p.224. (These figures have been compiled from the Annual Labour Department Report for 1942).

employment.¹ However, the position of the authorities at the end of the war towards the growing urban misery was unequivocal:

'Sierra Leone had not a large wage earning population before the war, though the men engaged in subsistence farming constituted a potential supply of skilled and unskilled labour. This supply was prodigally tapped during the war, and when wholesale retrenchments were made after the war, the larger centres of employment remained flooded with surplus labour not yet convinced that they should return to their former occupations.'²

Freetown by the end of the war had become a remarkably transformed city. Its population had increased by a third from about 90,000 to just over 120,000.³ The cost of living had soared as landlords inflated rents charged to the arriving wage earners. Following the withdrawal of peasant labour from the farms, rice, the staple food, was in short supply and this was to become a perennial problem in the post-war years. Faced with pressure from the trade unions (see the next chapter), the Labour Department ordered annual wage increases through cost of living allowances (COLA) following the results of

1 Cf., e.g., Central Statistics Office, Household Survey of the Western Province, Economic and Expenditure, 1966-68, Final Report, Freetown, 1969; Central Statistics Office, Household Survey of the Western Province, Household Characteristics and Housing Conditions, 1968-69, Freetown, 1969; David Fowler, 'The Urban Informal Sector in Sierra Leone', Africana Research Bulletin, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1976, pp.4-34; Katherine Moseley, 'Work, Class and Community: The Safroko Limba of Freetown' (forthcoming, 1982). I am grateful to Dr. Moseley for sending me a typescript copy of this article. For a general overview of the sociological characteristics of urbanisation in sub-Saharan Africa, cf. Josef Gugler and William Flanagan, Urbanisation and Social change in West Africa, Cambridge, 1978.

2 Sierra Leone, Labour Department Annual Report 1946, p.2, Freetown, 1947.

3 Cf. R. R. Kuczynski, op. cit.

studies which revealed the inflationary impact of the war. Rent assessment committees were also set up to examine the fairness of rents charged by Freetown landlords. Between 1941 and 1948, these committees decided 1,364 cases in favour of tenants, and 216 in favour of landlords.¹ Furthermore, the disorganisation brought about by the war resulted in a great increase in crime, delinquency, and other forms of anti-social behaviour. A report on penal administration and welfare services prepared just before the end of the war noted:

'There are in the colony a considerable number of boys and a certain number of girls who are either homeless or living in an undesirable environment...the great majority of boys and girls are not receiving the education, recreation, and employment essential to their training as sound and stable citizens. These conditions may rightly be said to constitute a grave social problem.'²

Many of the older dockers could recollect in informal conversations held with the researcher (during the first fieldwork in Freetown in 1979/80) that the area around the port especially was one of a high crime rate. The presence of visiting sailors in the vicinity attracted prostitutes and pimps. Two additions were made to the Krio language associated with war-time prostitution: man o' war pickin, meaning a child born out of a liaison between a prostitute and a visiting sailor; and longstep, meaning a brothel, after the old Portuguese steps to the east of Government Wharf; but perhaps more important was the fact that, as the older dock workers could remember, Freetown before the war was a relatively well laid-out city with few pockets of ghettos and shanty towns. During the war, Freetown landlords,

1 Cf. M. Banton, West African City, pp.34-35.

2 Sir Alexander Patterson, Report on Penal Administration and Welfare Services in Sierra Leone, Sessional Paper No. 3, Freetown, 1944.

anxious to exploit the arriving labourers, quickly put up tin shacks of various sizes, particularly in the East End at the Kinke, Mountain Cut, Ginger Hall, and Fula Town areas, and at Grassfields in the west central part of the city. Over the years, these ghettos have been considerably enlarged, have become more numerous, and are now a permanent part of the Freetown scenario. It was against this background that the centralisation of employment at the port took place. One of the pressing problems which faced the new port department, which became responsible for the coordination of the activities of port users following the re-organisation at the end of the war, and the newly appointed Port Advisory Committee, was cargo pilferage. The attempts made at the solving of the problem, and the steps taken inter alia towards the creation of a semi-autonomous port organisation, created the conditions that made possible the centralisation of the employment of dock labour.

The problem of cargo pilferage first surfaced at a meeting of the advisory committee in September 1946, to which the Commissioner of Police was invited. The meeting noted the presence of a large number of 'undesirables' within the vicinity of the port and concluded that security arrangements must be stepped up. The police were invited to oversee workers engaged in cargo handling. A 24-hour watch was also to be kept in the docks and plans were outlined for the formation of a special unit of the police force, the Harbour Division, who were to use launches to patrol the sea front of the wharf. Representatives of the shipping companies and the commercial firms also agreed to use members of their senior staff as 'detectives' to observe the cargo handling process. The docks were made a 'restricted access area', and the Customs Department was given the responsibility of issuing special security passes only to individuals

with legitimate business at the port.¹ After almost two years it became clear that these measures were hopelessly inadequate. In May 1948, the representatives of the shipping companies on the advisory committee reported that 'pilferage was on the increase, and in some cases, whole consignments were stolen'.² During the discussions, attention was drawn to the system of recruitment of dock labour which was felt to be too informal and subjected to many abuses. Under the decentralised system of port organisation - which was even then in transition - the shipping companies, the larger consignees and consignors provided their own stevedore and shore cargo handling labour. They traditionally selected Kroo foremen or 'gang' leaders who were given a free hand to select other labourers to make up the gang. This system was open to much abuse, as Kroo gang leaders invariably selected members of their own community or labourers from other ethnic groups who were prepared to pay a small bribe (or dash). The payment of a dash had the same effect as a tax on wages which some workers tried to make up for by stealing from cargo consignments. Moreover, the cargo sheds were a natural target for burglaries by the unemployed of Freetown, attracted to the vicinity of the port in search of casual work. This same system of recruitment had been used for the employment of 'coastwise' and articled seamen, but had recently been reformed by the Labour Department, which brought into operation a Maritime Labour Pool at the beginning of 1948. The pool was essentially a labour exchange at which all persons available for

1 National Workshop Archives, 'Minutes of Extra-ordinary Meeting of the Port Advisory Committee, 23 September 1946.

2 National Workshop Archives, Minutes of Meeting of Port Advisory Committee, 11 May 1948.

work as coastwise or articulated seamen were required to register. Foremen or headmen nominated by the shipping companies were still permitted to lead gangs, but the men were chosen in strict rotation from the register, thus giving everyone a fair chance of recruitment. The advisory committee meeting of May 1948 decided that a similar system should be introduced for the recruitment of stevedore and shore cargo handlers.¹ The pool eventually came into operation in 1952. The tone of the Labour Department in its report for that year was self-congratulatory:

'A separate Pool was opened early in the year to recruit, on behalf of shipping companies and commercial firms, wharf and stevedoring labour. The purpose of this additional pool was primarily to control the entry into Government Wharf of undersirables who in the haphazard system of recruitment which prevailed, easily gained entrance under the pretext of being in search of employment. It is gratifying to state that since the establishment of this new pool not only has recruitment been put on a sound basis but the incidence of pilfering which it was designed to check has fallen considerably.'²

By the time the new quay came into operation in 1954, the employment of dock labour had therefore been centralised, parallelling the centralisation of the management of the port. This was facilitated by the impact of war and the gradual abandonment of laissez-faire economic doctrines by the Colonial Office during the inter-war years. The port department and the shipping and commercial firms were assured, moreover, of a cheap and reliable source of labour supply drawn from the mass of the urban unemployed created by the upheavals of the war. The chapter which follows examines the

1 Ibid.

2 Sierra Leone, Labour Department Annual Report 1952, Freetown, 1953, p.4.

organisation of lower-paid workers in Freetown into trade unions and, more generally, the origins and dynamics of modern trade unionism in Sierra Leone.

Chapter 2

The development of modern trade unionism in Sierra Leone

Origins and Dynamics of Labour Protest Action before 1938

Before the development of the mining industry in the 1930's, the Sierra Leone economy was dependent on the produce trade. While many Krios and, after they increasingly began to turn to the professions towards the end of the nineteenth century, the newly arriving 'Syrians' or Lebanese had made fortunes as 'middle men' in the trade, opportunities for wage employment as such were severely limited. Labour requirements at the port, railway, and public works were met with little difficulty and, indeed, throughout the period of colonial rule, professional, skilled, and unskilled labour left the territory to work in other West African colonies.¹ This 'slack' demand for labour was reflected in wage rates which greatly fluctuated with prevailing economic conditions (see Table 2.1). The 'first systematic strike of the labouring classes in the history of the colony' took place in November 1892 over one such reduction of wage rates.²

1 Cf. R. L. Buell, The Native Problem in Africa, Vol. 1, New York, 1928, Ch. 54.

2 A. B. C. Sibthorpe, The History of Sierra Leone, 3rd edition, London, 1906, p.115; Conway and Lisk (cf. H. E. Conway, 'Industrial Relations in Sierra Leone with special reference to the development and functioning of the bargaining machinery since 1945', PhD thesis, University of London, 1968, Ch. 1; F. A. N. Lisk, 'Industrial Relations in Sierra Leone', M.Sc. dissertation, Queens University, Belfast, 1970, Ch. 4) both mention that a strike of Kroo seamen took place in 1874 and a photograph of the strikers was featured in the London Illustrated Evening News of 10 January, 1974. This event is curiously not mentioned by Chris Fyfe in his authoritative A History of Sierra Leone, or by the contemporary historian, A. B. C. Sibthorpe. Nonetheless, modern trade unionism did not develop in Sierra Leone until after World War I in the sense that early labour protest activity was sporadic and took place on an ad hoc basis. This, however, does not negate the political significance of such activity as a growing manifestation of a developing consciousness of the inequities of the mode of appropriation in the colonial state among lower paid workers. For comparable accounts of early protest activity, cf., e.g., A. G. Hopkins,

During the 1880's, skilled labour received between 1s.6d. and 2s.6d. per diem, while unskilled labour received between 1s. and 1s.6d. per diem.¹ These rates, which were reduced during the world depression of the 1880's, remained at the reduced levels well into the 1890's even though there had been an economic upturn. In November 1892, workers in the colony, led by workmen at the Public Works Department (or Royal Engineers' Department as it was then known), went on strike over demands for the restoration of the pre-slump wage levels.² The Sierra Leone Weekly News in its leader on the issue observed that it was 'not surprised that the reduction of wages should have been keenly felt by various classes of labourers as to cause this universal general strike'.³ The strike brought the whole colony to a standstill. The governor declared an emergency and special constables were appointed among 'loyal' citizens to help keep the peace. The strikers returned to work only after they had been promised that the falling wage rates would be stabilised.⁴

The action taken by Freetown workers in 1892 was spontaneous. It was a reaction to a specific situation. No organisation of workers was sustained after the strike; indeed, the workers of Freetown had not shown much interest in attempts to organise them into a union by

'The Lagos Strike of 1897: An Exploration in Nigerian Labour History', Past and Present, 35, 1966, pp.135-155; J. Illife, 'The Creation of Group Consciousness Among Dock Workers of Dar es Salaam 1929-50', in R. Sandbrook and R. Cohen (eds.), op. cit., pp.49-72.

1 The Artisan, 24 September 1884; see also Table 2.1.

2 The Sierra Leone Weekly News, 26 November 1892.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

TABLE 2.1

Wage rates 1880 to 1935

YEAR	SKILLED LABOUR	UNSKILLED LABOUR
1880 to 1885	1s.6d. to 2s.6d. ⁽¹⁾	1s. to 1s.6d. ⁽¹⁾
1886 to 1891	1s.0d. to 1s.6d. ⁽²⁾	10d. to 1s. ⁽²⁾
1892 to 1897	1s.6d. to 2s.0d. ⁽²⁾	9d. to 1s. ⁽²⁾
1898 to 1918	1s.0d. to 1s.6d. ⁽²⁾	9d. to 1s. ⁽²⁾
1919 to 1929	1s.3d. to 2s.0d. ⁽³⁾	1s. to 1s.3d. ⁽³⁾
1930 to 1935	9d. to 1s.0d. ⁽⁴⁾	6d. to 9d. ⁽⁴⁾

- SOURCES: (1) The Artisan, 24 September 1884
- (2) N. A. Cox-George, Finance and Development, p.123.
- (3) British Parliamentary Papers, CMND 2744, Report
by the Hon. W. G. A. Ormsby-Gore, HMSO 1926, p.58
- (4) M. H. Y. Kaniki, 'Economic Change in Sierra Leone
During the 1930's', TransAfrican Journal of History,
3, 1973, pp.72-95, p.83.

the gifted, if demagogic, S. H. A. Case, himself at one point in his colourful career an artisan at the Public Works Department. Fully aware of the low social esteem in which artisans were held in status-conscious Krio society,¹ Case had in the early 1880's formed a Mechanics Alliance, which was in all essentials a craft union. Its main objectives were to encourage the 'self improvement' of its members in the quality of their work, and to introduce them to the appreciation of literature, music, and art. Between 1884 and 1888, Case occasionally produced a newspaper, The Artisan, which he filled with platitudes and homilies urging the self improvement of tradesmen. Membership of the Alliance grew from 176 at its auguration in 1884 to reach a peak of 190 a few months later. Thereafter it dwindled to 51² and was dissolved a few years later.

In 1896 work began on the construction of a railway linking Freetown with the main market centres of the interior of the country. By the end of 1906, some 227 miles of railway had been completed, by which time the Railway Administration provided employment for just under 200 artisans and labourers.³ Before the outbreak of World War I, railway workers undertook strike action on two separate occasions. The first was in 1898 during the Hut Tax War of resistance to the imposition of 'hut taxes' on the people of the interior of the country by the colonial authorities who had declared a Protectorate

1 Cf. A. T. Porter, Creeledom: A Study of the development of Freetown Society, Oxford, 1963.

2 The Artisan, 29 July 1885.

3 J. Best, A History of the Sierra Leone Railway, p.30. (This monograph was commissioned as the official history of the railway to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the inauguration of the first train service in Sierra Leone. A thorough and detailed work, based on railway administration documents, this study will draw on its account of action taken by the railway men.)

over the area two years earlier.¹ At issue was a general dissatisfaction with working conditions at the time of the hut tax hostilities and with the level of wages.² Again, in 1911, railway workers took action over wages and working conditions. It appears that this strike was brutally suppressed. According to Best, 'when a riot seemed inevitable, firearms were discharged and two of the strikers were slightly wounded. The Railway men resumed work the next day and no further trouble was experienced. A grant of 13/6d. was made to Thomas Hero and others as a regard for remaining loyal during the strike.'³ After the war, railway workers again took the lead in undertaking protest action and in forming the first modern trade union in Sierra Leone. That various sections of the Freetown community rallied round the railway men during periods of strike action is the basis of the argument that these workers provided an early lead for the development of nationalist protestations at colonial domination. In view of the fact that nationalism in Sierra Leone never took the form of a coherent protest movement - given the strength of various cleavages within the society - action taken by the railway men provided almost the only opportunity for a concentrated focus of nationalist sentiments.

During the years before World War I, certain events of subsequent political significance occurred. Following the accusation leveled at the Krios of complicity in the hut tax hostilities, it had become the policy of the colonial authorities to exclude them from positions of trust. Krios were no longer appointed to senior positions in the government service.⁴ Furthermore, the prosperity of the Lebanese

1 Ibid, p.16.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid, p.36.

4 Cf. M. J. Bennie, 'Government and Politics of Sierra Leone with special reference to the Creole Community', M.Phil. thesis, P.T.O.

traders who had replaced them as middle men in the produce trade had begun to become apparent.¹ The main allies of the colonial administration had become the traditional chiefs of the interior who facilitated the system of indirect rule. In return for their cooperation they were allowed to keep five per cent of all taxes collected from their peasant subjects (which was also an incentive for them to collect the taxes) and paid a salary and other allowances.² In Freetown itself tribal headmen were appointed and paid by the authorities to maintain order within their communities.³ It was against this new trend of collaboration between the interior chiefs, tribal headmen, and the British authorities, increasing Lebanese prosperity, and Krio disaffection, that the 1919 railway strike and anti-Syrian riots occurred.

At the heart of the railway dispute lay the familiar problem of wage rates lagging behind the cost of living. During World War I, the War Office spent over £175,000 in strengthening the defence establishments in the colony. Furthermore, naval and merchant vessels calling at the port to take bunkers added to the internal spending boom through purchases of food supplies and other necessities from the colony.⁴ The net effect of these developments was that the internal

Nottingham University, 1970, Ch. 4; and Leo Spitzer, The Creoles of Sierra Leone: Responses to Colonialism 1870-1945, Wisconsin, 1974.

- 1 Cf. N. O. Leighton, 'The Lebanese Middleman in Sierra Leone: The Case of a non-indigenous trading minority and their role in Political Development', PhD thesis, Indiana University, 1971; Laurens van der Laan, The Lebanese Traders in Sierra Leone, The Hague, 1975; E. F. White, 'Creole Women Traders (1792-1945)', PhD thesis, Boston University, 1978.
- 2 Cf. M. Kilson, Political Change in a West African State, pp.59-60.
- 3 M. Banton, 'The Origins of Tribal Administration in Freetown', Sierra Leone Studies (New Series), No. 2, June 1954, pp.109-121.
- 4 For an account of economic conditions during the war, cf. N. A. Cox-George, Finance and Development, pp.179-195.

market failed to satisfy the growing demand and an inflationary spiral was set in motion. Between 1914 and 1919, prices rose by 300 per cent while wages generally remained at the pre-war levels. At the end of the war, imperial spending was sharply cut, retrenchment followed, leaving the workmen who had been temporarily employed, jobless. This combination of rising prices and unemployment, together with the growing polarisation of the administration, the chiefs, the tribal headmen, and the Syrian or Lebanese traders on the one hand, and the Krio educated elite on the other, created an explosive situation. The Freetown press owned by this elite thundered about the rising prices of food, the unemployment situation, and the growing prosperity of the Lebanese who were accused of profiteering. When daily wage workers at the Railway Department took strike action on 15 July 1919 to protest against the delay in the payment of the War Bonus, which had already been paid to European Officials, the press took up their case. The strike, which lasted a week, soon turned into a populist riot directed against the Lebanese. Within a few days, however, the riot had been suppressed and, as a punitive measure, the colonial authorities ordered that £37,000 be paid as compensation for damages inflicted on Lebanese property during the riots. The Freetown press vigorously opposed this order and the figure was reduced to £5,000. The railway and other workers who had not received the bonus were paid in full.

The strike was evidently well organised and action throughout the railway system properly coordinated. It was not just a spontaneous outburst as plenty of advance notice had been given to the authorities. It is clear from Best's account that the strike was a calculated attempt to force the authorities to meet the strikers' demands. Those workmen who remained loyal were 'prevented from working, engines

under steam were stopped, the fires drawn by the strikers, and two coaches and a wagon were derailed...attempts were made to stop Europeans attending the offices and to disorganise the railway as much as possible; in consequence all operations including the train service on the whole system were suspended from the 16th to the 22nd. The men resumed work on the 23rd July on the understanding that the bonus would be paid as soon as possible. The loss of revenue...was approximately £3,500.¹ The success of the strike drove home to the railwaymen the advantages that could be derived from proper organisation. In August, a group of railway artisans formed the Railway Skilled Artisans' Union declaring their objective to be 'to act as a medium between the employers and the employee and to protect its members'.² Within a year the union had been able to secure recognition by the railway management.³ In 1925, the union was re-organised and the title Railway Workers' Union adopted in order to emphasise that membership was drawn from all grades of railway workers.⁴ It was clearly the case, however, that the artisans were the driving force behind the union, officials such as A. E. Richards, W. D. Leigh, and J. B. Hington, being drawn from among their ranks. Members of the clerical grades were 'sleeping partners' while unskilled workers and labourers were regarded as no more than 'infantry men'.⁵

1 J. R. Best, A History of the Sierra Leone Railway, p.48.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., p.61.

5 Interview 'Pa' F. B. Hamilton, 31 March 1982; Pa Hamilton's father, an artisan at the railway, was a member of the union. He joined the railway himself as a clerk in 1937, and became a union official when the Railway Workers' Union was reconstituted during the Youth League years. He is now a part-time official of the Labour Congress.

The support of the Krio elite for the strikers in 1919 was essentially opportunistic. Although a Civil Service Association drawing its membership largely from Krio officials had been formed in 1909, it adopted a non-militant approach (sending 'memorials', as memoranda were wrongly termed, to the Secretary of State for the Colonies at Whitehall) in order not to jeopardise their position even further.¹ The 1919 strike therefore provided the opportunity for this elite to vent nationalist sentiments reflecting their increasing frustration at the colonial state.

During the 1920's, the position of the Krio elite improved considerably, and as a result their political loyalty to the colonial state was strengthened. Following the enactment of the 1924 constitution which provided for a legislative council at which the Krio community had half of the unofficial membership, a total representation of five members (two nominated by the governor, and three elected by a franchise limited by property qualifications), this elite, through its political organisation, the National Congress of British West Africa (Sierra Leone branch) adopted a more conservative posture vis a vis the colonial authorities. The era of 'constructive criticism' and 'progress through partnership' had begun. Nonetheless, this new era of partnership was rudely shattered two years later when most sections of the Freetown community felt obliged to support striking railway men subjected to high-handed treatment by the railway management and the colonial administration. As before, the action taken by the railway men reminded the community of some of the unsavoury aspects of colonial domination and the day-to-day

1 Cf. M. J. Bennie, 'The Government and Politics of Sierra Leone with special reference to the influence of the Creole Community', Ch. 4.

manifestation of the supremacy of the jombul.¹ The strike therefore became a temporary but concentrated focus of nationalist sentiments. The railway strike of 1926 was not over a wage dispute as such. Wages during the 1920's remained at post-war levels of between 1s.3d. and 2s. per diem for skilled and 1s. and 1s.3d. for unskilled workers (Table 2.1) and may be said to have been relatively buoyant.² The 1926 strike was a racial conflict between the railway and the railway management. The strike, which began on January 14, 1926, involved 'nearly the whole of the African staff of the locomotive, engineering, and traffic branches, and practically all telegraph operators'³ - over 1,000 railway men. The dispute embraced two separate issues, involving clerical workers of the traffic and operating sections on the one hand, and artisans of the engineering and locomotive sections on the other. The former objected to, and refused to be subjected to the successful completion of examinations as a precondition for promotion. These examinations, from which European personnel were exempted, had been introduced the previous year by the management in the 'interest of more efficient working'.⁴ The artisans complained that their

1 Jombul is the Krio word for a white man or European but has the connotation that such a person is in authority. This researcher was reminded by Pa Hamilton that this word is now almost extinct in present day Krio vocabulary. (Interview with Pa Hamilton, 31 March 1982).

2 During the depression years of the 'thirties by contrast, wage rates dropped to between 6d. and 9d. per diem for unskilled and skilled labour respectively. Assuming 25 working days a month, this becomes 12s.6d. and 18s.7½d. At the end of that decade Orde-Browne opined that '...the conclusion...is that for the plainest adequate living and poor accommodation, 30s. monthly is the minimum figure...I accordingly recommend the adoption of a basic figure of 30s. monthly as the minimum wage.' (cf. Orde-Browne, G. St. J., Labour Conditions in West Africa, p.120).

3 J. Best, A History of the Sierra Leone Railway, p.61.

4 Ibid.

request for a grading system similar to those obtaining elsewhere had been refused and that in consequence their progress was being impeded.¹ According to Best, 'the strike was obviously pre-meditated and well organised with the intention of paralysing all telegraph and rail communication'.² The re-organisation of the union during the previous year was apparently the first stage of the strategy, for '...it is evident from what transpired later that the expansion of membership and the renewal of union activity were the result of growing dissatisfaction on the part of the workmen at their conditions of service and had an obvious underlying motive'.³ The railway management and the government were resolute in their determination to break the strike. 'It was considered that the men had ceased work in an unauthorised manner and they were made to understand that no discussion could take place until they returned to work. His excellency the governor maintained a very adamant attitude in this respect and declined all offers of mediation...The railway men were repeatedly instructed to return to work and this they refused to do even though some of their members were dismissed and replaced.'⁴

The Freetown community were united in their support for the strikers. This '...deadlock was by no means eased by the clear expression of public opinion made in favour of the strikers and which culminated in a Strikers' Relief Fund being inaugurated'.⁵ That the strike lasted for six full weeks was a testimony to the determination

1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., p.62.

5 Ibid.

and solidarity of the railway men sustained by the support - fuelled by nationalist sentiments - of the local community and indeed branches of the National Congress of British West Africa in other colonial territories. The British government was equally determined that the colonial administration should resist the demands of the strikers. The strike was viewed as nothing more than an attempt at blackmail. A number of telegrams were addressed to the Secretary of State by the strikers and certain public bodies in Freetown, and questions were asked in the House of Commons, but to all approaches, the Secretary of State intimated that he saw no reason to intervene and he made it known that the Under Secretary (W. G. A. Ormsby-Gore), then about to make a visit to West Africa, would be instructed not to intervene.¹

The colonial administration simply bided time. As the weeks went by, the nationalist euphoria subsided. The hardship of a protracted struggle began to bite. The Railway Workers' Union reconsidered its position. Following a further unsuccessful appeal to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in which they asked that a special commissioner should be appointed (to inquire into the dispute), and that the status quo ante January 14th be restored - but with loss of pay for the strike period - the men returned to work on February 26th, 1926, on the conditions laid down by the government.² Fully aware of the demoralised mood of the men at the end of the strike, the colonial administration lost no time in breaking the union. It was outlawed, and some of its influential leaders re-deployed to the more remote parts of the railway system. Following this experience, there was little trade union activity in

1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

Sierra Leone for more than a decade.¹ Demoralised and dejected, railway and other lower paid workers in the territory entered the depression years in a sullen mood. Living standards were shortly to drop dramatically. As the volume of freight carried by the railway decreased, following the reduction in the demand for Sierra Leone produce in the world markets, retrenchments were made at the railway administration. 'A thorough investigation was made at the beginning of the year into the staff position in all branches with the result that the number of men employed was reduced by 159 or 8.6% of the total number employed at the end of 1932...The filling of vacancies in all branches, including those caused by normal wastage, were suspended'.² When Wallace-Johnson returned to Freetown in 1938, he found lower paid workers in the colony sullen and demoralised and forced to bear these hardships.

The influence of Wallace-Johnson 1938-50³

Sierra Leone entered the depression years with the colonial

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- 1 Interview with Pa Hamilton, 31 March 1982.
 - 2 J. Best, A History of the Sierra Leone Railway, p.79.
 - 3 For a full biography of Wallace-Johnson, cf. La Ray Denzer, 'I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson and the West African Youth League: A Case Study in West African Radicalism', PhD thesis, Birmingham University, 1977. I am very grateful to Dr. Denzer for generously allowing me to read this work which is temporarily on restricted access. Dr. Denzer also shared with me, during conversations at the Sierra Leone Studies Symposium, Birmingham, 17-19 July 1981, her personal recollections of Wallace-Johnson whom she had met in Ghana and in Sierra Leone. She has also collaborated with a scholar of Krio society, Dr. Leo Spitzer, in the writing of an important two-part biographical article of Wallace-Johnson. (Cf. L. Denzer and L. Spitzer, 'I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson and the West African Youth League', Part 1, International Jr. of African Historical Studies, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1973; part 2 ibid, Vol. 6, No. 4, 1973.) This account of the influence of Wallace-Johnson on the development of trade unionism in Sierra Leone is indebted to these studies.

authorities in firm control and receiving the cooperation of the Krio and chiefly elite. The depression years also coincided with the diversification of the economy, the beginning of the exploitation of small deposits of gold, platinum and chrome, as well as the larger deposits of diamonds and iron ore.¹ It was in general an era of rising expectations but hopes were quickly and cruelly dashed. Prevailing labour market conditions - the availability of a huge supply of labour - created a situation in which lower paid workers were, in practice, in a weak bargaining position.² Moreover, the politics of the rivalry between the Krio and chiefly elites for influence in the colonial administration, and the virtual exclusion of the 'masses' from the electorate in Freetown by property qualifications, created a situation in which the cultivation of a clientele by these elites among the lower paid workers brought the former virtually no immediate or direct benefits. Nonetheless lower paid workers at the mines upcountry and in establishments in Freetown took strike action on several occasions between 1932 and 1938 to register their discontent with falling living standards.³ These

1 Cf. M. H. Y. Kaniki, 'Economic and Social History of Sierra Leone, 1929-39'.

2 Interview with Marcus Grant, 10 February 1982.

3 This ground has been extensively covered by previous researchers and a rehash of the details is not necessary. Cf. F. A. N. Lisk, 'Industrial Relations in Sierra Leone, with Special Reference to the Development and Functioning of Bargaining Machinery since 1945', Ch. 2; M. Amolo, 'Sierra Leone and British Colonial Labour Policy 1930-45', Ch. 2; M. H. Y. Kaniki, 'Economic and Social History of Sierra Leone 1929-39', Ch. 5; M. J. M. Sibanda, 'Colonial Policy and Development in North West Sierra Leone 1896-1939', PhD thesis, Birmingham University, 1978, Ch. 5; and M. Kilson, Political Change in a West African State. Only those facts that are relevant to the influence of Wallace-Johnson on the labour movement and the structure of conflict within the movement are discussed.

strikes, like the pre-1914 protest action, were sporadic and short-lived. The mines also became notorious for a high labour turnover as workers periodically and seasonally - voting with their feet - moved in and out of peasant subsistence farming.¹

There had emerged during the inter-war years a growing number of young locally and foreign educated professionals of upcountry and Krio origins. Although these men and women had kinship relations with individuals of the Freetown and rural elite, they were beginning (unlike the latter) to develop a solidly based nationalist consciousness. Newspapers of this period contain many letters signed by upcountry and Krio names drawing attention particularly to the exploitation of minerals by imperial and foreign capital - a very early precursor to the 'growth without development' debate. This group of doctors, lawyers, teachers, civil servants, etc., was, moreover, willing and ready to create a clientele among the urban and rural masses. What they needed was coherent political organisation and the organisational skills of a leader experienced in the art of demagoguery. Wallace-Johnson perfectly fitted the bill, and arrived in Freetown at a most opportune time. His biographers maintain that, since his political activities in the Gold Coast had ended badly, Wallace-Johnson was probably at the point of withdrawal from active politics.² The colonial authorities unwittingly catapulted him into the lime-light, however, by seizing some of his books, documents, and papers at the Customs examination centre on the day of his arrival.

An indignant Wallace-Johnson gave this event the widest and

1 Cf. Ken Swindel, 'Labour Migration and Mining in Sierra Leone', PhD thesis, London University, 1973, Ch. 1.

2 Cf. M. H. Y. Kaniki, 'Economic and Social History', Ch. 5; for glimpses of working conditions in the mines, cf. Katherine Fowler-Lunn, op. cit.

loudest publicity.¹ His charismatic personality 'drew people to him like pins to a magnet'.² He wasted no time in denouncing the inter-war trends in elitist politics and 'large sections of the community, the unemployed and employed, rich and poor, the educated and the uneducated, men and women, Muslims, Christians, and pagans, Creoles and upcountrymen'³ were an enthusiastic audience for his fiery rhetoric. Within weeks of his arrival, Wallace-Johnson's strategy for handling the situation quickly unfolded. First, he proposed to create a political organisation, the Youth League, to challenge the elitism of the Freetown-based National Council of British West Africa. Second, he proposed to organise workers in the mines and in establishments throughout the country into trade unions to provide the Youth League with a strong grass roots base. By the end of 1938, Wallace-Johnson had achieved both objectives. An adherent of the Leninist theory of revolution, he believed in the use of strikes as a means of developing the consciousness of workers and in bringing about the destruction of imperialism. Overnight, Youth League activists, the 'verandah boys' of the Sierra Leone nationalist movement, became trade union leaders. Some of them were to use these positions to launch careers for themselves in national politics during the post-war years of decolonisation.

The months before the outbreak of war in Sierra Leone were especially turbulent as strikes shook the colonial state at its foundations. With the exception of a handful of Youth League activists, however, Wallace-Johnson's supporters among the 'middle

1 Interview with Marcus Grant, 10 February 1982.

2 Ibid.

3 L. Denzer and L. Spitzer, op. cit., part 2.

class' professionals¹ and among lower paid workers were not adherents of the Leninist theory of revolution. The former wished to bring about an end to the elitism in political representation and to hasten the devolution of power. The latter wished to effect improvements in living standards. With the outbreak of war, Wallace-Johnson was incarcerated at Bonth Island off the coast of Southern Sierra Leone, as it was thought by the colonial authorities that he posed a security risk to the territory.

During the war, colonial labour policy was based on a strategy of guiding the trade union movement through the channels of 'industrial unionism'.² Following the passage of legislation giving legal recognition to trade unions in 1939, and the establishment of a Labour Department two years later, a Trade Union adviser was sent out from Britain in 1942. He was Edgar Parry, himself a union official in the British trade union movement. Local unionists who knew and worked with Parry are all agreed that he has left an indelible mark on the practice of trade unionism in Sierra Leone.³ While Parry was without any doubt very sympathetic to the aspirations of the fast growing group of wage earners in the territory, he saw his role, quite unambiguously, as attempting to put into effect the policies on labour administration which had been developed over the years at the Colonial Office. Very simply, this meant turning the local trade union leadership away from the 'political unionism' of

1 Cf. L. Denzer, *op. cit.*, Appendix 2; the composition of the Youth League's central committee in 1938 was as follows: four lawyers, eight businessmen, seven senior clerks, three teachers, one surveyor, one clergyman, and two accountants including a Muslim Imam.

2 For the details relating to the reform of labour policies, cf. especially M. Amolo, 'Sierra Leone and British Colonial Labour Policy 1930-45'.

3 Interviews with Marcus Grant, 16 January 1980; H. N. Georgestone, P.T.O.

the Youth League and its destabilising tactics of agitation, to the institutionalised and more 'respectable' protest of 'industrial unionism'. It could not have been otherwise. Parry had himself obtained his industrial relations experience by working his way up through the ranks of the British trade union movement; the ideology of industrial unionism and institutionalised protest must have seemed only too natural. Indeed, writing in the colonial office journal, Corona, shortly after completing his tour in Sierra Leone, Parry maintained:

'The creation of trade unions is itself a fairly simple matter. To fit them into a comprehensive system of industrial relations is a much more exacting task... Since we have always encouraged the colonies to follow our example, we can only hope that workers there will eventually arrive at a more orderly method of running their affairs.'¹

It was to this 'exacting task' that Parry devoted himself, but not before careful study of the pattern of trade unionism that was emerging. He was aware of the conditions obtaining in the territory at the time of the arrival of Wallace-Johnson. The seething discontent of workers in the mines and in other establishments was swiftly given organisational expression in the formation of trade unions. By 1942, the year of Parry's arrival, eleven unions had been registered, claiming between them a total membership of 5,000 (see Table 2.2). The Labour Department was quick to point out that a 'bare 15 per cent' of this membership was fully paid up, while the number of wage earners in the whole country had risen to a figure between 70,000 and 80,000.² A former Youth League activist and trade union leader has pointed

23 January 1980; President Siaka Stevens, 11 July 1980; and Pa Hamilton, 31 March 1982.

- 1 Edgar Parry, 'Colonial Trade Unions', Corona, August 1949, pp.19-21, p.21.
- 2 Sierra Leone, Labour Department Annual Report 1941-2, p.3.

TABLE 2.2

Registered trade unions 1942

1. The All Seamen's Union
2. The Freetown Maritime Workers' Union
3. The Mining Employees' Union
4. The African Commercial Workers' Union
5. The Yengema Diamond Workers' Union
6. The Sierra Leone Building and Constructional Workers' Union
7. The Sierra Leone Mason's Union
8. The Sierra Leone Washerwomens' Union
9. The Sierra Leone Waterfront Workers' Union
10. The Railway Workers' Union
11. The Mercantile Workers' Union

SOURCE: Sierra Leone, Annual Labour Department Reports
1939-40, 1940-41.

out that, in those early days of trade union organisation, many of the activists leading the unions 'lacked the administrative skills to compile the type of reports showing the returns demanded by the Labour Department'.¹ Moreover, the trade union movement was at the time a populist organisation. Membership was spontaneous and informal. The movement grew out of the vacuum left by the orientation of the elites in Freetown and the provinces towards seeking greater representation for themselves in the colonial administration.² The momentum of the movement was maintained by the particular conditions

1 Interview with H. N. Georgestone, 23 January 1980; see also M. Kilson, Political Change in a West African State, pp.144-149.

2 Sierra Leone, Labour Department Annual Report 1941-42, p.3.

obtaining during the war: a tight labour market, war-time emergency, and considerable hardship caused by war-time inflation.

A trade union centre, the Sierra Leone Trade Union Congress (SLTUC), was formed to coordinate the activities of the unions in 1942. During the war, the unions were for the most part adversarial in bargaining tactics, generally adopting a hostile posture towards employers and officials of the Labour Department. In its 1942 Report, the department maintained:

'It is regrettable...that no progress has been made in the development of trade unionism during 1941-42...This is due to the fact that real trade union leaders are conspicuous by their absence; that the so-called trade union leaders are very loath to take the advice of the Labour Department, including that of Mr. Parry who is an expert on trade unionism and even of the TUC at home.'¹

This was only to be expected. The colonial administration had incarcerated Wallace-Johnson - in the eyes of the activists, a hero - while appointing two members of the Krio and upcountry elite, J. Fowell Boston (an eminent barrister) and Paramount Chief George Caulker, as members of the Executive Council in 1942.¹ In spite of the emergency measures in force, a total of thirty-four stoppages took place between 1940 and 1945. With the exception of two in 1945, which were over disputes relating to terms and conditions of redundancies, all were in respect of wage demands. This unprecedented increase in strike activity can be directly related to the internal condition of the economy during the war.² The state of the labour market (the increase in the demand for skilled labour relative to the

1 Cf. M. Kilson, op. cit., p.143.

2 For details relating to the strikes, cf. M. Amolo, op. cit., Ch. 5; for details relating to the economy, cf. M. A. Cox-George, Finance and Development, p.225 ff.

supply), an inflationary spiral, and trade union hostility, all fuelled the series of stoppages. In most of these disputes, the Labour Department worked assiduously to effect negotiated settlements as was required under the 1939 Trade Union Ordinance. The government itself granted an annual cost of living allowance between 1940 and 1945, as its own statistics on the movement of prices had registered a considerable upward trend (see Tables 2.3 and 2.4).

By the end of the war, Parry had developed a sound grasp of the pattern of trade unionism emerging in the country. He had not only seen instances of militant and aggressive wage bargaining, but also the strains in the solidarity of the labour movement. The union leaders, deprived of the inspiring leadership of Wallace-Johnson, were soon at odds with each other over demarcation disputes and personality rivalries.¹ Ethnic problems also surfaced. For instance, Kroo dock labourers, who had a virtual monopoly over the employment opportunities at the port, maintained a separate union organisation from that of non-Kroo dockers. Even after the two unions were merged in 1946, the system of recruitment of dock workers remained open to abuse until the centralisation of the employment of dock labour in 1952. Parry had also become acquainted with most of the union leaders and had developed a 'soft spot' for Siaka Stevens, Secretary of the Mining Employees' Union, who had by the end of the war emerged as a shrewd but moderate union negotiator. Parry singled out Stevens as a unionist of great promise and was instrumental in obtaining a scholarship for him to study industrial relations at Ruskin College, Oxford, and arranging a brief attachment for him with the British TUC

1 Interview with Marcus Grant, 16 January 1980.

TABLE 2.3

Official cost of living index 1939-45

YEAR	INDEX
1939	100
1940	N.A.
1941	175.57
1942	234
1943	242
1944	255
1945	233.7

SOURCE: N. A. Cox-George, Finance and Development, p.228.

(N.B.: An estimation of rent paid on housing was excluded from the compilation of the index.)

TABLE 2.4

Movement of real wages 1939-54

YEAR	COST OF LIVING INDEX	MINIMUM WAGES	INDEX OF REAL WAGES
1939	100	1s.0d.	100
1945	233.7	1s.6d.	64.2
1949	242	2s.6d.	103
1952	398	3s.9d.	94.2
1954	417	3s.9d.	90

SOURCE: Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Strikes and Riots in Freetown during February 1955, p.7. (This document will henceforth be referred to as The Shaw Report.)

at the end of his course in 1947/48.¹

Parry's strategy for re-organising the pattern of trade unionism in Sierra Leone involved three important phases. First, he aimed to reduce the number of trade unions so that only one union could exist in any one industry or sector; second, he wished to create institutions for collective bargaining at industry wide level; and third, he hoped to eliminate the hostile posture of the majority of union leaders and to replace it with a spirit of cooperation. By the time he left Sierra Leone at the end of his tour in 1947, Parry had achieved all three of these objectives. The eleven unions in existence in 1942 were reduced to eight in the streamlining phase of the strategy (see Table 2.5). The mining Employees' Union and the Yengema Diamond Workers' Union were amalgamated to form the United Mine Workers' Union, while the Masons' Union and the Building and Construction Workers' Union became the Artisan Workers' Union. - The Maritime Workers' Union (Kroo stevedores) and the Waterfront Workers' Union (non-Kroo stevedores) became the Maritime and Waterfront Workers' Union. With the achievement of one union in each sector, Parry next turned his attention to the introduction of institutions

1 Interview, President Siaka Stevens, 11 July 1980; while in the U.K. in 1947/48, Stevens wrote: '...experience has shown us... that Labour Advisers and officials of the right type can be of inestimable value to colonial trade union movements. Not by dictating to, or unnecessarily interfering with the unions, but by tactful guidance, pointing out pitfalls in trade union work, recommending suitable material to read - above all by straight dealing with the unions - can Labour Advisers and officers from the U.K. be of help to the colonies.' (Siaka Stevens, 'Trade Unionism in Sierra Leone', Empire, A Socialist Commentary on Colonial Affairs, Journal of the Fabian Colonial Bureau, Vol. II, No. 3, September 1948, p.5.)

for collective bargaining. Bargaining machinery of two types were introduced: Wages Boards and Joint Industrial Councils (JICs). The former, introduced in 1946, was a more paternalistic arrangement. A Board was formed in the cargo handling, mining, and agricultural (plantations) sectors, each with representation from the unions and employers in these sectors, but under the chairmanship of a government appointee, who was only obliged to consult these representatives in fixing the minimum rates of pay which were statutorily enforceable in each sector. If 'bargaining' was severely restricted at the Wages Boards, it was more openly permitted at the JICs. Two JICs were created in 1947 for the Artisan and Transport workers. Each had an equal number of representatives of the employers and the unions, with the Labour Department providing only administrative services. It was envisaged that these would meet periodically to review and agree on wage rates applicable throughout each of the two sectors. Conway has suspected that these institutions were deliberately designed so that the Labour Department would be directly involved in the fixing of wage levels in both the private and public sectors.¹ A communication received from Edgar Parry during his research confirmed his suspicions. According to Parry, Wages Boards were created to insure government influence:

'The creation of Wages Boards in the mining and maritime sectors allowed for government influence through the appointment of independent members. On the other hand, the designation of JICs in the transport and construction industries allowed equal representation for labour and employers without any independent appointees. Since government as an employer

¹ H. A. Conway, 'Industrial Relations in Sierra Leone with Special Reference to the Functioning of the Bargaining Machinery since 1945', Ch. 3; cf. 'Wages Boards', Cap 220, Laws of Sierra Leone, 1960.

TABLE 2.5

Registered trade unions 1946⁽¹⁾ and occupational background of trade union leaders⁽²⁾

UNIONS	DATE REGISTERED	MEMBER-SHIP	GENERAL SECRETARY	PREVIOUS OCCUPATION OF GEN. SEC.
United Mines Workers' Union	Amalgamated March 1945	5,000	Siaka Stevens	Clerical Officer, SLDC (Iron Mining Company)
Sierra Leone Artisans' Union	Amalgamated March 1945	1,300	Marcus Grant	Artisan, Public Works Department
Sierra Leone Maritime and Waterfront Workers' Union	Amalgamated November 1946	3,000	George Thomas	Clerk
Transport Workers	Reorganised July 1945	480	H. N. Georgestone	Surveyor's Clerk
National Union of Seamen	Reorganised July 1945	1,200	C. V. Jarrett	Article Seaman
Clerical Mercantile Workers' Union	Reorganised October 1945	150	Siaka Stevens	Clerical Officer, SLDC
Railway Workers' Union	Reorganised June 1941	500	D. A. Lottman	Artisan/Railway
Sierra Leone Washerwomens' Union	Registered	300	F. Horton-Shaw	Clerk

SOURCES: (1) Labour Department Annual Report 1946, p.26.

(2) Interview with G. A. Wilton During, 13 April 1982.

GEN. SEC. = General Secretary

was represented, there was no need for a third party.¹

The third phase of Parry's strategy involved the elimination of the aggressive posture of the trade union leadership. This very simply meant seeking their 'incorporation' into the establishment. Parry resorted to the use of a corporatist strategy by setting up a Joint Consultative Committee made up of union leaders and government officials, with terms of reference to advise government on its economic, social, and labour policies. A building, Trade Union House, was provided in central Freetown as the administrative headquarters of the trade union movement, providing offices for the TUC and several individual unions. Trade union leaders were also promised scholarships to study in the U.K., and were invited to sit on the national institutions of political power. J. Akinola Wright of the reconstituted Railway Workers' Union was nominated by the governor to sit on the Legislative Council and represent labour interests in 1946, while Siaka Stevens became a member of the Protectorate Assembly in 1949 and thus began a remarkable political career. The speeches of the union leaders were relayed over the rediffusion network, and reported in the press. In this way, the trade union leaders, most of whom had achieved prominence through being activists in the Youth League, became gradually 'respectable' with a corresponding obligation to be 'responsible'. (Cf. Table 2.5 for the occupational background of trade union leaders in 1946.) The union leaders welcomed these arrangements, as the unions were given recognition and security.² Even Marcus Grant, one of the strongest supporters of Wallace-Johnson

1 Communication from Parry to Hugh Conway, 3 March, 1967, quoted in Conway, op. cit., Ch. 3.

2 Conway, ibid., Ch. 4.

in the Youth League, appeared well pleased in a speech made at the inauguration of the JICs in March 1947:

'...today marks one of the happiest days concerning the workers in this colony for which we are glad. We can assure the council of our cooperation and best relations to bring this our attempt to success. I should not omit to extend our thanks to the Commissioner of Labour and the officers of the Labour Department who are responsible for bringing about the formation of these bodies.'¹

Nonetheless, the reforms had fundamental implications for solidarity within the labour movement. Towards the end of the war, Wallace-Johnson was released from confinement at Bonthe Island and allowed to return to Freetown. A clash with Parry, whose work was directed at undermining his militant style of leadership, was inevitable. The reforms were severely criticised in the Youth League Press. Deeply resenting Wallace-Johnson's influence, Parry's letters to his friends in Britain were indicative of his increasing exasperation. In a letter to Rita Hinden of the Fabian Colonial Bureau (which is worth quoting at length, not least for its entertainment value) Parry made it clear that he had had enough:

'I consider him to be the most objectionable and unscrupulous person I have met in political life...All this I would abide if he did not interfere with my work...It is necessary for me to do a fair amount of reorganisation of the trade unions. They are in a sad state of health and require a lot of assistance. In spite of his loud protestations to the contrary, Wallace-Johnson seems to me as if he does not want them to be any different than they are.'

1 Marcus Grant, 6 March 1947, quoted in The Shaw Report, p.4. Marcus Grant however fully realised the implications of Parry's reforms. He has written, 'It was of course easier for the government to keep a check on the development of the unions in Sierra Leone'. (Marcus Grant, 'Research on Trade Unionism in Sierra Leone', Freetown, typescript, n.d.; copy given to this researcher by Grant on 16 January 1980).

I believe this is because he meddles with the finances of one of them and also because he is a megalomaniac who cannot stand to see anyone trying to help his beloved 'toiling masses'. (He is full of pseudo-Marxist clap-trap)...In the first place I think he ought not to be encouraged by anyone in the labour movement at home. It would be neither fair to the Africans here who want to do something decent nor to me...My job here is difficult enough without having to deal with a man of this sort...There is no doubt that this country would have made far more progress without him. There are a few enlightened men here who can easily fill his place with advantage, but will not make any effort while he is about.¹

Wallace-Johnson, on the other hand, believed that labour reform was only one aspect of the more important question of imperialism, and that it was idle to argue about the details of the system while the system itself remained unchanged. In a speech before the World Federation of Labour in Paris in 1945 as the delegate from Sierra Leone, he argued this thesis forcefully:

'...in countries where the people are ruled by a foreign race, whose economic exploitation is supported by the political forces of imperialism, politics and economics are inseparable.'²

Parry, however, continued to work through the moderate union leaders and, by so doing, was able to precipitate a split between those leaders who subscribed to the ideology of political unionism and those who subscribed to the ideology of industrial unionism. In 1946, two moderates, Akinola Wright and Siaka Stevens, were elected as President and General Secretary respectively of the TUC, by virtue

1 Rhodes House, Oxford, Parry to Hinden, Fabian Colonial Bureau 86/2/173-115, 23 September, 1945; also quoted in M. Amolo, 'Sierra Leone and British Colonial Labour Policy 1930-45'.

2 The New Leader, 13 October, 'What Colonial Workers demanded at the WFTU Conference'; also quoted in M. Amolo, ibid.

of the fact that the moderates, having a greater proportion of the membership between them, could muster more votes. Marcus Grant and H. N. Georgestone immediately disaffiliated their unions from the TUC. In a statement on the crisis signed by Wright, Stevens, George Thomas (Maritime and Waterfront Workers' Union), D. A. Lottman (Railway Workers), and C. S. Pratt (Clerical and Mercantile Workers), the moderates were unequivocal about their split with the Youth League:

'Shorn of all its fanciful trimmings, the real reason for the conflict is that the Minority Section want to see the Trade Union Congress as part and parcel of the Youth League, and the Majority Section, whilst some of its members are Youth Leaguers and others have held prominent positions in the League in the past, maintain that it would be highly improper for the SLTUC to be hog-tied and controlled by the Youth League, a political organisation which is in no way accountable to the trade union movement.'¹

Delighted as it must have been with these developments, the Labour Department nevertheless made several attempts to bring the two factions back together on terms compatible with its strategies of labour administration. Parry himself made several approaches to Grant and Georgestone, who recall that he painstakingly lectured them on the development of trade unionism in Britain - drawing parallels with Sierra Leone - and on the achievement of the pioneers of the British labour movement. 'Parry often suggested that the greatest service we could do to the nation would be to cooperate with the department and the new JICs and Wages Boards. For this we would be remembered in history as the founding fathers of trade unionism in

1 SLTUC, 'Statement on the Present Situation in Congress', Freetown, circa June 1946. (Copy in this researcher's possession). The emphasis is in the original. The statement also went on to accuse Wallace-Johnson of dishonesty and misuse of union funds.

this country.¹ By the time Parry left Freetown in November 1947, a new trade union centre had been formed with its membership drawn from the two factions.² Increasingly isolated, Wallace-Johnson turned his energies and talents to the national political scene where arrangements for the devolution of power by the British were well underway.

Parry was therefore remarkably successful in achieving the objectives he set himself at the beginning of his tour. The effect of his reforms was that there was relative industrial peace for almost a decade. Between 1946 and 1955, there were no more than five stoppages in the whole country, and these were resolved by negotiated settlements. As Marcus Grant points out in his article on the recent history of the labour movement, '...up to the 1955 strikes, industrial relations was presented as something of a model of close cooperation between unions, the Labour Department, and employers; the existence of the Wages Boards, and Joint Industrial Councils, and the national joint consultative advisory body on labour legislation and policy, and the mature role of the Council of Labour'.³ One of the effects of union cooperation during this first post-war decade was that real wages soon lagged behind the cost of living. The gains which had been made during the years after the war had by 1952 begun to be eroded (see Table 2.4). This era of 'corporatism', coinciding with the incorporation of Africans into key positions in the colonial

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- 1 Interview with Marcus Grant, 16 January 1980; Marcus Grant has also said that the idea for the formation of a labour party in Sierra Leone came from Parry's remarks on British trade union history. (Interview with Marcus Grant, 10 February 1982).
 - 2 Sierra Leone, Labour Department Annual Report 1946, p.6.
 - 3 M. Grant, 'Research on Trade Unionism in Sierra Leone', (mimeo).

state, was perhaps not too surprisingly, if somewhat rudely, shattered by the 'general' strike¹ of 1955. This was led by the two radicals in the 1946 dispute within the old TUC, Marcus Grant and H. N. Georgetone.

The responses of organised labour to the politics of decolonisation

By the end of World War II the social structure of Sierra Leone had altered considerably and noticeably. Not only had the number of wage earners increased significantly, but more and more peasants were being drawn into the market economy as the measures taken by the Agricultural Department to promote the cultivation of cash crops were beginning to mature. At the other end of the socio-economic scale, the educated professional Krios, while constituting an elite (but disunited over questions of constitutional reforms and, more specifically, questions of the extension of the voting franchise and of the type of accommodation to be sought with the provincial elite) had been witnessing the enlargement of the latter elite. Several outstanding professional people with provincial origins had emerged. These included Dr. Milton Margai, Dr. John Karefa-Smart, Siaka Stevens, Albert Margai, I. B. Taylor-Kamara, and Dr. W. H. Fitzjohn. These elites, taken together, were 'moderate' in their political orientation. It was left to Wallace-Johnson and some of his anti-imperialist ideologues to keep nationalism as an issue on the political agenda. But the support he had received during those heady days of 1938 was on the decline by the end of the war as the colonial authorities had responded by creating institutions for

1 To term the 1955 strike a 'general' strike is in fact a misnomer. Although workers throughout the country took part in it unofficially, the action was taken by members of the Artisan and Transport unions.

collective bargaining, and had committed themselves to the introduction of constitutional reforms leading to the transfer of power.¹

These conditions made decolonisation in Sierra Leone a smooth and gradual devolution of power. A small degree of acrimony came from conservative Krio opinion which resented the growing (and inevitable) political influence of the provincial élite. By 1951, two political parties had emerged: the National Council of the Colony of Sierra Leone (NCSL), representing conservative Krio opinion, and the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) representing a coalition of liberal Krio, the provincial educated elite, and the chiefs. Neither of these parties were 'mass' parties - sustained by nationalist sentiments - like the CPP in Ghana or the NCNC in southern Nigeria. Each relied on kinship and patron-clientelist relationships to secure support among a franchise limited by property qualifications. After elections in 1951, the SLPP, whose network of support covered parts of Freetown and the whole of the provinces, emerged as the winner. Some of its leading members were appointed to the Executive Council or cabinet with Dr. Margai as Chief Minister and Leader of Government Business. The leader of the NCSL, Dr. Bankole Bright, became head of the Opposition where he was joined by Wallace-Johnson who had won a seat on the Legislative Council as an independent candidate.²

1 The literature on decolonisation in Sierra Leone is extensive; cf., e.g., M. Kilson, op. cit.; J. Cartwright, op. cit.; Dennis Austin, 'People and Constitution in Sierra Leone' (a five-part article in the weekly, West Africa, 13 September 1952-11 October 1952); W. H. Fitzjohn, Ambassador of Christ and Caesar, Ibadan, 1975; P. R. Kaim-Caudle, 'Review of Economic Changes in Sierra Leone 1930-55', Durham University Journal, December 1957, pp.34-41; and H. H. Gaffney, op. cit.

2 This researcher has tacked Dr. LaRay Denzer, Wallace-Johnson's biographer, over the question of the irony of his support for Dr. Bankole Bright's parochial NCSL. She insisted that Wallace-Johnson could have only been an effective critic of the government from the Opposition benches and drew attention to the

The conduct of the affairs of state within this formal Westminster-style institutional framework should not obscure the broader sociological processes at work. Dr. Milton Margai emerged as the dominant political figure during this period by mobilising the support of the chiefs in return for the maintenance of their privileges at the local level. This was facilitated in certain cases by communal and kinship ties, especially in the south and south-eastern areas of the country, and in others, by certain shared experiences such as originating from the protectorate, or belonging to the old boys' network of the Bo school (which had been established in 1906 by the colonial authorities to provide education for the sons and nominees of the chiefs). Access to the state was required to help redress the historical imbalance in development resources expended in the colony vis a vis the provinces, and by so doing, to assist the improvement of life chances in the latter area. Leading members of the educated elite were represented in the SLPP including Krio politicians inclined towards national integration and reconciliation. These networks of support were based on informal clientelist relationships which were cemented by the location of schools, hospitals, and other projects or infrastructural development in particular areas, appointments to the civil service, the allocation of diamond mining licenses, produce and other purchasing contracts, etc. During these years of decolonisation, however, the African politicians in government were not given complete discretionary powers by the British colonial authorities to formulate the priorities for the distribution of the resources of the state. The ethos of British colonial administration

fact that his collaboration with Bankole Bright was short-lived. (Conversation with Dr. Denzer, 18 July 1981).

had been, and continued to be, strict bureaucratic accountability. These administrative procedures restrained and constrained the full manifestation of the characteristics of neo-patrimonial political leadership. Nonetheless, the African politicians had some considerable room in which to manoeuvre. This was evidenced by the increasing prosperity of the politicians themselves, the award of substantial salary increases to senior civil servants following the publication of the Sinker Report in 1953 - many of whom were now Sierra Leoneans as the policy of Africanisation was pursued (see Table 2.6) - and the introduction of mortgages on very concessionary terms to this cadre of public servants.¹ The re-negotiation of the terms of diamond-mining agreements between Selection Trust and the Margai administration in 1954/55 created other opportunities for the dispensation of patronage. In return for a £1.5 million 'compensation', Selection Trust was required to surrender its 99-year exclusive rights to mine diamonds throughout the country, with the exception of some 450 square miles - containing the most promising deposits - in Kenema and Kono. The rest of the country (in practice parts of the south and south-east) therefore became available to miners who were required to be licensed by government.² The main beneficiaries of the increased access of Africans to the colonial state in Sierra Leone were the politicians in government themselves, and their clientele among senior public servants, businessmen, and other members

1 In pursuance of the policy of parity in the conditions of service of British and Sierra Leonean senior civil servants, the latter and their families were also allowed a few months leave in Britain every three years, with mail boat passages being paid by the government.

2 Cf. Laurens van der Laan, The Sierra Leone Diamonds: An Economic Study covering the Years 1952-1961, Oxford, 1965.

of the citizenry. Lower paid workers in the urban areas and the peasants in the countryside were not direct beneficiaries of the arrangements of the transfer to African political control. Moreover, the existence of the institutions of collective bargaining introduced just after the war, and the willingness of most trade union leaders (whose status had been significantly increased by the measures taken by Parry) created the conditions for effecting only very moderate wage settlements. Nonetheless, some sections of organised labour responded by taking strike action in 1955 in protest at the gradual decrease in real wages since the early 'fifties.

TABLE 2.6

Africanisation of the senior public service during the period of decolonisation

YEARS	OVERSEAS	AFRICAN	TOTAL	AFRICAN % OF TOTAL
1953...	315	166	481	24
1959...	297	381	678	56

SOURCE: Sierra Leone, Sessional Paper No. 4 of 1959,
Government Statement on Africanisation, p.1.

On 9 February 1955, the members of the Artisan and Allied Workers' Union and the Transport and General Workers' Union were called out on strike by the Secretaries of the two unions, Marcus Grant and H. N. Georgestone respectively. The immediate cause of the strike was a deadlock in negotiations for periodic wage increases at the Artisan JIC and at the Transport JIC. The workers' representatives at these JICs refused to refer the impasse to arbitration as was required under the Trades Disputes Ordinance. Hundreds of workers in Freetown, and indeed in various parts of the provinces, joined spontaneously in the four-day strike - in most cases in defiance of official union policy - which escalated into riots, looting, and running street battles with security personnel. The evident popularity of strike action among the labour rank and file was suggestive of widespread disillusionment with the formal procedures of collective bargaining in effecting significant increases in basic wage rates at a time of spiralling inflation. It arguably also reflected a certain envy, even resentment, of the political and bureaucratic elite following the appointment of the first African cabinet in 1951 and the gradual Africanisation of the upper echelons of the civil service. The strike also exposed the existence of divisions among the trade union leadership, between the militant and moderate factions. Following the departure of Wallace-Johnson to national politics in 1947, Grant and Georgestone came to regard themselves as the custodians of the militant tradition of the labour movement. As such, they took an uncompromising stand in fighting for what they regarded as workers' rights and in stirring workers' consciousness.¹

1 Interview with Marcus Grant, 16 January 1980; interview with H. N. Georgestone, 23 January 1980.

The events which came to a head in February 1955 had begun three months earlier when Grant and Georgestone - acting in close collaboration - submitted an application for a general increase of 2/6 per diem on behalf of the members of their respective unions to the Artisans and Transport JICs on 2 and 5 November respectively.¹ At the time of the application, neither Grant nor Georgestone had much faith in the formal procedures of bargaining as a means of effecting a 'fair' increase in wage rates. It had become evident over the years that the JICs and Wages Boards had been deliberately designed to ensure that the government (through its officials at the Department of Labour) was involved in wage settlements in both the private and public sectors. As an employer of artisans and of transport workers, the government was also directly represented on the Artisans and Transport JICs. A cost-conscious government was obviously concerned to exploit these arrangements in order to effect moderate wage settlements (see Table 2.4).

The original claim for 2s.6d. per diem by Grant and Georgestone was deliberately set so as to provide a margin for bargaining.² Indeed, at a meeting of the Transport JIC on 2 December 1954, Georgestone indicated that he would be willing to settle for 1s.6d. A week later, Marcus Grant also reduced his claim to this amount.³ The employers, on the other hand, initially offered 2d. at the Transport JIC and 3d. at the Artisans JIC, this later being increased to 4d. for the Freetown area and 3d. elsewhere. The accuracy of the cost of living index was challenged by the employers. Georgestone,

1 Sierra Leone National Archive, Ministry of Labour, 'Chronological Summary of Events from November 1954 to February 1955', p.1.

2 Interview with Marcus Grant, 16 January 1980.

3 'Chronological Summary of Events...'.
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while conceding that the index was based on the projections of the Labour Department and that no price survey had been undertaken since 1942, nonetheless argued that '...their claim was a general one, and not based on points, and took account of the rise in prices generally'.¹ When the employers contended at the Artisan JIC that they would be willing to negotiate further after a review of the index, Grant declared that '...negotiations should be regarded as closed...the workers would see how they would make their presence felt'.² Following this impasse, pressure was brought to bear on the two union leaders to take their claims to arbitration. Grant has since explained that their refusal to go to arbitration was due to the fact that any award made by the tribunal was legally enforceable and they failed to see how a 'fair' settlement could be reached when the arbitrators were Labour Department officials.³ No less a person than the member of the Margai cabinet with responsibility for the Labour Department, Siaka Stevens, himself a former moderate union leader, repeatedly urged Grant and Georgestone to allow a tribunal to review the impasse. His exhortations were ignored.⁴ A joint mass meeting of the Artisan and Transport unions voted overwhelmingly for the taking of strike action, and accordingly a fourteen-day strike notice was served on employers on 21 January. Once the decision to take strike action had become official, more pressure was put on the two union leaders to go to arbitration. The president of the national trade union centre, the Sierra Leone Council of Labour,

1 Ibid.

2 Ibid, p.2.

3 Interview with Marcus Grant, 16 January 1980.

4 'Chronological Summary of Events...', p.2.

J. Akinola Wright, wrote to Grant and Georgestone urging them to call off the strike:

'In thinking about strike, we must consider the varied repercussions and the many implications involved; then, as one who also knows the inside stuff of the trade unions in Sierra Leone, I wonder whether anyone knowing as I do would seriously think that there is any wisdom in calling a strike without first going through all the formalities...it is the usual course for such matters to be referred to a tribunal... this is the usual procedure even in the United Kingdom...As leaders of workers, I feel it is your duty to educate them on right lines and do not allow them to force your hands to do anything that would make them suffer more than they feel at present. Then it is a fact that the trade union movement in Sierra Leone had always been acclaimed as the best throughout the British colonies; if that is true it could not have been due to anything more than the serious way in which matters have been dealt with in the past, and while I will not hesitate to support any steps suggested to assist workers where I am reasonably convinced, I will refrain from doing anything that will bring discredit on the workers and make them suffer...but I must express my disappointment and disapproval of the method you are adopting at the present time and therefore consider it my duty to implore you to stop and think the matter all over again as it seems to me that up to the present time there is nothing to justify going on strike.'¹

In addition, the Railway Workers' Union executive wrote to Siaka Stevens to dissociate themselves from the strike:

'Those persons who appear to have subscribed their signatures to the Strike Notice in question did so as individuals on their own and not as representatives of the Railway Workers' Union.'²

1 Ibid, Appendix B, J. Akinola Wright to Comrades Grant and Georgestone, 21 January 1955.

2 Ibid, Appendix E, D. A. Lottman and eight others to the Hon. S. P. Stevens, 25 January 1955.

The Secretary of the Maritime and Waterfront Workers' Union, into which stevedores in the employ of the shipping companies were organised, reported to the Labour Department that 'he had recently tried to dissuade Grant from going through with his strike but that Grant remained intractable and even antagonistic'.¹

By the end of January, it became clear that Wallace-Johnson was a key adviser to the two unions and that he had done much work behind the scenes regarding the strategy to be adopted.² A week before the strike notice was due to expire, Siaka Stevens appointed a Board of Inquiry under the chairmanship of Mr. R. B. Marke, a Freetown barrister, to examine the causes and circumstances of the deadlock in the negotiations at the JICs. The other members of the Board were Reverend Solomon Caulker, a philosophy lecturer at Fourah Bay College, and Mr. H. E. T. Hodgson, a retired civil servant.³ The Board began to consider the evidence almost immediately, while Stevens and his officials at the Labour Department made frantic efforts to persuade the two union leaders to have the matter decided by a tribunal or to reduce their claim. Following consultations with the membership of their unions, Grant and Georgestone agreed to reduce their claim. At a joint meeting of the two JICs on 2 February, the notice was withdrawn and the two leaders indicated that they would be prepared to settle at 10d. per diem. The employers felt able to increase their offer to 6d., resulting in another deadlock.⁴ The workers' side argued that the employers 'were perfectly able to afford an

1 Ibid, p.5.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

increase of 10d.¹ Two days later, a joint mass meeting of the two unions was held and the membership informed of these developments. Workers again came out in favour of a stoppage. Accordingly, a three-day notice was served on employers on 6 February. The government responded by putting out a statement declaring that any action by government employees would be regarded as a 'break in service' and that long-service employees would therefore stand to lose gratuity, pension rights, and other benefits.²

The 6,353 members of the Artisans Union and the 1,160 members of the Transport Union came out on strike as planned on 9 February and were joined unofficially by workers in Freetown and other parts of the provinces. Working behind the scenes, politicians made desperate efforts to undermine the protest action. On the second day of the stoppage, Grant wrote to Siaka Stevens that 'certain ministers had been trying to undermine the strike through tribal rulers'.³ On the third day of the strike, however, riots, looting, and running street battles with security personnel occurred. There were several casualties among civilians and the security forces (see Table 2.7). The homes of three cabinet ministers, Siaka Stevens, M. S. Mustapha, and Albert Margai, were ransacked and looted.⁴ Shaken by the violence and stunned by the determination and vehemence of the strikers, Grant and Georgestone agreed to call off the stoppage after consultations with their advisers, several politicians, and prominent citizens. Stevens immediately announced the setting up of a conciliation committee to resolve the deadlock.⁵

1 Ibid.

2 Ibid., p.6 and Appendix N.

3 Ibid., p.7.

4 Ibid., p.8.

5 Ibid., p.9.

Meanwhile the Board of Inquiry under Mr. R. B. Marke had reported to the Ministry of Labour. The Board concluded that there were three reasons for the initial deadlock. It agreed that there was a necessity for a substantial increase in wage rates as a result of the fall in the value of real wages. It criticised the Labour Department for having failed to undertake a cost of living survey in recent years, or to conduct adequate research on the reaction of ordinary workers to rising prices. The report also pointed out that, under the existing legislation, the decision to go to arbitration was, contrary to the widespread supposition, a voluntary one and not a legal requirement.¹ The Marke Report has never been published. In a press statement of 18 February, the government explained that since a commission of inquiry was being appointed which would include within its terms of reference the same questions as the Board of Inquiry had considered, its report would not be published 'since to do so would pre-judge part of the report of the major commission'.²

At the conciliation committee, agreement could not be reached. Grant and Georgestone therefore opted not to pursue their claims but to wait until the cost of living survey had been undertaken. The employers however agreed to pay an ex-gratia award of 6d. per diem, 'which will continue to be paid unless or until superceded by a larger increase following the review of the cost of living'.³

1 The Marke Report, p.19.

2 'Chronological Summary of Events...', p.10; on 10 July 1980, this researcher showed Marcus Grant a copy of The Marke Report which had been obtained from the Sierra Leone National Archive at Fourah Bay College. Grant, who had never seen it but had all along rightly believed that the report was broadly supportive of his case, was visibly moved, and exclaimed, 'after 25 years!'

3 'Chronological Summary of Events...', p.10; see also Appendix AA.

TABLE 2.7

1955 strike casualties

	KILLED	WOUNDED
Army	-	-
Police	1	61
Civilians	17	60
TOTAL	18	121

SOURCE: The Shaw Report, p.32.

A Cambridge University economist, Mr. Reddaway, was flown out to Freetown to carry out the survey which was published as a 'movement of retail prices'. A joint session of the two JICs was convened on 17 June 1955 at which agreement was reached for an award of 1s. per diem to be back-dated to 1 February.¹ The government had earlier rescinded its decisions that all strikers in its employ were to lose their gratuity, pensions, and other benefits.²

The commission of inquiry under Sir John Shaw, a senior official at Whitehall, began its sittings in March 1955 and reported in May. The commission acknowledged that 'there is no question that there has been an increase in the cost of living', and noted the 'widespread dissatisfaction with the official cost of living index'.³ Nevertheless,

1 Sierra Leone, Annual Report of the Labour Department 1955, pp.9-10.

2 The Shaw Report, p.41.

3 Ibid, p.7.

dismissing the arguments of Grant and Georgestone against going to arbitration, the commission blamed them for intransigence and lack of good faith:

'...it is tragic that within the youthful trade union movement in Sierra Leone, so much authority should be concentrated in the hands of a man as ambitious, unscrupulous, and worthless as Marcus Grant. So long as he remains where he is the interests of the workers, and incidentally of the community at large will not be well served. No doubt there are good and potentially good trade union leaders in Sierra Leone. Some of them we saw and heard...While we do not exonerate Georgestone altogether, we do not attribute to him a major share of the responsibility of the strike and its consequences. Indeed, we do not exclude him from the number of potentially good trade union leaders.'¹

Both Grant and Georgestone have said that the report was a 'whitewash' of the real facts of the situation.² There is no doubt that the rank and file of both unions were solidly behind the leadership, and indeed precipitated the crisis. Representatives of the Labour Department were invited to a meeting of the Artisan Union at which the report was discussed, and, according to the Department, 'no doubt should be left in anybody's mind that the report was very bitterly received, and the workers strongly resented its contents and recommendations. The overcrowded and excited audience would not accept the adverse criticism contained in the report of their leader, Mr. Marcus Grant, and enthusiastically moved a unanimous vote of confidence in him'.³

The report also considered the violence which had occurred during

1 Ibid, p.48.

2 Interview with Marcus Grant, 16 January 1980; interview with H. N. Georgestone, 23 January 1980.

3 Department of Labour Annual Report, 1955, p.9.

the riots. Regarding the use of firearms by the security forces after an emergency had been declared, it contended, perhaps insensitively, that 'responsibility for the consequence, fatal or otherwise of these savage riots rests with those who instigated, organised and participated in them; it does not rest with the police to whom the law abiding citizens of Freetown owe a debt of gratitude.'¹

The strike was significant for several reasons. As an essentially economic response to declining real wages, it demonstrated the determination of lower paid workers to defend their standard of living. It served notice to the African heirs of state power from the British that workers reserved the right to defend their interests as they perceived them. Unlike the railway strikes of 1919 and 1926 and the crisis associated with the activities of the Youth League in which nationalist sentiments played some considerable part in fuelling the furore, the 1955 strike was primarily a protest against the straight-jacket into which the new institutions of collective bargaining had constrained wage negotiations. After the introduction of Wages Boards and the JICs, it had become the custom and practice for wage settlements reached at the two JICs for artisans and transport workers to be taken as the minimum wage rates for skilled and unskilled workers throughout the country. The JICs being 'wage leaders' in this respect, explains the profound interest of lower paid workers not employed as artisans or in the transport industry in the negotiations preceding the strike, and the spontaneity with which they joined (against the advice of the leaders of their unions) in the action.² The events of February 1955 therefore exposed the

1 The Shaw Report, p.35.

2 Interview with Pa Hamilton, 31 March 1982; interview with C. A. Wilton During (shop steward of the Clerical and Mercantile Workers' Union at the French firm, Societe Compagnie Afrique

conservatism and detachment of the majority of union leaders whose cooperative posture had been responsible for the failure of wages to keep pace with the cost of living.¹ Anxious to preserve their newly found 'respectability', the trade union leadership (most of whom had come to prominence by being Youth League activists) had worked assiduously to maintain industrial peace during the decade following the end of the war.

Arguably, the strike was also a demonstration of resentment at the evident and increasing prosperity of cabinet ministers and senior civil servants. It is significant that the homes of three ministers were singled out for attack during the disturbances:

'An ugly feature of the events on the 11th February was the attack on the houses of certain Ministers which took place in the early evening of that day. In point of time the first house to be attacked was that of the Honourable Siaka Stevens the Minister of Lands, Mines, and Labour. At about 4 p.m. two small crowds moved along Fort Street breaking lamps and stoning houses. They passed No. 33, the Minister's house, but on reaching the end joined forces. There was evidence which we accept that one man then pointed out the Minister's house and they returned and singled it out for concentrated stoning. Some penetrated into the compound and subsequently stole from the compound some personal belongings which the family had collected to take to a neighbour's house where they sought refuge... At about 5 p.m. a large crowd of about 100 attacked the house in Third Street of the Honourable Sanusi Mustapha, the Minister of Works and Transport, with sticks and stones. On their way to the house they were overheard that they would kill the Minister if he could

Occidentale, SCOA, during the strike), 13 April 1982.

1 At the time of the strike, the Railway Workers' Union was trying to organise dock workers at the new quay. This was aborted when the workers realised that the union leadership, including D. A. Lottman who was also president of the national union centre, the Council of Labour, were vehemently opposed to the strike. (Interview with Pa Hamilton, 31 March 1982).

be got at. When told he was not there, the crowd ultimately moved off announcing that they were going to the house of 'Minister Margai'...Later, between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m., a crowd advanced down Bathurst Street from Pademba Road and proceeded to stone the house of the Honourable A. M. Margai, the Minister of Education, in Westmoreland Street. All the windows were broken.¹

That strike action was undertaken to secure increases in real wages which had been 'squeezed' at the institutions of collective bargaining during the post-war years is beyond dispute. It is also very clear, however, that lower paid workers resented the prosperity of prominent politicians, some of whom had been known only a few years before to be men of very moderate means but could now be distinguished by conspicuous display of the symbols and paraphernalia of increased wealth and status. Nonetheless, the sociological processes (even then only gradually unfolding) underlying the articulation of political interests at the national level during this period of decolonisation (and also indeed in the post-colonial state), suggest that lower paid workers (and peasants) would take action to defend their economic interests, and at the same time identify with

1 The Shaw Report, p.31; that Marcus Grant was personally blamed for the violence during the strike by the commission is a travesty of grotesque proportions. The commission not only failed to perceive the changing social structure in Sierra Leone - stemming from the expansion of wage employment in the urban areas (cf. Chapter 1), and the expansion of commercial agricultural production in the rural areas - but also failed to understand, or view with any sympathy, the aspirations towards a reasonable standard of living among urban wage earners or the peasantry. As such, the commission could not anticipate the peasant riots which occurred a year later in November 1956, when peasant farmers in several parts of the country, but more particularly in the northern province, engaged in riots during which the homes of chiefs and public buildings were damaged. The immediate cause of the riot was the decision of the Ministry of Local Government headed by Albert Margai to increase taxation of peasant farmers. This, coupled with the regular extortionate demands of some chiefs and other local 'big men', spurred the peasants to riot. (Cf. Report of the Commissioners of Enquiry into the Conduct of Certain Chiefs and Government's Statement Thereon, Freetown n.d., circa 1957).

their respective communal groups in political (or electoral) competition. Herein lies an apparent contradiction between the manifestation by lower paid workers of resentment at the inequities of the mode of appropriation and distribution of social wealth, and their contribution to the maintenance, even reinforcement, of the conditions upon which neo-patrimonial political leadership thrives, and from which they (as a group) are not even significant beneficiaries. This contradiction is clearly evident from analysis of the general elections of 1957 when they neglected a convincing Labour Party alternative.

Six political parties contested the 1957 elections from which the ruling SLPP emerged the winner. While the unrest in Freetown and other centres of relatively large-scale wage employment, and in the countryside during the last two years of Dr. Margai's first administration of 1951-57, might have suggested that the ruling party would receive a battering at the polls, the SLPP was in fact able to increase its majority.¹ The SLPP fielded candidates in 38 of the 39 constituencies, winning 25 seats including 9 in the Freetown area. The opposition NCSL which did not in any case stand a chance in the provinces, fielded only ten candidates in the Freetown area, all of whom were unsuccessful. The United People's Party (UPP) which drew its leadership from Krio and provincial elites, but of a more 'radical' orientation, especially on the question of imperialism, and included Wallace-Johnson among its leadership, fielded 13 candidates in Freetown and the provinces, five of whom were successful including two in provincial constituencies. The Kono Progressive Movement (KPM),

1 Cf. D. J. R. Scott, 'The Sierra Leone Election of May 1957', in W. J. M. Mackenzie and K. Robinson, (eds.), Five Elections in Africa, Oxford, 1960, pp.181-182. The rest of this account of the election results is taken from this study.

a party confined to the diamond-rich Kono district, and whose leadership resented the collaboration of some members of the Kono elite in the exploitation of this resource from which ordinary Konos had not derived much benefit, won one of the two Kono seats it contested.¹ The Sierra Leone Independence Movement (SLIM), under the leadership of Edward Blyden III (a descendant of the nineteenth-century luminary bearing the same name) which purported to be a nationalist party, lost all four of the Freetown seats it contested. The Labour Party, which had Marcus Grant among a leadership, mainly of Krio lawyers and intellectuals, and which professed a reformist socialist ideology, lost all six Freetown seats contested. Eight 'independent' candidates won seats in various parts of the country. In nearly all the cases, these candidates were members of local influential families.

There are several reasons for the SLPP's success.² Exploiting its advantage of incumbency to the full, the SLPP was able to present a convincing image of its own inevitable victory to an enlarged but still restricted franchise.³ Only this party had the resources to field candidates in a majority of the constituencies. By drawing upon its patronage relations with a network of local 'big men' in various parts of the country, the SLPP was able to mobilise support

1 Cf. V. Minikin, 'Local Level Politics in Kono District, Sierra Leone, 1945-70'.

2 This account of the reasons for the SLPP's success is greatly indebted to William Fitzjohn's autobiography, Ambassador of Christ and Caesar, which is perhaps the only memoir that has been written by a post-war Sierra Leonean politician. Other literature on politics in Sierra Leone, particularly the works of Kilson and Cartwright, have also been useful.

3 Property qualifications were removed but the entry to the franchise confined to adult males who had previously not had the vote. (Cf. D. J. R. Scott, 'The Sierra Leone Election of May 1957').

as the party which had a truly national following, and therefore contributed most to 'nation-building'. It campaigned on the theme of 'one country, one people', this slogan - easily translated into other Sierra Leonean languages - having been adopted as its motto. This particularly impressed the British administrators supervising the devolution of power. The SLPP, however, was neither a mass party, nor did its leadership espouse populist causes. It presented itself as the party which can maintain law and order. 'Dr. Margai made speeches saying that his government had taken a tough stance during the strike and provincial riots and that he has shown the British that the black man can rule himself'.¹ During the campaign, the SLPP leadership dismissed the other parties as not having a comparable wide base of support.² The NCSL was derided as the 'Krio man party'; the UPP as a party of agitators; and the Labour Party as a party with an irresponsible leadership. SLIM and the KPM were thought to be too small to warrant much attention.³ At the constituencies, SLPP candidates, in most cases 'sons of the soil', openly appealed to ethnic loyalties and at the same time presented an image of the party as being best placed to look after the 'national interest'. Thus the SLPP won the 1957 elections by being able to demonstrate convincingly that it could win, and by mobilising communal support through its network of clientele at the local level. The mobilisation

1 Interview with Marcus Grant (himself a candidate of the Labour Party at the elections), 10 February 1982.

2 When these elections were discussed with dock workers who had voted in '57, most said that they voted for the SLPP because 'nar the party dat wey bin dae for all man' (it was the party of all sections of the country). Informal conversations with Dock workers, February 1982.

3 Interview with Marcus Grant, 10 February 1982.

of support along such lines cuts across what might be termed 'objective class interests'. Marcus Grant correctly perceives this as the reason for the rapid evaporation of the idealism behind the formation of the Labour Party and its subsequent demise (and the lost deposits) at the elections.¹

In spite of the manifestations of a fairly developed proletarian consciousness by Freetown and other wage earners in Sierra Leone in 1955, this could not find expression in the form of a party which stood little chance of winning. Thus the post-colonial pattern of political competition which is quite literally a struggle (and more often than not, a violent struggle) for access to the resources of the state and the institutions of state power, which, in turn, are used to maintain the system of patron clientelism, became established during the period of decolonisation.² In the years that lay ahead, the resilience of neo-patrimonial leadership - in particular its ability to survive periodical manifestations of factionalism by cliques close to the leader, and its ability to renew and extend the network of clientele - was to have severe repercussions on the efficiency of management of the public sector, and on efforts at economic development. For lower paid workers in the urban areas in

1 Ibid; but it should also be noted that the proportion of urban inhabitants employed as wage earners in Sierra Leone is relatively small.

2 Arguably, all political and electoral competition is a struggle for access to the resources of the state and the institutions of state power. The crucial point of distinction here is that a victorious party in a western democracy for example, is accountable (in the accountant's sense of the word) for its custody and use of the resources of the state. Under a neo-patrimonial regime, institutionalised means of accountability can be shown to have been fragile, and moreover, access to the state is used primarily to maintain the system of patron-clientelism. As such, the legitimacy of a neo-patrimonial regime is tenuous in a way the legitimacy of a government in a Western democracy is not.

general, and public enterprise in particular, patron-clientelism has become one of two channels that could be used to effect improvement in their living standards. The other has been aggressive bargaining at the work place through their trade union organisations. These two strategies are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, they will be shown to have been complementary in this study. Modern trade unionism in Sierra Leone has therefore evolved over the years to be accommodated within a political context of neo-patrimonial leadership.

SECTION 2

THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND ECONOMIC OPERATIONS OF THE PORT ORGANISATION
IN THE COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL STATES

CHAPTER 3

The development of a small-sized modern port in Freetown: The port organisation as a semi-autonomous public enterprise 1954-65

In May 1954, Deep Water Quay, providing berthing facilities for ocean going vessels and modern cargo handling installations, was officially opened. Significantly perhaps, the 'M. V. Aureol', a 'mail boat' taking its name from the beautiful mountain peak overlooking the port, and belonging to the fleet of Elder Dempster - the shipping organisation which had dominated the West African trade - was chosen as the ship to be berthed alongside the quay at the official opening.¹ The provision of modern port facilities had been made possible by the gradual change in policy at the Colonial Office at Whitehall towards investment in capital formation in the colonies which began in the late 'twenties, and received added stimulus from the Keynesian revolution in economic thought during the inter-war years. The colonial authorities however, still cautious, and still reluctant to extend the public sector, continued to utilise existing administrative apparatus - the Railway Administration - to supervise the management of the new port. The ethos of strict bureaucratic accountability in the practice of British colonial administration was to be maintained. A report commissioned by the authorities on the organisation of the quay had recommended that:

'....the quay and its ancilliary facilities should be placed under and operated by one centrally controlled organisation. It must be managed on business lines...'²

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- 1 Ocean Transport Archives 740/1, 'Queen Elizabeth II Quay, Freetown', Sea, Journal of Elder Dempster Lines Ltd., Vol I, No 2, July 1954. The new quay was officially named 'Queen Elizabeth II Quay', but is more popularly known in Sierra Leone as 'Deep Water Quay'.
 - 2 Sierra Leone, Sessional Paper No 1 of 1946, Report of a Committee on Proposals to Build a Deep Water Quay at Freetown, p.5.

This chapter examines the performance of the port organisation as a semi-autonomous public enterprise between 1954 and 1965, when a fully autonomous public corporation was created by an indigenous government. It begins by discussing the administrative and organisational structure that emerged to provide the modern port services before going on to discuss the economic and commercial policy adopted by the port management. A third section examines the reactions of lower paid workers to their employment by the port organisation.

The provision of modern port services

A year before the opening of the new quay, a port manager was appointed to head the Port Management Department (as the port organisation was known) which had been created at the end of the war as a branch of the Railway Administration. He was E. P. C. Gillespie, who arrived in Freetown in March 1953. Some of the longer serving dock workers remember Gillespie as a cherry-red-faced Englishman who, during a tour lasting seven years, master minded the transition of the port from little more than a river roadstead to a small-sized modern organisation. A retired corporation secretary who had worked with Gillespie as a clerical assistant remembered him as personable, eloquent, versed in matters pertaining to port economics, and a competent administrator.¹ At the new quay, the Port Management Department was to be responsible for a system of master-porterage (receiving cargo at ship's tackle and delivery to consignees, and vice versa), while the shipping companies and agents continued to be responsible for stevedoring (or the handling of cargo on board the ship itself) and lighterage (the removal of cargo from ship anchored at mid-stream to shore). The Railway

1 Interview with M. B. Bennett, 14 January 1980.

Administration provided maintenance and managerial services. Ministerial responsibility for the port resided in the Department of Works and Transport which was first created in 1951 at the beginning of the Margai ministry of 1951-57 (cf. Diagram 3.1). The labour used in cargo handling was provided by the port labour pool administered by the Labour Department (cf. Chapter 1). It was from this pool that the shipping companies and the Port Management Department drew stevedore and dock labour respectively.

Gillespie recognised that the provision of berthing facilities at the new quay should be matched by an efficient system of cargo handling which would facilitate the speedy turn round of ships. He further recognised that the easy approach to the harbour provided by the estuary of the Rokel could be exploited if shipping traffic along the coast could be encouraged to call at Freetown to take bunkers, water and other provisions, in much the same way as Las Palmas in the Canaries had become a major fuelling station for shipping traffic on the Atlantic side of the African Coast.¹ In sum, Gillespie aimed to provide varied and efficient services at the port, while adopting a commercial policy that would enable the Port Management Department to cover its operating costs. The evidence at the port archive suggests that the administration of the port during these early years was based on three principles, viz: first, the formulation of port policy was to be the preserve of the department; second, in a labour-intensive industry such as cargo handling, effective control was to be maintained over the labour force; and third, a variety of services were to be offered at the port.

1 Ibid.

One of the first decisions taken by Gillespie after his appointment as port manager was to recommend the 'watering down' of the status of the Port Advisory Committee (cf. Chapter 1) which had since the war-time emergency become the main forum for the formulation of port policy. While recognising the need for a forum at which port users could make representations vis a vis port services, Gillespie, realising that the interest of the users and the Port Management Department were not congruent, sought to reduce its influence on policy matters. In a memorandum to the General Manager of the Railway Administration, the port manager argued his case forcibly:

'Now that the quay is nearing completion and the organisation required for its operation and the master portorage system is being finalised, it is considered that the status and functions of the Port Advisory Committee should be reviewed... Much of the time of the committee had been taken up in the past with...operating and maintenance matters as the inevitable result of the lack of central management of port operations and in consequence as the only coordinating body concerned, the Committee has appeared, perhaps, to have been usurping normal departmental functions. This situation will not obtain with the establishment of the Port Management organisation at the Queen Elizabeth II Quay, when all such matters can be resolved directly by the port manager with consultation as necessary with the Port Authority.'¹

In the same memorandum, Gillespie outlined a new role for the committee as a 'consumer association':

'It is however essential that the Port advisory body should assist in the framing of port regulations and charges, review port estimates and expenditure, and generally advise on matters concerning the efficiency of the port.'²

1 Port Authority Archive, Port Manager to General Manager Railway Administration, 9 December 1953.

2 Ibid.

Shortly before the opening of the quay, the terms of reference of the committee were redefined and the Port Management Department assumed full responsibility for the formulation of port policy. Gillespie's decision to reduce the influence of the committee was timely. Within a few years, port users had begun to protest against the increases in tariffs and other charges arising out of the department's periodic review. Nonetheless, a distinctive feature of the port organisation prior to the formation of a fully autonomous public corporation was that it was fully accountable to the major consumers of port services in addition to being accountable to the General Manager Railway, as Port Authority, and through that office, the Ministry of Works and Communications. These separate channels of accountability to consumers and to the civil bureaucracy were not, as we shall see, maintained in the post-1965 port organisation.

A second principle evident in the early years of the Port Management Department was concerned with the measures taken to secure the effective regulation and control of the work force. Gillespie recognised that in a labour intensive industry such as cargo handling, a considerable proportion of operating costs could be constituted by wages and other benefits. Accordingly, he chose to make extensive use of the casual labour system under which stevedore and shore cargo handling labourers were drawn from the labour pool administered by the Labour Department. These labourers received no benefits and were paid strictly for the number of hours worked. This same principle was extended to the 'white collar' workers, that is to say, the large number of clerks engaged in the processing of documents related to the movement of cargo. They were paid on a daily basis and were denied the benefits associated with security of employment:

'The Port Manager pointed out that Government did not favour the use of directly employed

labour as such employees might well come to regard themselves as permanently Government employed and press for leave, pension, and other benefits in line with other government departments.¹

Furthermore, Gillespie sought to introduce the partial mechanisation of cargo handling. This involved the palletisation of cargo and the use of fork-lift trucks and electric platform trucks to move relatively large quantities. He recognised that the introduction of mechanisation would reduce the number of labourers required, but eloquently argued that economy and efficiency would be achieved:

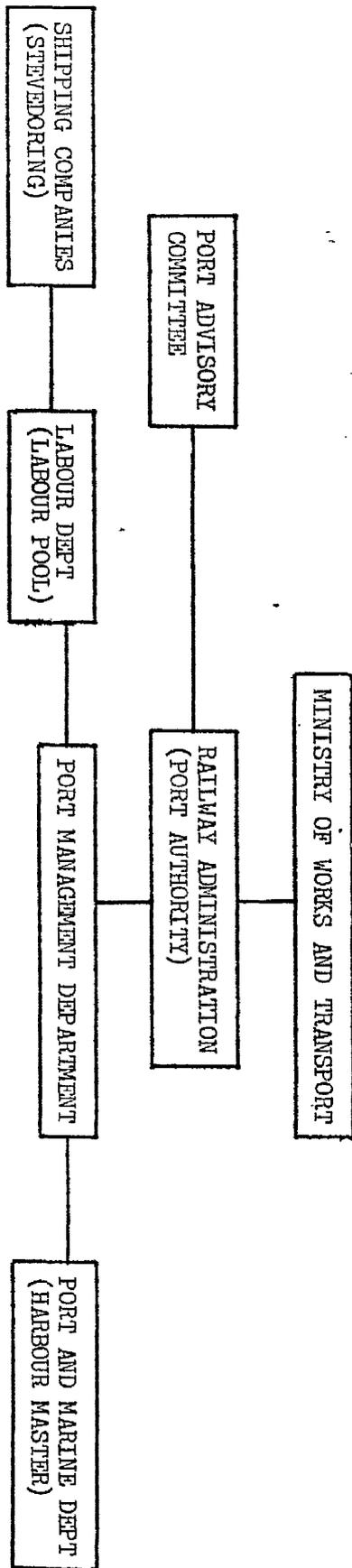
'It may perhaps be argued that the introduction of mechanised handling will result in unemployment consequent upon the reduced labour force required, but it is submitted that in view of the general economic situation in Sierra Leone, it is imperative that maximum efficiency is achieved with lowest possible costs. In the event, the introduction of mechanical appliances will enable a smaller force of relatively skilled technicians to be created, trained in modern operating methods, to replace the present large numbers of casual labourers with only very limited knowledge of safe working methods. Redundant labour can in any case be more usefully diverted to productive employment in the provinces and the various development projects.'²

In the event mechanised handling was introduced; road building and other development projects never absorbed dock workers since competition for jobs in these sectors was extremely keen. The hardship that resulted was however mitigated by an increasing tonnage of cargo handled at the port, so that the number of placings made by the labour pool in fact increased over this period. (cf. Tables 3.1 and 3.2). Nonetheless, the strategies of labour control adopted by the department, and in particular the widespread use of the casual

1 Port Authority Archive, Port Manager to Permanent Secretary Ministry of Works and Communications, 21 May 1953.

2 Port Authority Archive, Port Manager to General Manager Railway, 8 February 1954.

DIAGRAM 3.1. THE ORGANISATION OF THE PORT IN 1954.



and daily wage systems, helped to increase the solidarity of dock workers. It was during this period, that the 'white collar' dockers, denied the benefits enjoyed by their counterparts in other government departments became radicalised. It was this group of workers that master-minded the formation of the Dock Workers' Union in 1963 which also embraced the shore cargo-handling labourers. These developments are discussed in Chapter 6.

The third principle which characterised these early years was the provision of a variety of port services. Facilities for ships to take oil bunkers and water were created. In view of the fact that only three large ships could be berthed at the 1200 foot quay at any one time, it was arranged for the provision of lighterage services to be taken from the shipping companies. Suggestions were made to government for the possible extension of the quay. Facilities for limited repair to ships were provided by the Port and Marine Department under the Harbour Master. During the Suez Canal crisis of 1957, these services provided at Freetown were greatly in demand by ships forced to take the longer route round the West African Coast to the Cape, the Near East, and the Far East:

'The installation of oil bunkering facilities...in addition to being of considerable advantage to existing port users, in view of the closure of the Suez Canal it is proved of inestimable value to international shipping... Considerable additional revenue has naturally also accrued from these extra bunkering operations.'¹

By this time, the port of Freetown had come a long way from the facilities it possessed during the laissez-faire years before

1 Port Authority Archive, Governor's Annual Address, 25 January 1957; (notes on the activities of the Port Management Department prepared by the Port Manager for the governor's annual review of the work of government at the Legislative Council).

TABLE 3.1

Dock Workers registered and total number of vacancies filled, Port
Harbour Labour Pool[†]

YEAR	NUMBER REGISTERED	NO. OF VACANCIES FILLED
1953	1630	61,986
1954	1628	151,545
1955	2188	208,000
1956	2180	319,300
1957	2192	336,480
1958	N.A.	N.A.
1959	2234	182,721
1960	2278	149,141

[†] Excludes stevedore labourers who were not in the employ of the Port Management Department.

N.A.: Not available (it has not been possible to locate a copy of the 1958 Labour Report).

SOURCE: Sierra Leone, Annual Report of the Labour Department 1953-1957; 1959-1960.

TABLE 3.2

Total freight tonnage handled at Deep Water Quay 1955-1964

YEAR	FREIGHT TONNAGE
1955	326,626
1956	393,933
1957	422,579
1958	495,739
1959-60	371,067
1960-61	403,455
1962	496,393
1963	473,624
1964	487,632

SOURCE: Port Authority Archive, Annual Returns of Tonnage of cargo handled.

World War II. One of the effects of this modernisation was that the Port Authority had full control over port services and the opportunity to adopt a commercial policy to fully exploit the new facilities. The role of the shipping companies was transformed from being providers of port services to being consumers. Indeed this was the expectation of the committee which reported on the organisation of the port in 1946:

'The central operation (of the port).... ensures that a shipping firm does not obtain a monopoly in handling cargo and is thus able to charge high handling rates which discourage ships other than those owned by the firm in question, thus leading to a monopoly of shipping using the port, and consequently leading to high freight charges on Sierra Leone exports to the detriment of the trade of the country. Only by all operations being conducted by the (port) management can rates on charges be kept to a minimum and the maximum encouragement be given to shipping to use the port.'¹

With the provision of port services in the public sector, the shore operations of foreign shipping firms operating in West Africa were significantly reduced and their company structures rationalised.

In the case of Elder Dempster, Davies has written:

'The net effect of these changes is that Elder Dempster now has little direct business within West Africa, and even its subsidiary companies play a much smaller role than in the pre-war days.'²

1 Sessional Paper No 1 of 1946, Report of a Committee on Proposals to Build a Deep Water Quay at Freetown, p.5.

2 Cf. P. N. Davies, The Trade Makers, p. 364; Dr. Davies elaborated on this point during an interview at Liverpool on 12 February 1981. Since the nationalisation of stevedoring in 1971 (the provision of stevedore services was taken over by the government owned Sierra Leone National Shipping Company; in 1979 responsibility for stevedoring was transferred to the Port Authority - see Chapter 4) the shipping companies now undertake purely agency work in respect of ships owned by their companies. There has also been a tendency for companies to pool their resources by establishing jointly owned agencies, as in the case of the United Africa Company-Palm Line and Ocean Transport-Elder Dempster which set up the Sierra Leone Shipping Agencies in 1965, or for one agency to represent several shipping companies. (Interview with Christian Cole, General Manager Sierra Leone Shipping Agencies, 14 February 1980). Sierra Leone does not own any ocean-going vessels although a brief

Following the opening of the international airport at Lungi across the estuary in 1962, a ferry service was introduced to link the capital and the airport. The initial costs were borne by government while the department was expected to meet the operational costs.¹

The commercial policy of the Port Management department

The commercial policy set out by government for the department was that it must operate as a 'quasi-commercial' organisation. That is to say, the port was expected to pay its way:

'The beginning of the period under review was a continuation of the final planning phase in the change-over of the port of Freetown from a lighterage port with operations performed by private commercial interests to a deep water berth port with all shore handling operations provided by a self-contained quasi-commercial Port Management Branch attached to the Railway Administration under the General Manager, Railway, as Port Authority.'²

As a 'quasi-commercial' organisation, the Port Management Department was expected to meet its operational costs (including depreciation of capital - both the physical port entity as well as the mechanical installations). The port was therefore not expected to make a return to the government on the capital originally invested. Gillespie, the port manager, regarded the £2 million investment in quay construction

foray into international shipping was made in the early 'seventies without much success.

- 1 National Workshop Archive, Draft Gazette Notice, Opening of Freetown-Targrin Vehicle Ferry, January 1962.
- 2 Port Authority Archive, Governor's annual address, 8 October 1954; (notes on the activities of the Port Management Department prepared by the port manager for the governor's annual review of the work of government at the Legislative Council).

as an investment in capital formation with benefits accruing to the whole nation. Thus port policy was not geared towards obtaining adequate returns on the total cost of port operations (i.e. original investment plus depreciation plus operating costs), but the long-term average cost of port operations (i.e. depreciation plus operating costs). In a reply to an inquiry from the Economist Intelligence Unit over port commercial policy, Gillespie made the principle quite clear:

'...Government have accepted in principle the need for the port to be self-accounting with appropriate renewals and betterment funds...'¹

During these early years the principle was fully applied and the expenditure borne by the port in the course of its operations was covered by its revenue (see Table 3.3). However, two problems soon emerged with the policy. First, the authorities began to use the profits from the port to subsidise the Railway Administration of which the department was a branch:

'...to date, earnings in excess of ordinary working expenditure have actually been credited to general revenue and used to reduce the amount of subvention payable annually from general revenue to meet the working expenditure of the Railway.'²

Second, while the whole range of port services actually included the regulation of shipping traffic provided by the Port and Marine Department under the Harbour Master, stevedoring provided by the shipping companies, and storage accommodation in warehouses for which rental was paid to the Customs Department, the Port Management Department had jurisdiction only over shore handling operations and

1 Port Authority Archive, Gillespie to E. E. Pollock, The Economist Intelligence Unit, 23 November 1959.

2 Ibid.

lighterage:

'As I feel sure you will agree, comparison of merely Port Management revenue and expenditure figures fails of course to give a complete picture of the economics of port working here and it is essential that both the marine and shore working be included in one single port account if a properly balanced statement of overall working is to be seen. Similarly, items such as Queens Warehouse rent at present credited to Customs revenue should properly accrue to port revenue...'¹

Since port operations were not fully integrated, there was a 'leakage' of revenue away from the department, quite apart from the deliberate policy of the authorities of subsidising the railway out of revenue accrued by the department. On the other hand, management and maintenance services were provided by the Railway Administration and no direct charge made to the department. On the formation of a public corporation in 1965, all these services were integrated with the exception of stevedoring, which continued to be provided by the shipping companies until it was nationalised in 1971. During these early years therefore, the Port Management Department had a narrower range of services than later, from which it could derive its revenue. Furthermore, the decisions taken by the department to provide a lighterage service (to reduce the possibility of congestion at the relatively short 1200 foot quay) financed by a £100,000 loan from the Produce Marketing Board,² and to mechanise cargo handling, imposed a considerable burden on its finances. In addition, the department, like all other employers, was forced to grant wage increases following the

1 Ibid.

2 Port Authority Archive, Memorandum by the Minister of Works and Transport and (by) the Financial Secretary (a document on the financing of the port lighterage service presented to the Executive Council) 27 July 1954.

1955 strike. Salaries of more senior government officials were increased following a special review by the Gorsuch Committee which reported in 1957. These additional items of expenditure were successfully passed on to the consumers of port services through increased tariffs and a special levy, known as Quay Dues. At the Port Advisory Committee, the consumers attempted to resist the extra levy but the monopoly position of the department made it a fait accompli. The port manager as usual, however, was eloquent in his defence of the increased charges:

'He (the port manager) realised of course that the imposition of additional dues at the present juncture would hardly be welcomed by the shipping companies, but it was imperative that the port should be economically self-supporting if it was to retain its present virtual autonomy which was to the overall benefit of all port users. The port manager went on to explain the necessity for increasing the revenue of the port. Many factors had influenced the decision to impose Quay Dues such as the recent major wage awards to manual grades coupled with major increases to salaried staff consequent upon the Gorsuch Report; increased material costs. These coupled with the necessity for the port to operate as a self-supporting economic venture on strictly commercial lines, i.e., earnings needing to cover loan interest and redemption charges in addition to working expenditure including renewal contributions together with some provision for betterment, were such as to demand a complete re-assessment of existing rates.'¹

During these early years of its operation as a semi-autonomous public enterprise, the Port Management Department successfully introduced modern port services while operating along 'quasi-commercial' lines. The narrower range of services over which it had jurisdiction, stemming from the limited integration of these services, and the

1 Port Authority Archive, Minutes of the Port Advisory Committee, 13 August 1958.

TABLE 3.3

Port Management Department revenue and expenditure 1955-64

YEAR	REVENUE			EXPENDITURE		
	£	s	d	£	s	d
1955	310,346.	15.	1	205,871.	16.	6
1956	385,284.	6.	4	281,144.	18.	7
1957	465,793.	5.	3	354,132.	10.	9
1958	478,586.	10.	5	366,112.	2.	9
1959-60	486,697.	4.	5	351,333.	14.	4
1960-1	532,894.	12.	10	344,837.	13.	4
1962 ⁽¹⁾	Le1,078,527			Le850,206		
1963	Le1,045,622			Le811,019		
1964	Le1,071,585			Le861,321		

- (1) Figures for 1962-64 are given in Leones, the national currency. Le2 = £1 Sterling, a fixed rate of exchange until 1977, when the Leone was 'floated' and now fluctuates (officially) between Le2.15 and Le2.50 to £1 Sterling.

SOURCE: Port Authority Archive: Annual Financial Statements.

policy of subsidising the railway, made port revenues much lower than they otherwise would have been. Faced with these constraints, the department adopted an illiberal policy regarding wages and benefits of its employees, the majority of whom were employed on a daily wage and casual basis (see Table 3.4).

The reaction of dock workers to their employment by the Port Management Department: the failure of the Works Committee

Between 1959 and 1963, a Works Committee functioned at the department. A creation of the management, it was an attempt to provide a forum for continuous dialogue with workers on the routine and mundane issues relating to the performance of any large organisation (e.g. time-keeping, grievances, or productivity). As a result of the chequered history of the organisational evolution of the port (c.f. Chapter 1), at the time of the centralisation of the management of the port and the centralisation of the employment of dock labour, there was no trade union into which dock workers in the employ of the department were organised. A small proportion of workers among the artisan grades (deployed to the port to undertake civil and mechanical maintenance work by the Railway Administration), had been members of the Railway Workers' Union, but these withdrew their membership in protest at the failure of the leadership of the union to support the 1955 strike.¹ Another small group were members of the Artisans' Union.² Since stevedoring had not been integrated with the other functions of the department and continued to be undertaken by the shipping

1 Interview with Pa Karanke Limba 28 February 1980; aged about 63, Pa Karanke had forty years behind him as a docker, and had been a member of the Works Committee. Gifted with a keen memory and great sensitivity in his perception of issues and events, as well as a great sense of humour, Pa Karanke offered a friendship which was of great value to the researcher.

2 Ibid.

companies, the Maritime and Waterfront Workers' Union, into which these workers were organised, operated outside the jurisdiction of the port management. Thus the 1,948 lower paid workers in the employ of the department or deployed by the Railway Administration in 1954 (Table 3.4) were not organised into a central trade union. The Works Committee was therefore designed to fill the vacuum left by the absence of a trade union organisation to represent the dockers. Before examining the working of the committee and its subsequent failure, the impact of the 1955 strike will be discussed.

Wages of shore cargo handlers in the employ of the Port Management Department and of stevedores in the employ of the shipping companies were fixed by a statutory Maritime Wages Board.¹ It was the custom and practice for wage settlements reached at the Transport and Artisan JICs to be taken as the minimum wage rates for skilled workers (and adjusted accordingly for unskilled workers such as port labourers). The fact that these bargaining bodies were 'wage leaders' explains the profound interest of workers throughout the country in the negotiations preceding the 1955 strike. At the Port, officials of the Railway Workers' Union and the Maritime and Waterfront Workers' Union dissociated themselves from the strike (c.f. Chapter 2) and in view of the widespread use of casual labour (and the associated job insecurity among the workers) sufficient dockers remained at work to enable the port to continue to function. Nonetheless, a significant number of dockers picketed the docks, causing much harassment and irritation to the port management. According to a report prepared by the port manager for the authorities:

1 The Laws of Sierra Leone, Cap. 220, 'Wages Boards', p. 1890-1.

TABLE 3.4

Port Management Department work force 1954 and 1962

CATEGORY	1954	1962
Salaried	40 ⁽¹⁾	76 ⁽³⁾
Daily wage	320 ⁽¹⁾	629 ⁽³⁾
Casual	1628 ⁽²⁾	6052 ⁽⁴⁾
Total lower paid	1948	6681

SOURCES

- (1) Port Authority Archive, Governor's Annual Address, 8 October 1954 (Notes prepared by the Port Manager on the activities of the Port for the governor's annual review of the work of the administration at the Legislative Council).
- (2) Sierra Leone, Annual Report of the Labour Department 1954 (excludes stevedores).
- (3) Port Authority Archive, Work Force, March 1962.
- (4) Sierra Leone, Annual Report of the Labour Department 1962 (this figure is the total number of dock labourers and stevedores registered at the labour pool).

'...all staff were warned of the consequence of strike action by government employees and I was satisfied that sufficient men would remain loyal to carry on essential work... Actual damage to port property consisted of broken windows at the labour recruiting centre and in the police box at the Main Gate and the cost of repair amounted to £12.0.0d. Owing to reduced working hours in view of the disorders and the subsequent curfew, delays in the despatch of shipping probably amounted to a further £1,000. There was some loss of revenue to the port as a result of reduced output owing to the state of tension but it is impossible to calculate the amount of loss involved.¹

This experience was instructive to both the port management and the dockers in their employ. The strike demonstrated to the management the damage to the reputation of the port that might result from such action among international shipping companies. This was seen to be critical in view of recent attempts at modernisation and reorganisation, and for the success of the strategy to make Freetown an attractive port of call to shipping traffic on the West African coast.² For the dockers, confidence in the leadership of the Railway and Maritime Unions was shaken and the necessity of a trade union to represent their interest was demonstrated.³ The formation of an independent dock workers' union was a natural consequence, and indeed, the origins of the union have been said to lie in the lessons learnt from the strike.⁴ The management responded by seeking amendment to the existing labour legislation to allow the creation of

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- 1 Port Authority Archive, The strike and subsequent disorders in relation to the port of Freetown, n.d., circa March 1955.
 - 2 Interview with M. B. Bennett, 14 January 1980.
 - 3 Interview with Pa Karanke Limba, 28 February 1980.
 - 4 Interview with Aziz Kassim, 6 March 1982.

an independent JIC for the port industry at which negotiations on wages and working conditions could be undertaken. The introduction of a Works Committee within the Port Management Department, at which representatives of management and of the work force should deliberate issues relating to the work process, was also planned. In his annual Christmas message, the port manager informed workers of these plans:

'In the field of staff and labour relations, arrangements are well advanced for the establishment of a Works Committee to facilitate consultation between management and employees and for the setting up of a single Joint Industrial Council to embrace the whole port industry. It is also planned to obtain the services of an experienced Training Officer to draw up and supervise training schemes for all grades of employees... I am confident that by continuing to work together as a team, we shall succeed in establishing a truly efficient port...'¹

The Works Committee held its first meeting on 27 January 1959.² Its elaborate constitution had been drawn up to give management much control over its deliberations. One clause made this provision:

'No other business than that appearing on the agenda shall be transacted at any meeting unless both sides agree to its introduction.'³

Another clause asserted that:

'Workers' representative shall hold office for a period of one year. At the end of the period, there shall be an election of workers' representatives for the ensuing year. Any representatives leaving the employ of the department or resigning his position shall be replaced by a representative

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- 1 Port Authority Archive, Christmas Message from the port manager, E. P. C. Gillespie, 24 December 1957.
 - 2 Port Authority Archive, Port Management Works Committee, Minutes of Inaugural Meeting, 27 January 1959.
 - 3 Port Authority Archive, Port Management Works Committee, Objects and Constitution, n.d.

of the section concerned. A member of the committee who is unable to attend any meeting is authorised to appoint a deputy from the section he represents.¹

The port management believed that by subjecting workers' representatives to frequent elections, 'agitators' would have little chance of being elected, thus ensuring a predominance of workers with moderate views on the committee.² This requirement, however, was later to have the unintended consequence of nurturing and fostering a democratic shop stewards' movement after a dock workers' union had been formed.

The chairmanship of the committee was to be the preserve of the assistant port manager, as the port manager himself was to be seen to be above bargaining between management and workers. At a rare appearance at the committee, Gillespie made this quite clear:

'The chairman then informed the meeting that he welcomed this opportunity of meeting the members of the Works Committee as although he had been responsible for initiating the machinery for establishing the committee, it had not, as they were aware, been finally established until after his departure on leave. They would appreciate that it would be only on rare occasions such as at present that he would attend such meetings and would normally be represented by the assistant port manager in order that he could deal with points raised by the committee as impartially as possible when they were ultimately referred to him in his official capacity as port manager without being prejudiced by participating in the discussions.'³

In addition to these means of ensuring that the balance of power within the committee remained with management, provisions were made in the constitution for observers to attend meetings and witness

1 Ibid.

2 Interview with M. B. Bennett, 14 January 1980.

3 Port Authority Archive, Minutes of the Port Management Works Committee, 15 June 1959.

agreements:

'Recognised officials of the Maritime and Waterfront Workers' Union and the Labour Department may attend meetings of the Works Committee in an advisory capacity at the request of either side.'¹

Anticipating the formation of a separate Joint Industrial Council for the port industry, the constitution of the committee excluded matters 'covered by any wage negotiating body' from its deliberations.²

A careful study of the minutes of the committee reveals that the workers' side was most concerned with reversing the illiberal employment policies of the port management and, in particular, the widespread use of casual and daily paid labour. At the second meeting of the committee, the question of the absorption of casual workers was raised:

'Arising from a question raised by Mr. Jalloh, the chairman said that employment of tally clerks depends on the work available and it was normal practice all over the world to have casual employees in the shipping industry. Mr. Ross (the chairman) observed that to further increase the number of monthly paid tally and delivery clerks would not be an economic proposition and held the view that it could not be reasonably denied that there were occasions when we were overstaffed in this section. In this connection, the chairman added that immediately before proceeding on leave, the port manager took on about 30 casual employees on a monthly basis. After some further discussion it was agreed by the committee that the following request be made and forwarded to the port manager on his return...that a review be made of the number of permanent clerks. That the port manager give favourable consideration to the absorption to the permanent staff of some of those employees who have served

1 Port Authority Archive, Port Management Works Committee, Objects and Constitution.

2 Ibid.

the port regularly for the past few years.¹

In resisting these demands, the port management argued that 'the Works Committee was not a negotiating body', and the assistant port manager 'read out the relevant portions of the constitution in this connection'.²

When the port manager himself eventually made an appearance at the committee, his tone was evidently condescending:

'He regretted that his first ruling must be that the points raised for discussion at the present meeting were matters outside the competence of the Works Committee and could not therefore be officially discussed in such a body. However, as he appreciated that members of the staff side were as yet inexperienced in the interpretation of the constitution and the correct workings of such bodies as Works Committees, and as it was obvious that some deep concern had given rise to the points raised, he was prepared to hear the viewpoints raised regarding the alleged grievances and would endeavour to satisfy them as far as possible. The staff side accepted this ruling.'³

Such demands persisted at meetings of the committee. An item on the agenda of one meeting was headed: 'Annual absorption has been sadly neglected for the past two years'.⁴ At another meeting, the representative of the drivers was most persistent in his complaints:

'Mr. Alimamy Kamara complained that the platform truck drivers operate expensive equipment, the operation and maintenance of which required some techniques and that it was felt that such drivers should be offered regular employment instead of casual...Mr. Alimamy Kamara stated that the portal crane drivers addressed the

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- 1 Port Authority Archive, Minutes of the Port Management Works Committee, 18 February 1959.
 - 2 Ibid.
 - 3 Port Authority Archive, Minutes of the Port Management Works Committee, 15 June 1959.
 - 4 Port Authority Archive, Minutes of the Port Management Works Committee, 20 October 1960.

former port manager (Gillespie) a letter during 1957 regarding their status and that no reply had been received. The chairman promised to enquire into the matter...Mr. Alimamy Kamara informed the meeting that the Scamell drivers and motor drivers are licensed drivers and that as is practiced in other government departments and local firms, consideration should be given to the award of non-accident bonus to such staff. After full discussion the chairman undertook to represent the matter to the port manager.¹

There is some evidence that the standard of deliberation expected by the expatriate management at the committee was beyond the reach of some of the unskilled workers whose interests were therefore not properly represented. In many cases, sympathetic clerks and artisans discussed their grievances on their behalf.² For instance, casual workers (the greatest proportion of whom were among the shore cargo handling labourers) received no gratuity for long service. On the death of any such worker, their families were therefore not entitled to any claim. The possibility of setting up a 'death benefit trust' for them was raised at one meeting and rejected:

'The port manager explained that the law did not permit him to make such arrangements but it was agreed that in the event of the death of any employee of the department, other than casuals, a list would be circulated headed by senior officers of the department.'³
(The list was for financial contributions).

Shore cargo handling labour were represented on the committee by Pa Karanke who, though handicapped by his illiteracy, found ways to get round the problem:

'Headman Karanke handed the chairman a copy of a letter dated 8th September 1961, addressed to the port manager by the monthly paid headmen (or cargo handling gang foremen) to which no reply had been

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- 1 Port Authority Archive, Minutes of the Port Management Works Committee 10 November 1960.
 - 2 Interview with Pa Karanke, 28 February 1980.
 - 3 Port Authority Archive, Minutes of the Port Management Works

received. The chairman accepted a copy of the letter and promised to investigate.¹

The letter contained a request for an increase in wages and it was eventually decided that this was a matter that should be dealt with by the JIC.²

The management for its part was keen to use the committee to reach a consensus on issues relating to punctuality and productivity.

At one meeting:

'The chairman asked representatives to impress upon all members of their sections that they must come to work on time and not to absent themselves without leave during working hours. This was agreed to... The chairman stressed that overtime should only be worked when absolutely necessary. In this connection, Mr. Terry (representing accounts clerks) observed that the substantive port manager, Mr. Gillespie, had told him and others that there was no limit to overtime being worked. Everybody could work as much overtime as possible as he, Mr. Gillespie, would not increase their basic wages. The chairman said that he could not believe that that was what Mr. Gillespie meant when he authorised certain overtime to be worked. The meeting agreed that unnecessary overtime working and absence during authorised overtime hours should not be allowed. All members promised to bring this home to their sections.'³

By the end of 1962, however, when the committee had been in existence for about four years, the workers' representatives had begun to lose their initial interest, since many issues which they regarded as important were being ruled outside the competence of the committee.⁴ Many of these representatives had begun to warm to the

Committee, 16 December 1960.

- 1 Port Authority Archive, Minutes of the Port Management Works Committee, 17 January 1962.
- 2 Port Authority Archive, Minutes of the Port Management Works Committee, 14 February 1962.
- 3 Port Authority Archive, Minutes of the Port Management Works Committee, 18 February 1959.
- 4 Interview with Pa Karanke, 28 February 1980.

idea of the formation of an independent dock workers' union which was being canvassed by Jack Sandy, Moses Fatoma, and Amadu Jalloh (clerks in the operations section of the department), Alimamy Kamara who had represented drivers and maintenance workers on the committee, and by Pa Karanke.¹ Another view which was widely held was that dock workers in the employ of the department were not effectively represented at the port JIC.² Moreover, in view of the impending expansion of the Port Management Department into a fully autonomous public corporation, it was felt that a strong union organisation ought to complement that development.³ By the end of 1962, Sandy, Fatoma, and others had persuaded most workers at the department of the potential of a dock workers' union. An application for registration and a bargaining certificate was made at the Labour Department. These were granted in May 1963.⁴

Administrative responsibility and accountability within the colonial state: some theoretical conclusions

During the early years of its operation as a semi-autonomous public enterprise, the Port Management Department successfully introduced modern port services while operating along 'quasi-commercial' lines. The narrower range of services over which it had jurisdiction, stemming from the limited integration of these services, and the policy of subsidising the railway, made port revenue much lower than

1 Ibid ; the same point was made during informal conversation with dock workers during both periods of field work.

2 Interview with Aziz Kassim (founder member of the union), 6 March 1982.

3 Interview with Pa Karanke, 28 February 1980.

4 Cf. Labour Department, Annual Report 1963, p.7.

it otherwise would have been. Faced with these constraints, the port management adopted an illiberal policy with regard to wages and benefits of its employees, the majority of whom were employed on a casual or daily paid basis. This 'exploitation' was facilitated by the state of the labour market in Freetown since the end of the war (cf. Chapters 1 and 2), and raises serious questions for theorists who have argued that lower paid workers in the public sector 'live off the fat' created by the peasants and other revenue appropriated by the state. The Port Management Department, however, remained fully accountable to its consumers and to the civil service bureaucracy and there was apparently no suggestion of corrupt practices among its officials. This is not to suggest that Sierra Leoneans (or Africans) are inherently corrupt while the British expatriates were honest and competent administrators. The reductionist (and racist) nature of this argument aside, corruption in Sierra Leone does not originate from the personal characteristics of individuals. It is rather related to political norms which place a lower premium on the accountability of public officials than to the loyalty and continued support of such officials to the regime in the post-colonial state. For most of the period of its existence, the Port Management Department operated within the colonial state in which the rules were made by the colonial authorities. One of the more easily identifiable characteristics of the British colonial administration was its high degree of bureaucratic rigidity. This was the means by which the British effected colonial domination over nearly a quarter of the earth's surface. The tons of documents preserved at the Public Records Office in London - the shrine of the student of aspects of British imperial history - is a lasting monument to the red-tapism of the colonial bureaucratic apparatus with its apex at Whitehall

and spreading out to the local peripheries. In the individual territories the colonial state was therefore founded on the principle of administrative responsibility and accountability. Sierra Leone and the Port Management Department were no exception. The post-colonial state by contrast, while adopting formal procedures of bureaucratic accountability inherited from the British, is founded on a different principle. The pattern of political competition which became established after independence (and indeed even during the years of decolonisation) is quite literally a struggle for access to the resources of the state. The key of understanding this form of political competition is first to understand the role of patronage in the political sociology of neo-patrimonial leadership. In the absence of an indigenous class of wealthy entrepreneurs, access to the apparatus of the state guarantees access to the most important resources for distribution in political competition. Before the withdrawal of the British, access was restricted by the procedures of bureaucratic accountability;¹ after independence (and even during

1 In the House of Commons, a Public Accounts Committee is required to review public expenditure ex post facto. The British instituted similar procedures in the colonies and in Sierra Leone where a Public Accounts Committee of the Legislative Council was created. (Cf. N.A. Cox-Gorge, 'The System of Public Financial Organisation and Control in Sierra Leone', in Bank of Sierra Leone, Economic Review, Vol 5, No 3, 1970, pp.1-11). The 'raw material' of this committee was provided by the annual report of the Auditor-General, a senior treasury official, which like that of the committee is published. After independence, these procedures continued to be faithfully implemented. A Public Accounts Committee of the House of Representatives reviews public expenditure using material provided by the Auditor-General (now a senior official in the Ministry of Finance). Both reports continue to be published. The colonial and post-colonial reports have been compared. These reveal a sharp increase in the incidence and magnitude of financial indiscretions after independence. This trend is more fully discussed in the chapter which follows.

decolonisation) access became relatively unrestricted. In conditions where this form of political competition obtains, the public sector is particularly vulnerable as an instrument of political patronage. This vulnerability of the Port Organisation became increasingly evident after 1965 and contrasts sharply with the period under consideration here when procedures of administrative accountability could not only be identified, but worked the way they were intended to work.

Chapter 4

The port organisation 1965-76: the dynamics of an African public enterprise

On the first of January 1965, the Sierra Leone Port Authority, (SLPA), a statutory public corporation with responsibility for the management of the port, came into being. The need for an autonomous port organisation had been apparent for several years. It had been the view of Port Management Department officials that the loss-making Railway Administration was 'dragging down' the port, and the lack of integration of port services was thought to have denied the central organisation of much-needed revenue. As the government began to contemplate the future of the railway, the department was made independent in April 1962.¹ During the interim period between the separation of the department from the Railway Administration and the beginning of operations by the SLPA, the Harbour Master's department was integrated with Port Management and new sections - accounts, purchasing and stores, civil and mechanical maintenance - were created within the new organisation to provide these services previously provided by the Railway. Although the Ports Act (1964) under which the SLPA was created stipulated that responsibility for stevedoring was to be one of its functions, the shipping companies which had provided this service successfully lobbied to retain it.

This chapter discusses the economic and administrative operations of the SLPA between 1965 and 1976. It begins by reviewing the performance of the parastatal sector in post-colonial Sierra Leone,

1 National Workshop Archive, Memorandum by the Minister of Communications, Establishment of separate port department (part 1); Establishment of a statutory Port Authority (part 2), 20 September 1962.

and assessing its impact on the national economy. The case study of the SLPA is then taken up in the second section, beginning with an examination of the organisation of the new corporation, its economic performance and its procedures for accountability. A third section examines the factors leading to the financial collapse of the corporation in 1976.

The parastatal sector in post-colonial Sierra Leone: an overview

The expansion of the economic activities of the state in many African countries has been encouraged by the need to facilitate development and by the important role accorded to state intervention in this task by fashionable economic theory (Nkrumah's Ghana being the most notable example). In Sierra Leone, on the other hand, there was no dramatic expansion in the economic activities of the state at the time of independence. This was partly because the financial resources available were much more modest, but also because the government of Sir Milton Margai adopted a 'gradualist' market orientated strategy of economic growth manifested in the so-called 'open door policy'.¹ Nonetheless, the importance which the state had assumed (not least by being the largest employer) in social and economic life, put into the hands of the politicians considerable resources (from mining, agriculture, etc.) for appropriation and selective distribution. At the time of Sir Milton's death in April 1964, the frontiers of the parastatal sector were confined to the marketing of commodities (by the Produce Marketing Board, the SLPMB), the marketing of the staple food (by the Rice Corporation), the buying of diamonds from licensed alluvial 'diggers' for polishing and marketing locally and overseas (by the Diamond Corporation, DICOR), the broadcasting

1 Sierra Leone, The Open Door Policy, Freetown, 1961.

services (SLBS), one national newspaper, and the public utilities (Railway Administration, Port Management Department, Guma Valley Water Company, Electricity Corporation, Road Transport Corporation, Post and Telecommunications, Cable and Wireless and Sierra Leone Airways).¹ On the drawing board were plans for the creation of an autonomous Port Authority and a Forest Industries Corporation for the manufacture of furniture from local timber resources. Both corporations came into operation in January 1965. The SLPMB had since the early sixties ventured cautiously into plantation agriculture and the processing of produce. The import substitutive industries were firmly within the private sector where overheads were kept low by the generous provisions of the open door policy. Notice of Sierra Leone's withdrawal from participation in the West African Currency Board had been given and the necessary legislation for the creation of a national central bank had been passed the previous year. (Ghana and Nigeria withdrew their participation in 1957 and 1960 respectively, leaving Sierra Leone and The Gambia as members of the Board). The Bank of Sierra Leone began operations in August 1964. The significance of the formation of a national central bank was that decisions relating to the regulation of money supply could be made locally. Under the regime of the Currency Board, managed by the colonial authorities, changes in the level of money supply strictly depended on changes in the level of income generated by foreign trade. Under the regime of a national central bank, a whole range of fiscal and monetary policies could be employed in deficit financing.²

1 Cf. Bank of Sierra Leone, Documents, October 1966, p.13.

2 Cf. A. B. Taylor, 'The role of financial institutions in the economic development of Sierra Leone', PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 1973, especially Chapters 1 and 2.

Since its first intervention in 1966, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has been a major influence - though it must be emphasised, only one among others - on the setting of objectives and criteria of performance of the parastatal sector in Sierra Leone. This influence has been particularly evident since the mid-seventies when the spiralling cost of imported energy began to be the source of a now chronic trade imbalance. The first intervention of the IMF was necessitated by the rapid expansion of some areas of the parastatal sector after the death of Sir Milton, when his more 'radical' brother, Albert, became prime minister.¹ The rationale of this expansion was ostensibly to diversify the economy and reduce the dependence on the mining sector whose share of the value of income generated by foreign trade had never fallen below 65 per cent during the early 'sixties (cf. Table 4.1).² But it was also an attempt by the new prime minister to consolidate his political base (via the patron-clientelist network of the SLPP) by opening up new areas for the award of contracts and for appointments to positions in the new or expanded organisations. Consequently, the subsidiary activities of the SLPMB in agricultural plantations and processing industries were expanded, and investment made in tourist infrastructure, the expansion of the internal services of Sierra Leone Airways, and other industrial ventures, necessitating considerable expenditure on imported technology and building materials. With export earnings in 1965 falling below the 1964 record level (Table 4.1 again), the expansion of the SLPMB was financed by its accumulated trading surpluses and

1 The style of leadership of the two Margai brothers has been compared by John Cartwright, in Political Leadership in Sierra Leone, 1978. Sir Milton is described as a 'conservative ideologue' and Sir Albert as a 'radical ideologue'.

2 Cf. R. J. Bhatia et al, 'Stabilisation Program in Sierra Leone', IMF Staff Papers, November 1969, pp.504-525, p.504.

TABLE 4.1

Major domestic exports by value (in thousand Leones) 1960-65

EXPORT	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965
Diamonds	32,946	31,938	14,218	32,328	39,828	36,959
Iron ore	8,234	9,346	10,234	9,874	10,354	10,896
Bauxite	-	-	-	64	407	579
Coffee	1,398	1,192	1,618	1,305	2,529	1,347
Kola	300	198	162	158	292	197
Piassava	546	570	490	540	714	437
Ginger	146	162	292	178	326	320
Palm kernels	5,834	4,876	4,904	4,907	4,870	5,681
TOTAL	50,796	49,210	33,420	50,548	60,456	57,318

SOURCE: Bank of Sierra Leone, Documents, October 1966.

the more direct investments by the government were financed partly by external short-term contractors' credit and partly by the increased use of accumulated cash balances and bank credit. The result, however, was a substantial rise in the trade deficit from Le0.6 million at the end of 1964 to a record Le11.6 million at the end of 1965.¹ The total foreign exchange reserves, including those of the Bank of Sierra Leone, declined from Le29.2 million at the end of 1964 to Le17.6 million at the end of 1965 - the equivalent of three months' imports. For the 1966-67 fiscal year, the budget estimates showed a deficit of Le19.3 million. In these estimates, the government budgeted for an increase of almost 100 per cent in its 'development' expenditures.² By this time, the SLPMB, which had committed its liquid assets to long-term projects in agricultural production and processing, was unable to meet its current liabilities to the buying agents. Farmers were issued with 'I owe you' chits for their produce. Moreover, large repayments were falling due and it was anticipated that the trade deficit would deteriorate further. Given the skilful exploitation of the crisis by the opposition APC (which claimed that the government had 'eaten' all the country's money), and with a general election due by May 1967, Sir Albert called in the IMF in mid-1966.

The SLPP, quite understandably perhaps, lacked the political will to implement a policy of economic austerity on the eve of a general election. It was left to the National Reformation Council (NRC), which came to power following the intervention of the military after the election, to implement the stabilisation programme. As a study

1 Ibid, p.505.

2 Ibid.

of the NRC argues, it was in its interest to do so, being 'faced with the harsh economic realities and with a need to strengthen its initial flimsy arguments for intervening'.¹ In return for credits totalling some Le9 millions over a three-year period to help meet the trade deficit, the NRC agreed to undertake significant reforms not only in fiscal and monetary policy, but also in policy relating to the management and organisation of the public sector.² Accordingly, measures to reduce the budget deficit, to increase personal taxation and improve the efficiency of tax collection were implemented. The rate of domestic monetary expansion was made consistent with the realisation of targets relating to the building up of foreign reserves.³ Organisations in the parastatal sector were required to make strict economies which were closely monitored by the IMF representatives and their local counterparts at the Department of Finance. The SLPMB was reorganised and its activities confined to the marketing of produce. Plantations which were assessed not to be viable were closed down resulting in over 2,000 redundancies. A loan of Le4 million was negotiated with a London-based bank to help the Board with its liquidity problems.⁴

When the NRC was ejected from office in April 1968, these measures had begun to make an impact on the economy. The APC which then assumed office had campaigned on a 'radical' programme of economic nationalism

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- 1 Cf. T. Cox, Civil-Military Relations in Sierra Leone, Camb., Mass., 1976, p.179; see also Franklyn Lisk, 'The political economy of Sierra Leone 1961-71, with special reference to the IMF stabilisation programme of 1966-69', PhD thesis, Birmingham University, 1974.
 - 2 R. J. Bhatia et al, p.507.
 - 3 Ibid, p.508-12.
 - 4 Ibid, p.512-13; see the discussion below for an appraisal of how the economies affected the Port Authority.

aimed at assuming control of the 'commanding heights' of the national economy.¹ While Siaka Stevens and his new government felt committed to the continued implementation of the IMF programme for the remaining year, a state-led programme of economic expansion was very much expected. Nonetheless, in his first budget, the APC Minister of Finance was critical of the forays of the SLPP regime into industrial and tourist ventures:

'...under the slogan of industrialisation abuses can flourish. In the past year or two, Government has borne financial losses as a result of the collapse of companies producing processed milk and shoe and rubber products. A construction company in which government has a financial interest has gone bankrupt and we are struggling at present to salvage something from the cement factory and the metal assembly plant. The folly of the Cape Sierra Hotel mocks us every day from Aberdeen Point. We are determined that projects like these should never again be undertaken with government participation, and we shall make it our guiding principle that industrial ventures which have government support shall be undertaken only if it can be demonstrated beyond doubt that they will bring benefits not for a group of unpatriotic politicians, but for the common people of our country.'²

One of the first measures taken by the APC on assuming office was to begin negotiations for the acquisition of a 51 per cent share of the equity in Selection Trust (in return for commensurate compensation) the largest diamond mining concern in the country. A new company, Diamond Mining Company of Sierra Leone (DIMINCO (SL) LTD) was formed in October 1970. The APC was also committed to the reform of banking and insurance practices and to the formation of state-owned financial institutions. Accordingly, legislation was passed requiring the (mainly British) commercial banks and insurance companies to be incorporated

1 APC, Election Manifesto, Freetown, 1967.

2 Sierra Leone, Budget speech delivered by the Hon. Dr. M. S. Forna, Minister of Finance on Monday, 8 July 1968, Freetown, 1968.

in Sierra Leone and to maintain large deposits at the Bank of Sierra Leone.¹ In 1968 a National Development Bank had been formed to extend credit facilities to indigenous businessmen, and this was followed by the formation of a National Cooperative Development Bank and the Sierra Leone Commercial Bank in 1971 and 1973 respectively.² In 1972, a state-owned insurance business, the National Insurance Company, was formed. The rationale for the reform and the establishment of these financial institutions was to increase the scope for the availability of credit to finance indigenous businessmen, the APC having rejected the whole-scale nationalisation of foreign financial institutions. Needless to say, these developments (and the passing of the Non-Citizens Trade and Business Act in 1969)³ have also had the effect of increasing the scope of patronage of the regime. Partly because of the competitive market situation in which these state-owned financial institutions operate, partly because the confidence of the public is an essential ingredient for their continued viability, and given the supervisory role of the Bank of Sierra Leone (in cooperation with the IMF, the African Development Bank, the World Bank and other international financial institutions which have either provided technical expertise

1 Budget speech delivered by the Hon. C. A. Kamara-Taylor, Minister of Finance on June 28, 1971, reproduced in Sierra Leone, 12 years of Economic Achievement and Political Consolidation under the APC and Dr. Siaka Stevens 1968-1980, pp.104-110. This document is an official record of the day-to-day activities of leading members of the APC regime from April 1968 to March 1980.

2 Cf. Budget speeches of 1968; 1971 and 1973, reproduced in ibid.

3 Sierra Leone, Budget speech delivered by the Hon. Dr. M. S. Forna, Minister of Finance on June 25, 1969, Freetown, 1969.

or have provided loans to meet the capital required) each of these businesses have performed relatively satisfactorily. Relatively high standards of accountability and administrative efficiency seem to have been maintained. For instance, the Bank of Sierra Leone, as the banker of the public sector, reported in 1979 that the net profits of the National Insurance Company for the previous year increased by 19 per cent.¹

Two other parastatal organisations, the National Shipping Company and the National Trading Company, created by the APC in 1971² have not shared the success of the financial institutions. The shipping company was established to give the government a foothold in the provision of shipping services to and from Sierra Leone. Being unable to meet the financial commitment required in the purchase and maintenance of vessels and the hiring of experienced manpower, this ambitious project has consequently been considerably modified. Since 1976, the shipping company has operated as a clearing and forwarding agency (in competition with other shipping agencies operating in the private sector). The monopoly over the provision of stevedore services which it has assumed at the time of its formation was transferred to the Port Authority in November 1979 to enable the latter organisation to provide a fully integrated system of cargo handling. The trading company was established to centralise the purchase of imported merchandise and thereby cut out the middle-man role of foreign companies such as Paterson Zochonis (PZ) and the United Africa Company (UAC) group. After only two years of operation, the company faced a cash crisis, having provided extended credit facilities to retailers

1 Bank of Sierra Leone, Annual Report 1979, p.17, Freetown, 1979.

2 Cf. 1971 Budget speech.

typically on the strength of their connections with the ruling party, rather than by traditional business criteria of the assessment of risks. The company was forced to increase mark-ups on its merchandise over which it held monopoly import rights. This contributed to the rising trend in prices (following the substantial increase in the price of imported energy in 1973) and brought protests from the labour movement (see Chapter 7). The government responded by decentralising the importation of merchandise.¹

Under the APC, and in view of the 'conditionality' guidelines of the IMF, the performance of the SLPMB has been, superficially at least, very satisfactory. This of course means, however, that the export agricultural sector has been subjected to considerable exploitation. The Bank of Sierra Leone reported in 1979 that during the previous year the Board purchased 48,943 tons of produce valued at Le46.2 million. Resales by the Board amounted to Le61.9 million suggesting a profit of Le15.7 million.² After the fiasco of 1966-67 when farmers were issued with chits for their produce, the APC has apparently been very cautious with regard to its management of the Board, though the relatively high profit margin suggests that producer prices could be increased. Indeed a recent study of incomes in Sierra Leone suggests that between 1968 and 1977, agricultural taxation on coffee and cocoa has, on an average, been 45.6 per cent and 40 per cent respectively. Taxation on palm kernel during the same period has on an average been 6.3 per cent, this lower figure being due to lower receipts in the export markets in 1972-3 and in 1975-6 (see Table 4.2). As the study concludes,

1 Cf. President's Annual Address to parliament, June 21, 1974, reproduced in 12 Years of Economic Achievement and Political Consolidation under the APC and Dr. Siaka Stevens 1968-80, pp.35-243.

2 Bank of Sierra Leone, Annual Report 1979, p.25.

'nobody in Sierra Leone had one-half, or even one-quarter of his income deducted through any form of (direct) taxes'.¹

Following several years of relatively unsatisfactory performance, the Port Authority, the Electricity Corporation, Post and Telecommunications, and the state-owned hotels were reorganised in the late 'seventies. With the exception of post and telecommunications and some of the hotels, the management of these corporations has been subcontracted to foreign consultants. The Minister of Finance in his 1978 budget speech failed to locate this poor performance in prevailing political practices, bitterly criticising, instead, the management of these corporations:

'...the financial performance of our public corporations has been dismally poor. The budgetary implications of this unhappy situation is of crucial importance and cause for worry in my Ministry. With the exception of the Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Board, which has recorded outstanding successes over the past four years, largely as a result of favourable conditions in the world market for our agricultural exports, all other public corporations have come to rely on government to bail them out of their financial difficulties. Obviously such a state of affairs adds to our budgetary difficulties and contributes to the need for higher levels of taxation. I would underline the point that public corporations are meant to be revenue earners for the central government, not revenue devourers. A large degree of independence is accorded them which, if it were exploited advantageously, should make it much easier to adopt sound business principles and thereby create the conditions necessary for effective performance...Of course...we do not judge their financial performance by the demanding standards of private business. However...

1 Cf. Ensuring Equitable Growth: A Strategy for increasing Employment, Equity and Basic Needs Satisfaction in Sierra Leone (Report to the Government of Sierra Leone by a Jobs and Skills Programme for Africa Employment Advisory Mission) Addis Ababa, 1981, p.290. This document will henceforth be referred to as The JASPA Report.

public corporations were formerly departments from which government derived substantial revenue. The situation now is that such revenue has almost ceased to flow...the bitter truth revealed by the evidence gathered so far is that the vital resources entrusted to public corporations are woefully misused, mismanaged, and misdirected...the chilling revelations of the Report of the Forster Commission of Inquiry into the Sierra Leone Port Authority have forcibly brought home to us the need for stricter measures of control...I would sound a warning here that inefficient managers and those found to misuse resources will have to go. I would hope however that the swift action of government in dismissing the top management of the...Port Authority would serve as a corrective measure...¹

It is evident that the APC has financed its expansion of the parastatal sector by increasing receipts from indirect taxes on commodities, minerals, and merchandise, as well as receipts from foreign aid and loans, and from the system of direct taxation (Table 4.3). The evidence further suggests that while the expansion of the parastatal sector has to some extent been constrained by considerations of profitability and viability, there has been a considerable expansion in general services (the system of public administration) and in education, health and social services (Tables 4.4(a) and 4.4(b)).

It should be clear from this review of the impact of the parastatal sector on the national economy, that Sierra Leone's modest resources can hardly afford to absorb inefficient and unprofitable public corporations riddled with graft and corruption. Consequently there is pressure for reform from the IMF, international institutions of aid and development, and other creditors. In this respect, the parastatal sector in Sierra Leone has been more amenable to reform than their counterparts in Ghana under Nkrumah. Nonetheless, state-

1 Budget speech delivered by the Hon. A. B. Kamara, Minister of Finance, on 30 June 1978 (reproduced in 12 Years of Economic Achievement and Political Consolidation..., pp.445-453).

TABLE 4.2

Price and tax structure for palm kernels, coffee and cocoa, 1968/69 - 1976/77 (Leones per ton)

	1968/69	1970/71	1972/73	1973/74	1974/75	1975/76	1976/77
	(a) <u>Palm Kernel</u>						
Export price	115	120	84	228.43	276.66	134.56	214.73
Buying agents commission	18	13	13.90	13.90	21.50	19.35	21.22
Other charges	17	24.45	23.20	32.36	45.39	42.27	27.52
Parity price	80	82.55	46.90	282.17	212.77	72.94	165.99
Export duty	11.50	12	8.40	22.80	27.93	13.50	21.22
MB profit	3.50	5.55	-26.50	79.93	38.84	-60.56	10.77
Producer price	65	65	65	79.44	146	120	134
Effective tax (%)	18.8	21.3	-38.5	56.4	31.4	-64.5	19.3
Average tax 6.3%							
	(b) <u>Coffee</u>						
Export price	530	640	744	827.51	864.84	1,453.60	4,693.48
Buying agents commission	31	19.50	21.40	19.50	34.20	35.76	70
Other charges	17	28.95	28.70	36.99	52.64	52.11	39.23
Parity price	482	591.55	693.90	771.02	778.00	1,365.73	4,584.27
Export duty	90.10	140.80	208.32	259.60	285.49	576.68	1,867.40
MB profit	78.30	137.15	171.98	63.42	-67.49	72.25	1,104.07
Producer price	313.60	313.60	313.60	448.00	560	716.80	1,612.80
Effective tax (%)	35.0	47.0	54.8	41.9	28.0	47.5	64.8
Average tax 45.6%							

/Continued over.....

TABLE 4.2 continued

	1968/69	1970/71	1972/73	1973/74	1974/75	1975/76	1976/77
	(c) <u>Cocoa</u>						
Export price	713	560	523	1,010.37	1,417.60	1,312.60	2,998.36
Buying agents commission	26.50	19.50	19.50	33.20	39.65	39.65	56.16
Other charges	17	28.95	28.70	36.74	52.34	53.23	39.21
Parity price	669.50	511.55	474.80	940.43	1,325.61	1,219.72	2,902.99
Export duty	185.40	100.80	88.91	382.60	567.01	525.05	1,119.14
MB profit	182.20	97.15	72.29	132.23	86.60	22.47	574.25
Producer price	302.40	313.60	313.60	425.60	672	672.20	1,209.60
Effective tax (%)	54.8	38.7	34.0	54.8	49.3	44.9	58.3
Average tax 40%							

SOURCE: The JASPA Report, p. 289. (Average tax figures have been calculated from figures provided on effective tax).

CENTRAL GOVERNMENT REVENUE

TABLE 4.3 Current Revenue (in thousands of Leones)

Financial Period	INDIRECT TAXES			Total	DIRECT TAXES			Total	OTHER SOURCES ²	GRAND TOTAL	EXPENDITURES ³	SURPLUS(+) DEFICIT(-)
	Import Duties	Export Duties	Excise Duties		Mining Cos.	Other Cos.	Personal					
1969/70	22 698	4 685	9 375	26 758	2 578	8 508	2 426	13 512	6 343	56 613	53 620	+ 2 993
1970/71	19 064	3 714	9 528	32 306	7 233	8 103	2 744	18 080	5 312	55 698	47 979	+ 7 719
1971/72	21 638	3 941	10 580	36 159	1 628	8 158	2 764	12 550	4 797	53 506	52 030	+ 1 476
1972/73	23 095	4 950	10 817	38 862	802	11 558	3 237	15 597	4 639	59 098	63 466	- 4 368
1973/74	30 654	3 564	12 018	51 226	1 159	22 461	3 780	27 400	5 405	84 131	81 096	+ 3 035
1974/75	29 561	8 832	11 828	50 221	4 011	21 690	4 320	30 021	4 800	85 042	96 767	-11 725
1975/76	29 161	9 031	14 400	52 592	2 910	13 478	5 974	22 362	6 280	81 234	101 440	-20 206
1976/77	35 742	21 602	17 449	74 793	1 830	15 080	6 483	23 393	18 618	116 804	128 793	-11 989
1977/78	47 930	23 007	23 007	93 944	1 258	25 411	8 152	34 821	28 401	157 166	148 838	+ 8 328
1978/79	49 949	18 031	25 328	93 308	2 312	28 294	10 920	41 526	38 546	173 380	179 531	- 6 151

SOURCE: Bank of Sierra Leone, Annual Report 1979, p.62.

- 1 Financial year runs from July to June
- 2 Includes miscellaneous and aid receipts
- 3 Central government expenditures

Cos. = Companies

TABLE 4.4(a) Summary of functional distribution of government expenditures 1960/61 - 1968/69 (Le. thousand and per cent)

Year	Total %	General Services ¹ %	Social Services ² %	Economic Services ³ %	Debt Servicing %
1960/61	22,942 100	8,294 36.2	6,521 28.4	6,968 30.4	1,159 5.0
1961/62	26,003 100	9,053 34.8	7,453 28.7	8,254 31.7	1,243 4.7
1962/63	26,825 100	10,006 37.3	8,177 30.5	7,347 27.4	1,295 4.8
1963/64	30,352 100	10,150 33.4	9,039 29.8	9,308 30.7	1,855 6.1
1964/65	33,384 100	11,248 33.7	10,755 32.2	9,090 27.2	2,291 6.9
1965/66	43,172 100	13,702 31.7	14,777 34.2	8,595 19.9	6,096 14.1
1966/67	31,838 100	11,463 36.0	12,124 38.1	6,264 19.7	1,987 6.2
1967/68	39,688 100	11,989 30.2	11,836 29.8	7,140 18.0	8,723 21.9
1968/69	42,923 100	12,467 29.1	11,359 26.2	9,154 21.3	10,213 23.4

SOURCE: Bank of Sierra Leone, Economic Trends, 1976, p.23.

- 1 Public Administration, Law and Order
- 2 Education, Health, Social Welfare
- 3 Transport, Communications, Trade, Industry

TABLE 4.4(b) Functional classification of central government expenditure (in thousands of Leones)

Financial Period	GENERAL SERVICES				SOCIAL SERVICES			
	General Administration	Justice & Police	National Defence	Pensions & Gratuities	Tourism & Cultural Affairs	Education & Social Welfare	Health	Housing & Country Planning
1969/70	9 386	3 079	2 939	1 793				
1970/71	8 961	3 685	3 418	1 655		9 779	3 182	99
1971/72	7 328	3 885	2 599	1 720		10 996	3 971	90
1972/73	10 954	4 772	3 949	2 068		12 765	5 125	113
1973/74	14 418	5 210	4 094	2 882	227	15 031	5 478	114
1974/75	17 786	5 653	5 579	2 784	428	18 061	6 005	143
1975/76	16 047	5 833	5 020	2 564	428	20 596	5 634	128
1976/77	31 534	5 763	5 836	2 650	421	23 103	6 415	184
1977/78	35 098	5 953	7 605	3 841	570	25 621	7 932	168
1978/79	26 096	7 902	8 117	7 740	437	28 266	9 815	214
					746	32 191	11 152	246

/Continued over.....

TABLE 4.4(b) continued

Financial Period	ECONOMIC SERVICES					DEBT SERVICING	TOTAL
	Agriculture & Natural Resources	Trade & Industry	Transport & Communication	Construction & Development	Other Economic		
1969/70	1 929	358	4 530	3 735	767	12 044	53 620
1970/71	1 829	356	3 418	3 977	805	4 818	47 979
1971/72	2 178	399	4 920	3 953	879	6 166	52 030
1972/73	2 580	410	3 891	5 057	922	8 420	63 466
1973/74	3 185	524	4 148	7 189	1 086	13 874	81 096
1974/75	4 134	512	4 815	8 197	1 542	19 278	96 767
1975/76	4 475	509	4 929	9 980	2 225	19 435	101 440
1976/77	7 076	611	4 978	10 804	1 607	23 643	128 793
1977/78	6 266	751	4 904	10 431	7 199	28 058	148 838
1978/79	6 745	693	5 069	13 060	17 821	41 947	179 531

SOURCE: Bank of Sierra Leone, Annual Report 1979, p.80.

led economic expansion primarily to 'accommodate' political clients (but ostensibly for other reasons such as to control the 'commanding heights' of the national economy) is the inherent logic of a neo-patrimonial political system. Not only does the state finance the salaries, wages, and prerequisites of public sector personnel, over and above this, (and since loyalty to the regime is of greater importance than the accountability of public officials), such personnel might quite literally dip their hands into the public corporation till. The diversion of resources from public and parastatal organisations to private consumption and investment, the deliberate overmanning of these organisations to accommodate political clients or, the failure of such organisations to operate like typical capitalist organisations, might more usefully be viewed as the operational logic of a patron-clientelist political system. This approach also encapsulates the broader sociological processes underlying actions of political corruption. Even as Sierra Leone enters the 1980's, the public sector is locked-in a vicious circle of unsatisfactory performance and international pressure for reform. This is very clearly illustrated by the case study of the Port Authority.

The Port Authority 1965-70: organisation, accountability, and economic performance

The appointment of a Board of Directors accompanied the vesting of responsibility for the management of the port in a fully autonomous public corporation. Under the Ports Act, a total of seventeen part-time directors, including a chairman, could be appointed.¹ The Act also stipulated that the Board members must include representatives

1 Sierra Leone, The Ports Act (No 56) 1964, Freetown, 1964, Section 5, p.4.

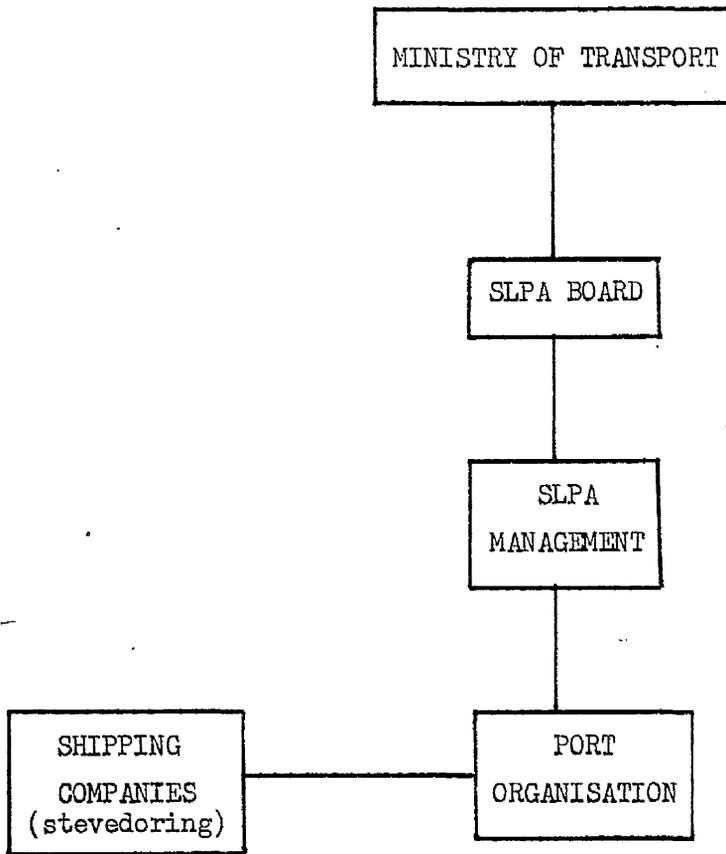
of the Ministry of Transport and Communications and of the Ministry of Finance, the Managing Director of the Produce Marketing Board, the General Manager of the Railway Administration, and the head of personnel administration in the civil service, the Establishment Secretary. The Board was to be the main forum for the formulation of port policy. The General Manager of the SLPA, and ex-officio member of the Board, was to be responsible for the implementation of policies decided upon by the Board to which he was accountable. (see Diagram 4.1).

Manifestations of political patronage were evident in the composition of the Board and of subsequent Boards. The chairman had been a defeated SLPP candidate for the Waterloo constituency at the 1962 general elections, and had been an associate of the late prime minister, Sir Milton Margai. The Establishment Secretary, the Managing Director of the Produce Marketing Board, the General Manager of the Railway, and the Financial Secretary who represented the Ministry of Finance were, apparently, proteges of the new prime minister, Sir Albert Margai. While they were fully qualified for the positions they held, Gaffney has persuasively argued that the careers of the incumbents of some of these offices were 'helped along' by the pervasive system of political clientelism.¹ The other directors appointed in 1965 were the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Transport and Communications, the Comptroller of Customs, three representatives each of the shipping companies and of commercial interests, and the secretary of the Dock Workers' Union, who with origins in the southern province was reputed to have kinship connections in the hierarchy of the SLPP (see Chapter 5). All

1 Cf. H. H. Gaffney, 'Administration and the Administrative Service in Sierra Leone', PhD thesis, University of Columbia, 1967, Ch. 6.

DIAGRAM 4.1

The organisation of the SLPA 1965-76



received directors' fees. As the major consumers of port services were directly represented on the Board, the role of the old Port Advisory Committee became somewhat superfluous.

Scrutiny of the port archive leaves the impression that the Board worked through specialist sub-committees where policy was discussed and agreed upon before being ratified by the whole Board. Although the Board was supposed to be formally accountable to the Minister of Transport and Communications, the procedures for such accountability were never made clear - the permanent secretary being only a representative of the ministry on the Board. Neither were there clear procedures for the minister's own accountability to parliament. Indeed, the minister was never questioned in parliament about the SLPA even though its economic performance during its early years should have been a cause for concern. From reports on the proceedings and debates in parliament, it appears that the Produce Marketing Board was the main target of criticisms by the APC opposition as regards the government's management of the parastatal sector. There is also evidence in the port archive that important politicians exerted influence on the management of the SLPA to provide jobs or credit facilities to members of their clienteles. For instance, a letter signed by the then Minister of Transport and Communications asks specifically that the bearer of the letter, described as 'one of the strongest supporters in my constituency' be given a job as a labourer.¹ The minister also intervened to modify penalties imposed by the Board on one of its largest debtors. At a meeting in May 1966, the sub-committee on finance had reported to the Board that the Sierra Leone Cement Works was one of the Authority's largest debtors, owing Le52,000. The Board decided that the company

1 Port Authority Archive, Hon. Kandeh Bureh, Minister of Transport and Communications to Acting Secretary SLPA, 16 February 1967.

should be informed that, unless this debt was cleared, future cargoes of the company would not be handled by the Authority's staff. The management of the company made representations to the minister to get the Board to relax its ultimatum. The General Manager of the SLPA was invited to an 'informal meeting' at the minister's office, where he was directed 'to put the matter before the Board to relax or vary its decisions so that the next cement clinker arriving for the company could be off loaded'.¹ The Board succumbed to the pressure but insisted that at least a third of the amount owed must be paid.²

If procedures for accountability between the Board and the minister and between the minister and parliament were ill defined, there were some 'external' considerations which exerted an influence on the maintainance of the bureaucratic chain of accountability between the management and the Board, and which influenced the decisions of the Board. These consisted of the IMF package negotiated with the government in 1966 and effectively implemented by a resident team of officials from Washington working with counterparts in the Ministry of Finance over a three-year period to 1969. The package consisted of stand-by arrangements to save the government from further financial embarrassment, and at the same time ceilings were set for government borrowing from the banking system and for contracting new short- and medium-term foreign credits. The growth of public expenditure was to be restrained through tightened controls over budgetary disbursements, the credit policy of the central bank, curtailment of development expenditure, and the monitoring of all public corporations.

1 Port Authority Archive, Minutes of Meeting of the Board of the SLPA, 17 June 1966.

2 Ibid.

This deflationary package and the glare of the IMF spotlight to which the parastatal sector became subjected had a considerable influence on procedures for accountability at the SLPA. While SLPP politicians, ignoring the presence of the IMF, continued to make demands on the SLPA - understandable enough in view of the approaching general elections in March 1967; Sir Albert himself had resisted pressure for the devaluation of the Leone - guidelines were introduced which public corporations were expected to implement. In mid-1966, the Board of the SLPA was advised to cut down on its huge overtime payments, and to make a determined effort to recover the large debts owed by port users.¹ These instructions duly received the attention of the finance and staff sub-committees of the Board. Regarding the overtime bill, which amounted to Le250,661, being almost a third of the total wages and salary bill of Le701,298 for the first eleven months of 1966,² it was decided that a system of shift working should be introduced.³ This also had the advantage of avoiding redundancies which would have been politically unacceptable. Militant action by the Dock Workers' Union delayed the effective implementation of these plans until they had been properly negotiated with the union (cf. Chapter 6).

One casualty of these austere times was the Chief Accountant of the Authority, Mr. C. B. A. Pratt. It was alleged that he had ordered some material used by the civil maintenance department to be taken from the stores at the quay to a site at which he had a building under construction. It was also discovered that he had requisitioned four

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- 1 Port Authority Archive, Minutes of Joint Staff and Finance Committees Meeting held on Thursday 18, and Friday 19 July 1966.
 - 2 Port Authority Archive, Acting Chief Accountant to General Manager SLPA, 22 February 1967.
 - 3 Port Authority Archive, Minutes of Board Meeting held on 2 August 1966.

new motor car tyres on the account of the Authority for his private car.¹ The Board decided to instigate criminal proceedings. Anticipating a dismissal after his conviction, Mr. Pratt eventually resigned his position from the Authority.² This incident contrasts sharply with the more flexible standards of managerial behaviour accepted at the SLPA after 1970, following the withdrawal of the IMF at the end of the stabilisation programme, when senior management openly plundered the property of the Authority with little fear of disciplinary action.

Effective accountability within the port bureaucracy continued to be maintained under the military junta of 1967-68. Indeed, Colonel Juxon-Smith, the NRC chairman, evidently acquired a sense of messianic purpose vis a vis the national economy:

'Accountable to almost no civilians, the NRC did not particularly see fit to gauge the political consequences of its austerity measures with the same degree of sensitivity as might a civilian government. Juxon-Smith stressed this view in a 'State of the Nation' address in February 1968. 'Never again', said the NRC chairman, 'must the timely implementation of national economic policies be delayed or even prevented because the government in power is more interested in party politics than in the well being and prosperity of the nation as a whole.'³

Juxon-Smith also acquired the habit of paying unscheduled 'surprise' visits to government offices and corporations to examine for himself aspects of the day-to-day administration and management. He made one such visit to the port in July 1967.⁴ The junta also removed those members of the Board, including the chairman, who had been closely identified with the previous regime. The failure, however, of the NRC

1. Port Authority Archive, Minutes of Board Meeting held on 7 April 1966.

2. Port Authority Archive, Minutes of Board Meeting held on 8 Nov. 1966.

3. Thomas Cox, op. cit., p.179.

4. Interview with M. B. Bennett, 14 January 1980.

to resolve the political crisis, its high-handed treatment of senior politicians of both parties, its institution of austerity measures (in November 1967 the Leone was de facto devalued following the devaluation of sterling to which it was 'pegged' at an exchange rate of Le2 = UK£1), the pomp and circumstance of grotesque proportions clearly enjoyed by the chairman and other leading members of the junta, evidently led to their removal from office by the junior ranks of the army in April 1967.

The financial crisis of the mid-'sixties, involving most importantly a shortage of foreign exchange, clearly affected the economic performance of the port. Tonnage of cargo handled and revenue derived fell below the levels of the old Port Management Department (cf. Tables 4.5 and 4.6). During the first two years of operations under the SLPA, a deficit of Le29,748 was incurred for the year ending 31 December 1965,¹ and Le184,136 for the year ending 31 December 1966.² Much of this deficit was created by a sharp increase in administrative and operating costs at a period of 'slack' business activity. In a statement for the Board prepared by the Authority's financial manager, the reasons for the deficit were outlined. Some of these were associated with the increased overheads of an autonomous public corporation or beyond the control of the Authority. Under the old Port Management Department the Railway Administration had been responsible for the purchasing of supplies of the port:

'We now negotiate our own stores requirements direct with Crown Agents and we pay to them an average of Le13,000 a month as deposit for goods now being ordered from the United Kingdom. In addition we now pay customs duty. In 1966 we spent Le37,012...previously we

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- 1 Port Authority Archive, Consolidated Profit and Loss Account for the year ending 31st December 1965.
 - 2 Port Authority Archive, Consolidated Profit and Loss Account for the year ending 31st December 1966.

received our goods free of duty.¹

Furthermore:

'...insurance premiums which were not previously paid are now being paid and these amount to Le30,000 annually'.²

The statement also argued with regard to the import substitution effect of goods manufactured in local light industries since the early 'sixties:

'...although...of immense help to the country as a whole, yet we are robbed of our revenue as very few of these items are now being imported'.³

The other reasons for the deficit, however, had their origins in the trends in the parastatal sector in the post-colonial state. The junior staff of the Authority had succeeded through their union in reversing the old policy under which they were employed as daily paid workers with no fringe benefits. While the casual labour system for workers involved in shore cargo handling was maintained, clerks, artisans, and other skilled or semi-skilled labour were now entitled to paid holidays and pensions on retirement:

'Leave gratuity not previously paid to all members of staff is now being paid and this is around Le16,000 per annum'.⁴

Moreover, overtime payments amounted to over a third of the total wages and salary bill and the permanent staff of the Authority had increased by seventeen times between 1962 and 1967 (Table 4.7). The Authority had also undertaken to provide accommodation for its senior management staff at a subsidised rent:

1 Port Authority Archive, Acting Chief Accountant to General Manager SLPA, 22 February 1967.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

TABLE 4.5

Tonnage of cargo handled at the port 1960-72

YEAR	TONNAGE
1960-61	403,455
1962	496,393
1963	473,624
1964	487,632
1965	N.A.
1966	466,674
1967	383,862
1968	419,539
1969	471,705
1970	542,104
1971	477,787
1972	492,869

SOURCES: Pre-1966 figures from Port Authority Archive, Annual Returns of tonnage of cargo handled; post-1966 figures from Port Authority Archive, National Development Plan 1974/79 (Port of Freetown).

N.A.: Not available.

TABLE 4.6

Port Authority revenue 1960-1966

YEAR	REVENUE
1960-61	Lel,065,789
1962	Lel,078,527
1963	Lel,045,622
1964	Lel,071,585
1965	Le 737,500
1966	Le 642,089

SOURCES: Pre-1965 figures from Port Authority Archive, Annual Financial Statements; 1965 and 1966 figures from Port Authority Archive, Consolidated Profit and Loss Accounts, 1965 and 1966.

'Prior to vesting day, our officers were occupying government quarters and rents were collected from their respective salaries; since vesting day, we have had cause to lease houses for each of these officers at an average of Le1,800 per annum; this is exclusive of cost of furniture which to my estimation is around Le900 for each flat; in addition we are now paying general and water rate charges, for each house, and I guess we will have to pay city rates as well.¹

The main action taken by the Board with regard to the financial situation was to secure cuts in overtime payments by introducing the shift work system. Efforts were also made to recover large outstanding debts from port users. The Board further decided that senior non-expatriate officials should not be entitled to subsidised housing but that they could apply for mortgages (financed by the Authority) under certain conditions. The actual expenditure of each department was to be closely monitored against planned expenditure. By the middle of 1967, the shift system had been fully implemented, and the cost control strategy applied throughout the Authority. The Accounts department prepared a statement showing that the Authority was out of the red by the first quarter of 1968 (cf. Table 4.8). The statement also asserted that:

'Prior to September 1967, much control had not been exercised on soaring departmental costs. There had been great improvement in this control aspect since the first quarter of 1968 as departmental heads were often requested to explain adverse variances, i.e., when actual costs exceeded budgeted figures.¹²

Thus, complementing the IMF stabilisation programme which led to an upturn in the national economy by 1968, there was the successful imposition of a stringent regime of financial discipline at the level

1 Ibid.

2 Port Authority Archive, Brief comments on attached graphs and statistics showing revenue/cost position for the period January to June 1968.

TABLE 4.7

Port workforce 1954-1967

CATEGORY	1954	1962	1967
Permanent	40 ⁽¹⁾	76 ⁽³⁾	1303 ⁽⁵⁾ +
Daily wage	320 ⁽¹⁾	629 ⁽³⁾	103 ⁽⁵⁾
Casual	1628 ⁽²⁾	6052 ⁽⁴⁾	5678 ⁽⁶⁾
Total lower paid	1948	6681	6783

SOURCES:

- (1) Port Authority Archive, Governor's Annual Address, 8 October 1954 (notes prepared by the Port Manager on the activities of the port for the governor's annual review of the work of the administration at the Legislative Council).
- (2) Sierra Leone, Annual Report of the Labour Department 1954 (figure excludes stevedores).
- (3) Port Authority Archive, Work Force, March 1962.
- (4) Sierra Leone, Annual Report of the Labour Department 1962 (this figure is the total number of dock labourers and stevedores registered at the port labour pool).
- (5) Port Authority Archive, General Manager to Secretary, Sierra Leone Employers' Federation, 18 July 1967.
- (6) Sierra Leone, Annual Report of the Labour Department 1967 (figure includes casual stevedore labourers).

+ Includes managerial staff which was 106 in 1967.

TABLE 4.8

The control of expenditure 1968

1968	Revenue (Le)	Expenditure (Le)	Profit (Le)
January	133,759	163,614	-29,855
February	219,535	156,992	+62,543
March	204,032	165,854	+38,178
April	169,113	153,909	+15,204
May	207,353	179,093	+28,262
June	200,379	164,849	+33,730
TOTAL	134,373	984,311	150,062

SOURCE: Port Authority Archive, Graph and statistics showing the revenue/cost position for the period January-June 1968, prepared by the Management Accountant.

of the port bureaucracy.

The SLPA 1970-76: erosion of accountability and financial collapse

With the restoration of civilian rule, the return of party politics, and the withdrawal of the IMF, the resurgence of the old politics of patronage soon became evident. In 1970, the chairman of the Board of the SLPA appointed by the junta was replaced by a veteran civil servant and businessman and a known sympathiser of the APC during its years in opposition, Mr. O. P. A. Macauley. The choice of some of the other directors seems to have been influenced by their loyalty to the regime. These included three party stalwarts and among them the organiser of the women's wing, Mrs. Nancy Steele. As before, some civil servants with strong connections in the hierarchy of the ruling party were appointed. The major port users and the shipping companies were represented through the Chamber of Commerce. The secretary of the Dock Workers' Union, first elected in 1967, had been appointed to the Board in keeping with the precedent that had been set earlier. The report of the commission of inquiry appointed after the financial collapse of the SLPA in 1976 was particularly scathing as to the composition of the Board. This is worth quoting at length as it gives an indication of the source from which the rot began to spread within the Authority:

'The Board of the Authority is in the opinion of the commission not only too large but also ill composed. It was evident from the history of its activities culled from its minutes, that it was lacking in commercial expertise and overweighted needlessly by Government appointed members. True enough, the Authority is wholly owned by Government, but if it is to be of economic viability, it must be run on economic lines, implying a prerequisite of commercial expertise. The avowed aim of public officers appointed to the Board was the carrying out of government policy under all circumstances, and it is doubtful if any of them took back any meaningful report of the

proceedings of meetings they attended to their respective Ministries...The Board seemed incapable of making a firm decision and holding on to it; often it was vacillating and subject to unaccountable changes of mind. It clearly maintained a double standard as is evidenced by its treatment of members of staff deserving of punishment for malpractices or grave misconduct...The Board displayed much weakness in failing to formulate any guiding policy, and worse, by not insisting on any laid down policy being carried out. The chairman complained of being fettered by administrative directives from certain Ministries, Transport and Communications, and Finance being the two major offenders. He also said in his evidence to the Commission that he felt helpless without executive power. The Commission was keenly disappointed that a man of such commercial and administrative attainments could not have, during his six years as chairman, impressed that type of character on the Board. From the records he would not have been without support, at least from the representatives of the Chamber of Commerce whose record of service to the Authority is praise worthy. He adopted a negative attitude towards management, 'content to fill a little space' and let the Authority drift with the tide.¹

With the reassertion of the influence of patron-clientelist relationships in appointments to key positions in the public sector under the APC, it is evident that a gradual breakdown in effective accountability at the port occurred. As in the situation before 1970, the Ministry of Transport and Communications which had nominal responsibility for the SLPA never did impose formal procedures for the accountability of the Authority. In parliament, the official opposition, gradually undermined by APC authoritarianism, raised fewer questions about the government's management of the public sector

1 Sierra Leone, Report of the Commission Appointed to Inquire into all Aspects of the Affairs of the Sierra Leone Port Authority as a Viable Economic Revenue Making Establishment covering the Period 1st January 1965 to 4th July 1976, Freetown, 1977, pp.7-8. (Throughout this study, this document will henceforth be referred to as The Forster Report.)

including the Produce Marketing Board which had traditionally attracted the critical attention of opposition MPs. The Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Finance did intervene on several occasions; (this was alluded to in the quotation from The Forster Report). It appears however, that the main reason for intervention was to direct the Board to extend credit facilities to selected individuals, companies, and government departments. The large number of debtors and the huge amount owed as documented by Forster (cf. Table 4.9), an important consideration in the financial collapse of 1976, was largely a consequence of this type of intervention. Furthermore, the Ports Act (1964) stipulated that an annual statement of the financial accounts of the Authority must be submitted to the Ministry of Transport for the minister to lay on the table of parliament.¹ The ministry apparently never bothered to scrutinise the accounts. It was Forster who discovered that the accounts have been repeatedly falsified:

'The Commission was appalled at what it found...Management's Profit and Loss Accounts and the Balance Sheets thereon have never reflected the true financial operations of the Authority. Most of the adjustments necessary for this are seldom put through the records even though these adjustments are normally submitted to the Accounts section and discussed with them after each audit...The deteriorating financial position of the Authority which became apparent in the past few years had been so much earlier. The adverse financial position was made much less obvious by window-dressing of the accounts, coupled with faulty and inaccurate records - a violation of Section 33(2) of the Act...In 1972/3 for example, Management Accounts showed a record net profit of Le620,193. When the same account was audited by the External Auditors, the net profit was reduced to Le309,384, a net difference of Le310,809.¹²

1 The Ports Act (1964) Sections 33-34, pp.16-17.

2 The Forster Report p.25.

TABLE 4.9

Debtors of the Port at the time of the financial collapse (30 June 1976)

Government Departments	Le217,001 ⁽¹⁾
Individuals	Le 49,219 ⁽²⁾
Firms	Le652,277 ⁽³⁾
TOTAL	Le918,497

SOURCES: (1) The Forster Report p.52-53 (Appendix 8).

(2) Ibid, p.53 (Appendix 8A).

(3) Ibid, p.54 (Appendix 8A).

Given the laxity with which the ministry and the Board approached the affairs of the port, the professional management fully exploited the resulting situation. The commission discovered several instances of serious financial malpractices. First, foreign currency to the value of Le2,266 was held in the office of the Chief Cashier for the use of certain members of senior management named by the commission.¹ This was in contravention of foreign exchange legislation. Second, cheques were exchanged for cash by the cashier, and the commission discovered that cheques to the value of Le196 had not been forwarded to the banks of the individuals concerned for payment.² Third, 'I owe you' chits were also exchanged for cash:

¹The Commission was able to confirm that recovery was either delayed, slow, or abandoned as some chits dated back to 1974. Lack of recovery and control over their issue has resulted in an outstanding balance of over Le9,000 as at 30th April 1976. Furthermore,

1 Ibid, Appendix 52, p.156.

2 Ibid, p.31.

between 1975 and March 1976, a total of over Le10,369 was approved by management as advances - personal, domestic, which in the Commission's view was meant to replace the chit system, but the latter was continued without any reason being given therefor.¹

And fourth, the commission discovered that the procedures governing loans for mortgages, cars, and refrigerators were repeatedly flouted

'The Commission was satisfied that there was a lack of adequate supervision and control in the administration of salary advances to staff and this has resulted in a huge outstanding balance of Le178,000...'²

Of this amount, housing loans accounted for Le105,841, and car loans for Le62,150.³ The commission also discovered serious irregularities in the purchase and administration of the Authority's stores and supplies,⁴ and in the financial returns from the Targrin-Kissy ferry service⁵ as a result of which several hundred thousands of leones were lost to the Authority.

These malpractices appear to have spread all the way down the line. For the lower placed employees, the system of overtime payments was the most obvious opportunity for graft. The overtime system which had been brought under control in 1968 was again being abused by the early 'seventies:

'With the introduction of the shift system, the Authority hoped to have helped relieve unemployment among dock workers and that working extra hours would have been kept at a minimum. On the contrary, it was the rule rather than the exception. A wide spectrum of the staff and workers earned overtime...

1 Ibid.

2 Ibid, p.32.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid, pp.17-25.

5 Ibid, pp.11-14.

and though it gave the Commission cause for concern, yet it seemed it had the blessing of management itself, notwithstanding the various circulars issued ad hoc, since provision for overtime in the budget was invariably about 50% of the amount provided for salaries/wages... The annual budget was usually overspent by as much as 70%.¹

With the workforce already artificially inflated (the permanent workforce had increased from 1,303 in 1967 to 2,064 in 1976, '...in the opinion of the Commission much in excess of that required for the economic productivity of the Authority')², the abuse of the overtime system also took its toll on the finances of the Authority.

Another concern of the commission was with the security force operating at the port. Given the evident paranoia of the government over officers in uniform, the security force, numbering 126 in 1976 and costing some Le200,000 per annum³ was directly recruited by the Ministry of Transport. Thus, '...the Authority was not in a position to exercise adequate discipline over the force in consequence, and the drain on its meagre finances was a constant source of irritation to the Board'.⁴ Moreover, the commission implicated the force in the notorious breaches of security at the port:

'The Force did not distinguish itself by any mark of loyalty or efficient service to the Authority, and seemed impotent to check the thriving pilferage which was being carried on...There was also sufficient evidence given to the Commission of the fact that a good deal of stolen and pilfered goods went through one or other of the many gates of the Controlled Area.'⁵

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- 1 Ibid, p.26.
 - 2 Ibid, p.3.
 - 3 Ibid, p.15.
 - 4 Ibid.
 - 5 Ibid.

Given the erosion of accountability within the port bureaucracy, and given the large scale diversion of resources, the economic viability of the Authority was soon in doubt. By the middle of 1975, it was clear that the Authority had great difficulties in meeting its financial commitments and that it was on the brink of financial collapse. One of the earliest indications of the plight of the Authority was its inability to finance the removal of siltation from the seabed of the berths - an operation routine enough and which would normally be provided for in budget estimates. The acting General Manager solicited a loan from the Oil Refinery for this purpose and suggested that it would be repaid by waiving future claims against the Refinery for port dues.¹ Ten days later, the acting General Manager wrote to the Electricity Corporation requesting permission to pay outstanding bills in monthly installments of Le5,000.² By the end of the year the Crown Agents made it clear that the Authority's orders would not be processed until all outstanding debts to the tune of Le300,000 had been settled.³ Early in 1976, the Authority had difficulties in meeting its own wages and salary bills. A series of sensational articles soon appeared in We Yone, the APC newspaper, exposing 'corruption' at the port. These served notice that the system of patronage could not be expected to protect the directors and senior officials of the Authority. A few months later, in August, the Forster Commission was appointed.

The management for its part argued at the commission that there

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- 1 Port Authority Archive, Acting General Manager SLPA to General Manager Sierra Leone Oil Refinery, 21 August 1975.
 - 2 Port Authority Archive, Acting General Manager SLPA to General Manager Sierra Leone Electricity Corporation, 31 August 1975.
 - 3 The Forster Report, p.13.

were other reasons which equally contributed to the financial collapse. First, it was pointed out that the government had entered into an agreement with the mining companies exempting them from harbour dues. Between 1968 and 1972, it was contended that revenue to the tune of Le875,297 was lost as a result of the agreement. Indeed, the commission accepted that '...the Authority has been deprived of much revenue because of government's agreement with the mining companies concerned, and some way should be found to make payments to the Authority for the services rendered to these companies, or the Authority would be found to be subsidising the mining companies'.¹ Second, the debtors to the Authority apart, (a large proportion was owed by the public sector, Table 4.9), it was contended that the Produce Marketing Board contested portorage charges to the tune of Le89,138 between 1969 and 1971.² Third, the management argued that, although the Ports Act had stipulated that stevedoring should be one of the functions of the Authority so that a fully integrated system of portorage would be provided, the shipping companies had, in 1964, successfully lobbied to retain this function. In 1971, stevedoring was nationalised and the newly formed National Shipping Company was given monopoly rights to provide the service. It was pointed out that stevedoring is an extremely profitable business (the overheads are very low) especially where casual labour is used. The commission accepted that '...this is a very sore point with the Authority and justifiably so.... Incredibly as it may seem the Authority is wholly owned by government and cutting the nose to spite the face never did anyone any good'.³

1 Ibid, p.9.

2 Ibid, p.37.

3 Ibid, p.16.

Finally it was contended that the Dock Workers' Union adopted aggressive bargaining tactics, and was largely responsible for the abuse of the overtime system. The commission rejected these arguments:

'The lower grades, the daily waged, particularly the casual dock workers need encouragement to help boost productivity. For this class, the most important factor is security of employment and there is, in the opinion of the commission, no valid reason why the Authority should not start a social security scheme of its own, for the dock workers, by setting aside a modicum of the portage fees collected, be it a mere 1% thereof, for funding such a project.'¹

The commission however recommended that the permanent staff of the Authority '...grossly in excess of present requirements...should be reduced considerably'.²

The conclusion reached by the commission was that the bureaucratic organisation of the port (including the chain of responsibility to the Ministry of Transport and Communications and ultimately to parliament) was adequate to maintain effective accountability:

'The Commission is firmly of the opinion that the infrastructure of the Authority is substantially sound and, but for the pronounced human failings due to greed and selfishness of many senior officials, the Authority would not have been as financially crippled and demoralised as it was immediately preceding 4th July 1976.'³

Following the logic of this conclusion, the commission recommended the dismissal of several senior officials and the reconstitution of the whole Board.

While Forster may have been correct in laying blame for the financial collapse on the Board and the management of the SLPA (after all a public inquiry is usually appointed in order that a government

1 Ibid, pp.8-9.

2 Ibid, p43.

3 Ibid, p.37.

be seen to be doing something about an important or embarrassing problem), corruption in Sierra Leone does not originate from the personal characteristics of individuals. On the contrary, it originates from within a political system in which a low premium is placed on the accountability of public servants, notwithstanding the moral indignation expressed from time to time in budget speeches and on other occasions of the statement of government policy. It cannot be overemphasised that in Sierra Leone, political competition is quite literally a struggle for access to the resources of the state. Once such access has been obtained, prominent and influential members of the elite are incorporated into the ruling establishment by the offer of rewards for their cooperation. Those so rewarded are then expected to use their influence among their communal groups to build up loyalty to the ruling party. In this way a pervasive system of political clientelism becomes established. If the adage 'seek ye first the political kingdom and all things will be added thereafter' had a figurative meaning for Nkrumah, it must be taken quite literally in Sierra Leone. There is little idealism or vision in Sierra Leone politics; nor is there a clearly discernable strategy of economic development. Development planning, the approach to the major issues of international affairs, or issues of political principle are all incidental to the fundamental political objectives of the control and expansion of the apparatus of the state. Gaffney, in his study of the civil service, concludes that the input to a coherent strategy of development came primarily from the professionals within the service and foreign aid administrators (but he is also careful to point out that, shopping lists of desirable projects apart, neither had the colonial authorities a coherent strategy).¹ Perhaps no other

1 Cf. H. H. Gaffney, op. cit., Ch. 12.

politician has demonstrated a fundamental understanding of the structure of politics and the political culture as great as that of President Siaka Stevens. Acutely aware of the potentialities of the patronage system from his frustrated years in opposition, and having seen the army intervene (initially at the behest of the defeated government) to deny him the victory he had so narrowly won in the relatively freely contested elections in 1967, Stevens has been better placed than his political rivals to manipulate the system of patronage. Tinkering with the Westminster style constitution bequeathed by the British first to create a Republic, and more recently a single party state to provide him with greater control over the system, Stevens has also intervened on several occasions (and external pressure has evidently been an influence) to restrain the kleptocratic behaviour of some of the elite occupying positions in public service - and who occupy these positions as a result of his patronage. The appointment of the commission of inquiry under the respected judge S. J. Forster to examine the affairs of the port bureaucracy is a case in point.

With regard to the problematic task of situating lower paid workers in a public corporation in the political economy, two propositions are now offered (and these will be taken up again in the chapters which follow). First, as a parastatal in the post-colonial state, the SLPA did not operate in the manner or by the criteria of the typical capitalist enterprise (i.e. profit-making via surplus appropriation). With the gradual erosion of accountability within the port bureaucracy, what emerged was the tendency of its employees (including lower paid workers) to plunder the resources of the Authority. As Forster saw it:

'There was clearly prevalent throughout the Authority an enervating attitude of 'how for

do?', as is nebulously expressed in Krio.
A yet more deleterious penchant as widespread
as the foregoing attitude is to be found in
the satiric Krio proverb of the cow eating
grass where it is tethered.¹

Given the prevalence of such attitudes, the notion of anti-capitalist protest may not be very relevant. Second, (and this point will be more fully illustrated in Chapter 5), dock workers cannot be accurately regarded as an aristocracy of labour. Notwithstanding a system of patronage to which many owe their jobs, life at the bottom of the social heap (in what is really a poor country even by third world standards) in terms of housing, family access to education and medicare, rules out such considerations. Nor can dock workers be said to be doing work which is not essential to the market economy even if their productivity is low as a result of overmanning. Patrons do not in fact 'look after their own' on a continuous basis. Help may be given in finding jobs and at times of acute adversity but there are no regular handouts. That casual dock labourers survive at all is because of the resilience of the informal economy. Indeed, Forster felt moved to recommend some kind of a social security system for this category of docker.

1 The Forster Report, p.iii.

SECTION 3

THE PROBLEM OF SITUATING LOWER PAID DOCKERS IN THE POLITICAL ECONOMY
OF SIERRA LEONE: AN EXAMINATION

Chapter 5

Dock workers of the port of Freetown: a sociological profile

An important dimension to the further elaboration of the problem of situating the dockers in the political economy of Sierra Leone is an appraisal of the general sociological characteristics they exhibit, the material conditions in which they find themselves relative to the other 'classes', their 'world view', and their relationship to processes of patron-clientalism. The pursuit of these empirical questions by the researcher in the field may be greatly affected by his approach to the workers, their acceptance of him, and his own definition and selection of what is to be regarded as important. Nonetheless the research strategy was formulated with an awareness of these problems in mind as will be evident from the discussion of the methodology that follows. While the 'objective conditions' are the first to be considered, the appraisal of the social and cultural relations of the dockers cannot be ignored. Class consciousness (without which classes can hardly be said to exist as political entities) is expressed in, and conditioned by, prevailing social and cultural formations.¹ Before examining the empirical evidence however, it is necessary to outline the methodology employed and to visit the theoretical ground.

Methodology

Four separate strategies were adopted in the attempt to reconstruct the world of the docker from his own standpoint. Formal interviews were held with certain key individuals including union officials, shop stewards, union activists, and a cross section of the rank and file on

1 See the writings of Antonio Gramsci for an elaboration of this truism, e.g., Selections from Political Writings (edited by Quentin Hoare), London, 1977 (2 volumes).

issues relating to the history of their union, leadership crises, and union struggles. Most of these informants had been participants in these events or reliable observers of the growth and evolution of the union. Similar interviews were held with past and present officials of national labour centres. Second, informal conversations were held with many dockers covering a wide range of issues from the trivial to the more serious consideration of the society of which they are a part. These conversations took place over a five-month period from January to July 1980 at road-side bars in the Kanike and Cline Town areas near the port, usually during the midday work break or in the evenings at the end of the day's work, and also during the second period of field work in February 1982, mostly in the evenings. Third, a questionnaire survey of a 1 in 96 sample of casual dockers and a 1 in 12 sample of non-casual dockers was undertaken. The questions asked had been designed to tease out some of the various strands in the ideological beliefs held by dockers with particular regard to what may be termed their 'class consciousness'; to assess their knowledge of, and participation in the Dock Workers' Union and to elicit information on their attitudes to trade unionism, trade union leadership, and strike action; and finally to obtain some basic sociological data on the dockers and their material environment (cf. annexure). Permission had been granted by the port management to undertake research at the port and the secretary of the Dock Workers' Union had asked all shop stewards to cooperate and inform workers of the research. The questionnaire was administered during the second half of May 1980 with the help of an assistant engaged only for this purpose. He was Alfred Josiah, a literacy instructor in the employ of the Port Authority. Josiah was chosen because of his totally unassuming character, his sense of humour, and because - as a literacy instructor -

he was held in high esteem by many dockers, some of whom had attended his classes. It was impressed upon him, as it had been impressed upon all others, that the researcher was wholly independent, and that the purpose of the research was academic and specifically for a London University thesis. The internal organisational politics of the Port Authority, the Labour Department, the Ministry of Transport and Communications, and the government, it was repeatedly emphasised, had nothing to do with the research. The workers had been selected randomly from each of the categories of dockers (clerical, skilled manual, unskilled manual, and casual) after a total enumeration of dockers in each category. The venue chosen for the administration of the questionnaire was a classroom in the training department of the Port Authority. The workers participating in the survey were invited during working hours, two at a time, to the classroom where Josiah and the researcher interviewed each in Krio, translating from the questionnaire, and simultaneously writing down the replies in English. Clerks and other literate dockers were encouraged to fill in the questionnaire themselves with Josiah and the researcher being available to clarify queries.

The fourth strategy was pursued during June 1980. The research had until that stage been largely concerned with dockers at work and related issues. In order to broaden the perspective by a small degree, it was decided to observe some dockers in their home environment. This was a rather difficult task as dock workers do not live in any particular area of Freetown, although a significant proportion have residences scattered over the eastern part of Greater Freetown - an area covering some fifteen square miles. Twelve dockers were selected from among those who had become particularly friendly with the researcher, and evening visits to their homes were arranged. These dockers belonged in equal proportions to the clerical, skilled, unskilled and casual

groups. The conversation during such visits was trivial and informal; the opportunity was used however to observe living conditions and to assess their standard of living.

Throughout the fieldwork the researcher endeavoured to present himself in a manner that was intended to convey to the dockers that he fully identified with them and was broadly sympathetic to their hopes and aspirations. Complete informality was maintained in all encounters with dockers. Krio was the main medium of communication but words of greeting in Mende and Temne were expressed when appropriate in a conscious attempt to convey that the researcher had no ethnocentric illusions. Dock workers participated willingly in the project; the researcher was fully accepted.

Visitation to the theoretical ground: the relevance of data on social stratification

The relevance (and importance) of Kitching's work on class in Kenya to the debate on class formation in contemporary African societies lies in his contention that the 'exploiting' and the 'exploited' classes are not at all neatly and simply identifiable in terms of their position in the mode of production. This is essentially because 'socially necessary labour' and 'surplus labour' (or surplus value) cannot be unambiguously identified and also because it is generally the case that the same person occupies differing positions ('exploiter' and 'exploited') in different modes of production at one and the same time (e.g. the urban wage earner who also employs hired labour on his farm). On the other hand however,

'...if there was not surplus labour time being worked in Kenya it would not be possible for money to be accumulated and to become capital. We must look for exploitation then not in the direct relation of surplus labour appropriator to surplus labour source but in the capacity of various strata to accumulate money in the form of capital... those who can accumulate money and capital

on any scale at all must be in control of part of the product of Kenya's surplus labour. The more and faster they can accumulate, the greater must be their share of surplus labour.¹

Kitching goes on to identify the groups in control of this surplus:

'merchant capitalists proper...both foreign-owned import/export firms, and on a smaller scale African and Asian merchant capitalists operating in the domestic market, and (in a few cases) in the international market too; the best-paid public sector employees, and especially officials in the state and parastatal sector...and to a small extent, domestic retailers and wholesalers...'²

Now, although Kitching does not admit as much, this amounts to a sophisticated Marxist rationale for treating income levels or levels of capital accumulation (normally dismissed by Marxists as the criteria of 'bourgeois stratification theory') as the clearest possible indicator of class position to which one can aspire in African conditions.³ The endemic corruption (which Kitching does not take sufficiently into account as a means of capital accumulation) associated with political clientelism in the post-colonial state is, of course, also relevant.

The pattern of income distribution in Sierra Leone closely resembles that depicted by Kitching for Kenya. Table 5.1 shows the distribution of national incomes among rural and non-rural groups in 1968/69 and 1975/76, and in particular draws attention to a trend for rural (farmers') money income to rise faster than that of urban incomes. Although this shows the cash incomes of urbanities to have been much higher, in general, than that of rural dwellers, it must be doubted whether the difference in total incomes, taking subsistence and accommodation expenses into account, is very great, certainly as far

1 Gavin Kitching, op. cit., p.449.

2 Ibid, pp.449-50.

3 Cf. Richard Jeffries, Class, Power and Ideology, pp.169-185, for the use of just such an approach.

TABLE 5.1

Rural and non-rural per capita incomes in Sierra Leone, 1968/69 and 1975/76 (figures in Leones)

	1968/69	1975/76
Rural <u>per capita</u> ⁺	56	115
Urban <u>per capita</u>	238	354
Non-rural <u>per capita</u> (includes mining areas)	249	376
Average income	108	186
Non-rural:rural ratio	4:1	3:1

⁺ excludes imputed income from subsistence farm production

SOURCE: The Jaspa Report, p.34.

as urban manual workers are concerned. Table 5.2 shows the distribution of national income among aggregate groups in 1975/76 and confirms this view. In aggregate, farmers are better off than manual workers. This does not mean, however, that farmers have been given a fair deal or that they have been treated generously enough to stem the flow of rural-urban migration. Farmers' incomes depend on the type of crop cultivated. Farmers producing export crops such as coffee, cocoa, or ginger, would have received higher incomes relative to farmers producing food crops such as rice. This is because of the deliberate policy of successive post-colonial governments to intervene in the market (under pressure from urban dwellers) to keep the price of food artificially low. Thus Table 5.3(a), in giving a breakdown of the distribution of income among disaggregated groups, provides a more detailed overview. It is clear from this table that not all farmers

are better off than urban manual workers. In reading the table, however, the categories which should be isolated for comparison with the others are unskilled (per capita income, Le425 per annum), skilled (per capita income, Le895 per annum), and clerical (per capita income, Le2,333 per annum). The vast majority of dockers belong to the unskilled category; but, that aside, minimum wages obtaining at the port in 1976 (for dockers eligible to join the union or who did not fall within grades A-B of the Port Authority's pay scale) stood at Le585 per annum (this assumes 300 working days a year for casual dockers) and maximum wages stood at Le1,780.¹ Moreover, these wages amounted in real terms to about half their value in 1965. While nearly all groups must have suffered an erosion in the real value of their incomes as a result of the inflationary tendencies in the economy, particularly after 1973, this would appear to have been especially acute in the case of lower paid workers. Although the total incomes of such workers, certainly the dockers', were supplemented by (often dishonest) claims for overtime payment and, as we shall see, by their involvement in secondary employment in the informal sector, this supplement was not at all comparable in (even relative) magnitude to the windfalls obtained by better placed individuals (members of the elite) from political and bureaucratic corruption. While the availability of such monies to well placed individuals among the elite arguably accounts for the major proportions of their real incomes, this is certainly not the case for lower paid parastatal employees. The latter are therefore far from being the most direct or favoured beneficiaries of the system of patron-clientelism and corruption; and, in several respects, may be seen to suffer from it. The embezzlement of government

1 Cf. The Forster Report, Appendix 3, p.49.

TABLE 5.2

Functional distribution of income, aggregated groups, 1975/76

GROUP	AVERAGE INCOME (LEONES PER ANNUM)	PERCENTAGE		CUMULATIVE PERCENTAGE	
		NUMBERS	INCOME	NUMBERS	INCOME
Unskilled	425	6.1	3.2	6.1	3.2
Informal sector	425	18.3	9.5	24.4	12.7
Non agricultural	522	13.7	8.8	38.1	21.5
Semi-skilled	630	4.1	3.2	42.2	24.7
Farmers	640	48.8	38.4	91.0	63.1
Skilled	895	2.9	3.2	93.9	66.3
Clerical	1,870	2.3	5.2	96.2	71.5
Professional/ Managerial	6,500	0.9	7.2	97.1	78.7
Formal sector entrepreneurs	9,800	2.9	21.2	100.0	100.0
				=656,000	=Le536M

SOURCE: The JASPA Report, p.279

TABLE 5.3(a)

Functional distribution of income, disaggregated groups, 1975/76

GROUP	NUMBER (1000)	INCOME (M.Le)	PER CAPITA (Le)	PERCENTAGE		CUMULATIVE PERCENTAGE	
				NOS.	INCOME	NOS.	INCOME
Farmers I	48	8	171	7.3	1.5	7.3	1.5
Hawkers	45	10	300	6.9	1.9	14.2	3.4
Farmers II	93	37	399	14.2	6.9	28.4	10.3
Unskilled	40	17	425	6.1	3.2	34.5	13.5
Non agricultural	90	47	522	13.7	8.8	48.2	22.3
Vendors	40	21	530	6.1	3.9	54.3	26.2
Artisans	35	20	566	5.3	3.7	59.6	29.9
Farmers III	70	43	619	10.7	8.1	70.3	38.0
Semi-skilled	27	17	630	4.1	3.2	74.4	41.2
Farmers IV	45	39	869	6.9	7.3	81.3	48.5
Skilled	19	17	895	2.9	3.2	84.2	51.7
Farmers V	51	58	1,131	7.8	10.8	92.0	62.5
Farmers VI	13	21	1,585	2.0	3.8	93.9	66.3
Clerical	15	35	2,333	2.3	5.2	96.3	71.5
Retailers	14	58	4,143	2.1	12.1	98.4	83.6
Managerial/ Professional	6	39	6,500	0.9	7.2	99.3	90.8
Formal sector entrepreneurs	5	49	9,800	0.8	9.1	100.0	100.0
TOTAL	656	536					

SOURCE: The JASPA Report, p.282.

M. = Million, NOS. = Numbers

or parastatal monies by these members of the elite, for example, clearly has an adverse effect on government's ability to finance wage increases for lower paid workers (at least without resort to simply printing money).¹

Furthermore, while there are immediate differences between low income rural groups and low income urban groups over such issues as the official level of food prices² and, in particular, the importing and subsidising of rice, it is clear that these are really subsidiary to the major conflict between the political and administrative elite together with some capitalist business on the one hand, and the low income rural and urban workforce on the other.

That there is very considerable inequality of incomes (and in the rate of capital accumulation) between the various socio-economic groups should be evident. Less than four per cent of the population receive a third of the national income. The highest income group receive almost sixty times as much as the lowest income groups. That income inequality in Sierra Leone is one of the highest in the world should be evident from Table 5.3(b). Comparison of the 1968 figures in this table with the 1975/76 figures in Table 5.3(a), however, suggests that the dimensions of the problem have improved, but not significantly.

These indices do not by themselves, however, provide a full picture. For instance, it is preferable to use the household of the dockers as the unit of income assessment since wives and other inmates

1 For an indication of the scale of elite corruption in the public sector, cf., e.g., Sierra Leone, Report of the Auditor-General for the Years 1974-79, Freetown, 1980.

2 For an elaboration of this theme, cf. R. Bates, Markets and States in Tropical Africa, esp. pp.30-44. The extent to which official agricultural policy has contributed to the discouragement of farmers and to their low receipts has been discussed by Olu Williams in 'Agro-Rural Development Strategies: Past, Present and Future', paper presented at the 11th Annual Conference of the Agricultural Society of Sierra Leone, held at Njala University

contribute to family income typically via participation in the thriving informal economy. Some dockers themselves undertake secondary employment in this sector. The questionnaire survey was designed to probe these (and other aspects of their social and cultural as well as economic lives) more deeply.

The material environment of the dockers and aspects of their social life

One consequence of the low incomes of the dockers and the resulting pressure to make ends meet is that some resort to secondary employment. There is clearly a demand for various types of service outside the formal sector of the economy where capital intensive methods are prevalent or formal contracts mandatory. Many therefore resort to informal contracts. 8.3% of the clerks, 20% of the skilled manuals, 20.6% of the unskilled manuals, and 14.7% of the casuals in the sample reported having some form of secondary employment. Among the jobs listed were tailoring and secretarial work (including writing letters for a fee) by clerks; mechanical repairs, carpentry, and other building repairs mentioned by skilled manuals; night watching and woroko woroko (or load carrying) mentioned by casual and unskilled dockers (cf. Table 5.4(a)).

The average annual household income of the dockers (including estimated earnings from secondary employment) is provided in Table 5.4(b). It will be evident that these averages are considerably higher than the minimum and maximum wages obtaining at the port in 1976. The range of incomes within each category of dockers, however, more clearly illustrates the importance of the contribution of secondary employment and of household members to family income. Household members were invariably petty traders, accounting for 66.17%

TABLE 5.3(b) continued
(ii) Income U.S. \$300-\$750

Country (year)	HIGH INEQUALITY			MODERATE INEQUALITY			LOW INEQUALITY							
	Share of Lowest 40% less than 12%	Share of Lowest 40% between 12% and 17%	Share of Lowest 40% 17% and above	Per Capita GNP U.S.\$	Country (year)	Per Capita GNP U.S.\$	Country (year)	Per Capita GNP U.S.\$	Country (year)					
Malaysia (1970)	330	11.6	32.4	56.0	Dominican Republic (1969)	323	12.2	30.3	57.5	Surinam (1962)	394	21.7	35.7	42.6
Colombia (1970)	358	9.0	30.0	61.0	Iran(1968)	332	12.5	33.0	54.5	Greece (1957)	500	21.0	29.5	49.5
Brazil (1970)	390	10.0	28.4	61.5	Guyana (1956)	550	14.0	40.3	45.7	Yugoslavia (1968)	529	18.5	40.0	41.5
Peru(1971)	480	6.5	33.5	60.0	Lebanon (1960)	508	13.0	26.0	61.0	Bulgaria (1962)	530	26.8	40.0	33.2
Gabon (1968)	497	8.8	23.7	67.5	Uruguay (1968)	618	16.5	35.5	48.0	Spain (1965)	750	17.6	36.7	45.7
Jamaica (1958)	510	8.2	30.3	61.5	Chile(1968)	744	13.0	30.2	56.8					
Costa Rica (1971)	521	11.5	30.0	58.5										
Mexico(1969)	645	10.5	25.5	64.0										
South Africa (1965)	669	6.2	35.8	58.0										
Panama(1969)	692	9.4	31.2	59.4										

TABLE 5.3(b) continued

(iii) Income above U.S. \$750

Country (year)	HIGH INEQUALITY			MODERATE INEQUALITY			LOW INEQUALITY						
	Share of Lowest 40% Less than 12%	Share of Lowest 40% between 12% and 17%	Share of Lowest 40% 17% and above	Share of Lowest 40% between 12% and 17%	Share of Lowest 40% 17% and above	Share of Lowest 40% 17% and above	Per Capita GNP U.S.\$	Country (year)	Per Capita GNP U.S.\$				
Venezuela (1970)	1004	7.9	27.1	65.0	1079	16.5	36.1	47.4	Poland (1964)	850	23.4	40.6	36.0
Finland (1962)	1599	11.1	39.6	49.3	1100	13.7	35.7	50.6	Japan (1963)	950	20.7	39.3	40.0
France (1962)	1913	9.5	36.8	53.7	1990	13.6	37.9	48.5	U.K. (1968)	2015	18.8	42.2	39.0
					2010	16.6	42.9	40.5	Hungary (1969)	1140	24.0	42.5	33.5
									Czechoslo- vakia(1964)	1150	27.6	41.4	31.0
					2144	15.4	31.7	52.9	Australia (1968)	2509	20.0	41.2	38.8
					2563	13.6	38.8	47.6	Canada(1965)	2920	20.0	39.8	40.2
					2859	15.5	42.5	42.0	United States(1970)	4850	19.7	41.5	38.8
					2949	14.0	42.0	44.0					

SOURCE: Montek S. Ahluwalia, 'Income inequality: some dimensions of the problem', in Hollis Chenery et al., Redistributionwith Growth, Oxford, 1974, pp.3-37.

of the occupations of inmates of casual dockers' homes; 68.69% of unskilled manual dockers'; 66.66% of skilled manuals'; and 52.77% of clerical dockers' homes (cf. Table 5.4(c)). This predominance of petty traders in the informal economy of Freetown has been noted by David Fowler in his 1976 survey¹ and by Katherine Mosely² in her 1979 study of Safroko Limba migrants in Freetown. Both report a predominance of women petty traders, typically hawking foodstuffs ranging from cookery or home-produced meals to fruits and vegetables as well as gara or tied-dyed cloth. Fowler notes that his trend is a consequence of the '...stagnation in opportunities for wage employment expansion of the urban economy; most job seekers face a choice of self employment or indefinite unemployment.'³ The low capital input, flexible working hours, and relative simplicity of petty trading, which can be conveniently combined with other domestic chores such as looking after young children, make this form of employment particularly attractive to women. Accordingly, an inescapable spectacle on the streets of Freetown is of women and their fannah markits (or tray of wares). The 1966-69 series of household surveys by the Central Statistics Office⁴

1 D. Fowler, op. Cit.

2 K. Moseley, op.cit.; cf. also J. Gugler and W. Flanagan, Urbanisation and Social Change in West Africa, pp.138-141, for an account of 'market mummies' on the sub-continent.

3 D. Fowler, ibid, p.4.

4 The results of these surveys have been published by the Central Statistics Office under the following titles: Household Survey of the Western Province: Economic and Expenditure, 1966-68; Household Survey of the Northern Province: Economic and Expenditure, 1966-68; Household Survey of the Eastern Province: Economic and Expenditure, 1966-68; Household Survey of the Southern Province: Economic and Expenditure, 1966-68; Household Survey of the Western Province: Household Characteristics and Housing Conditions 1968-69; Household Survey of the Northern Province Urban Areas: Household Characteristics and Housing Conditions 1968-69; Household Survey of the Eastern Province Urban Areas: Household Characteristics and Housing Conditions 1968-69; Household Survey of the Southern Province Urban Areas: Household Characteristics and Housing

TABLE 5.4(a)

The incidence of secondary employment among categories of dockers

CATEGORY	% engaged in secondary employment	Sample/size(n)	Total no. of dockers in category (N)
Clerks	8.33	36	432
Skilled Manuals	20.00	60	720
Unskilled Manuals	20.68	29	348
Casuals	14.70	68	6,528
	TOTAL	193	8,028

(Figures are given in percentages and have not been rounded). Sample size and total numbers are also shown.

TABLE 5.4(b)

Household annual incomes (in Leones) among categories of dockers

CATEGORY	MEAN	RANGE
Clerks	1422.60	1080 - 3360
Skilled Manuals	1910.52	744 - 3660
Unskilled Manuals	1022.88	660 - 1824
Casuals	633.48	45 - 1560

significantly listed 'sales work' as among '...predominant occupations in Freetown and other urban places'.¹ More specifically, a full quarter of the Freetown labour force at the end of 1967 was involved in petty trading.²

Apart from undertaking secondary employment, or having household members who are employed therein, most dockers' households make purchases of their basic necessities in this sector. 98.5% of casual dockers reported that their households purchased more than half the items listed in the questionnaire in small quantities (e.g. sugar by the spoonful) and consequently from this sector. All unskilled manual dockers, 58.3% of skilled manual dockers, and 52.8% of clerical dockers also reported making purchases of more than half of the items listed outside the formal economy (Table 5.4(d) has the details).

In view of the widespread belief that the African extended family system has built into it some form of social security mechanism - with automatic redistribution from more affluent relatives to poorer ones - which cushions off lower paid workers from some of the hardships of urban life, the sample was specifically asked whether they had ever resorted to borrowing money at the end of the month (pay day) as a result of not being able to meet all commitments. No less than 63% of each of the four categories of dockers reported that they sometimes borrowed money at the end of the month (Table 5.5(a)). Of those replying that they sometimes borrowed, however, less than 20% of each of the four categories reported that they borrowed from well-off kinsmen and relatives (cf. Table 5.5(b) for the details). Most

Conditions 1968-69; Household Survey of the Rural Areas of the Provinces: Household Characteristics and Housing Conditions 1968-69. All titles are published in 1969 in Freetown.

- 1 Central Statistics Office, Household Survey of the Western Province: Economic and Expenditure, 1966-69, Final Report, p.14.
- 2 Ibid, p.3.

TABLE 5.4(c) Occupations of household members (by percentage)

OCCUPATION	Clerks	Skilled Manuals	Unskilled Manuals	Casuals
Trader	52.77	66.66	68.69	66.17
Unskilled (Labourer, Domestic)	2.77	16.66	6.89	6.47
Skilled (Clerical, Artisan, etc.)	8.33	3.33	-	-
Unemployed	5.55	-	17.24	20.00
Students	30.55	13.33	6.89	7.35
TOTAL	99.97	99.98	99.98	99.99

TABLE 5.4(d) Percentages of occupational categories purchasing more than half of selected items from the informal sector

CATEGORY	%
Clerks	52.77
Skilled Manuals	58.33
Unskilled Manuals	100.00
Casuals	98.52

rather borrowed from friends or neighbours or, in the case of unskilled workers especially, from professional money-lenders. The sample was then asked whether they were assisting any relative other than immediate family, financially or materially. No less than 56% of each of the categories replied that they were helping relatives (Table 5.5(c)). This confirmed the impression which had been formed during informal conversations with the dockers. Assistance may be given by more affluent relatives or kinsmen in finding jobs or at times of acute adversity, but there are no regular cash handouts.¹ Moreover, the principle of reciprocity - an important cultural phenomenon in Sierra Leone as in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa - precludes many lower paid workers from seeking assistance from affluent relatives.

The proletarianisation of lower paid dockers can be further illustrated by some indices of their standard of living. None of the unskilled manuals, 5.9% of the casuals, 18.3% of the skilled manuals, and 19.4% of the clerks were owner-occupiers of their homes (Table 5.6(a)). A very liberal index of six persons to one room en parlah (or one bedroom and parlour/living room) was used to define overcrowding in the households of the dockers. By this definition, 41.4% of unskilled manuals, 38.2% of casuals, 18.3% of skilled manuals and 14% of clerks lived in conditions of overcrowding (Table 5.6(b)).² The type of material out of which the home is constructed and the degree of protection provided thereby from the elements is not only evidence of position in the class structure but is also an index of standard of living. More than two-thirds of the clerks and over half of the skilled manuals lived in cement houses. By contrast only 20.7% and 26.5% of the unskilled manuals and the casuals respectively lived in

1 For similar conclusions in relation to southern Ghana, cf. Richard Jeffries, Class, Power and Ideology, p.182.

2 The problem of overcrowding must be apparent to the most superficial
P.T.O.

such houses, with a greater proportion living in pan body homes (i.e. houses constructed out of shanty-type corrugated tin; cf. Table 5.6(c)).

Over 80% of the clerks had both electricity and running water in their homes. About half of the skilled manuals had electricity but only a third had running water. On the other hand, less than 10% of the unskilled and casuals had either electricity or running water in their homes (cf. Table 5.6(d)). The sample was asked which of these five luxury items they owned: 'fridge, radio or tape, TV, car, motorbike or bicycle. None had all five items. 5.6% of the clerks owned four of the items. A further 8.3% of this category and 3.3% of the skilled manuals owned three of the items (cf. Table 5.6(e)), but the large majority of unskilled and casual workers owned none.

Various aspects of the social lives of the dockers were examined. 98% of the sample frequently attended a church or mosque. In Freetown (as well as in other parts of Sierra Leone), churches and mosques tend to cater for particular ethnic groups. Thus, for example, Christian Mende dockers tend to worship in a Mende church while Temne Muslim dockers tend to worship in a Temne mosque or jamaat (or Muslim burial society).¹ 63% of dockers not born in Freetown were members of a descendants' association such as the Tonkolili District Descendants' Association (TODDA) or the Moyamba District Descendants' Association (MADDA). Since the APC came to power in 1968, and particularly since the mid-seventies, these descendants' associations have proliferated. They typically serve as the power base of important national politicians, have undercut the influence of the chiefs in national politics, and have clearly become channels for the dispensation of

observer of African cities. For a discussion of this phenomenon, cf. J. Gugler and W. Flanagan, op. cit., pp.45-49.

1 Ethnicity and religious affiliation is discussed in some detail by Edward Fashole-Luke, 'Religion in Freetown', in Chris Fyfe and Eldred Jones (eds.), Freetown: A Symposium, Oxford, 1968.

TABLE 5.5(a) Percentage of sample reporting making loans

CATEGORY	%
Clerks	63.88
Skilled Manuals	80.00
Unskilled Manuals	89.65
Casuals	77.94

Table 5.5(b)

Sources of Loans (percentage)

CATEGORY	FRIENDS/ NEIGHBOURS	OSUSU	RELATIVES/ KINSMEN	MONEY LENDER
Clerks	92.30	-	7.69	-
Skilled Manuals	62.50	12.50	10.41	14.58
Unskilled Manuals	46.15	-	19.23	34.61
Casuals	75.47	-	11.32	13.20

TABLE 5.5(c) Percentage of sample reporting helping relatives other than immediate family

CATEGORY	RELATIVES	FRIENDS	NIL
Clerks	55.55	2.77	41.66
Skilled Manuals	61.66	11.66	26.66
Unskilled Manuals	65.51	3.44	31.03
Casuals	61.76	5.88	32.33

TABLE 5.6(a)

Percentage of sample reporting home ownership

CATEGORY	PERCENTAGE
Clerks	19.44
Skilled Manual	18.33
Unskilled Manual	-
Casuals	5.88

patronage and the mobilisation of support. The tribal headman system in Freetown, which has always been closely related to religious communities,¹ is by now all but fully integrated into descendants' associations. 58% of the sample also reported belonging to secret societies such as the Gbangbani, the Ojeh, the Porroh, or the Hunting Society. Membership is usually related to ethnicity. Thus, for example, the Krios are found in the Hunting Societies while the Mendes and Temnes are found in the Porroh.²

TABLE 5.6(b)

Overcrowding in the household of dockers (by percentage)

CATEGORY	%
Clerks	13.88
Skilled Manuals	18.33
Unskilled Manuals	41.37
Casuals	38.23

1 Cf. B. Harrel-Bond et al, op. cit., Ch. 9.

2 It should be noted that none of the dockers in the sample were members of any of the masonic lodges. The membership of these lodges has been restricted to the elite among Krios (cf. Abner Cohen, op. cit.) but during the last fifteen years or so, has become increasingly open to the elites of other ethnic groups including the Asian mercantile community.

TABLE 5.6(c)

Type of house lived in by dockers (by percentage)

CATEGORY	PAN BODY	BOARD	CEMENT	MUD
Clerks	11.11	5.5	83.33	-
Skilled	28.33	16.66	55.00	-
Unskilled	55.17	20.68	20.68	3.44
Casuals	60.29	19.29	26.47	2.94

TABLE 5.6(d)

Amenities enjoyed by dockers' household (by percentage)

CATEGORY	RUNNING WATER	ELECTRICITY
Clerks	80.55	83.33
Skilled	33.33	51.66
Unskilled	10.00	6.89
Casuals	8.82	7.35

TABLE 5.6(e)

Luxury items owned by dockers (by percentage)

CATEGORY	0	1	2	3	4	5
Clerks	27.77	30.55	27.77	8.33	5.55	-
Skilled	31.66	50.00	15.00	3.33	-	-
Unskilled	62.06	37.93	-	-	-	-
Casuals	75.00	23.52	1.47	-	-	-

Outside the world of work, in their social and cultural activities, dock workers may therefore be said generally to belong to organisations which provide a certain degree of communal cohesion. This point will be taken up again below when political clientelism vis a vis recommendation for employment in the public sector is discussed.

Dock workers: some basic sociological characteristics

It is perhaps not surprising that all dockers undertaking manual tasks are male. It was estimated from the total enumeration of all dockers that some 28% of the clerical group (N = 433) were female. The sample of the clerical group yielded 8 females or 22% (n = 36).

The dockers are drawn from most of the ethnic groups in Sierra Leone and from all the main linguistic groups (Table 5.7(a), (b), (c), and (d)). Among casual dockers (made up of stevedore and shore cargo handling labourers) it had been observed impressionistically that Kroo men were in the minority. This suggested (and was indeed confirmed during informal conversations) that the traditional dominance of this occupational category by the Kroos has over the

years been eroded. The sample yielded only 3% Kroos. Krio dockers, having been long exposed to formal education, dominate the clerical grades, while Temne dockers dominate the manual grades as a result of their relative proximity to Freetown.¹

In his sociological study of Freetown, Banton suggests that a multiplicity of factors influenced rural-urban migration.² These included the imbalance of opportunities as between the provincial areas and Freetown, the desire to 'break out' of the restrictions (particularly for women) in rural society, and the pull of the 'bright' lights'. Some attempt was made by the present researcher to assess the extent to which dockers are migrants. Just over two-thirds of the sample were born outside Freetown (cf. Table 5.8(a)), though less than half of the clerks - suggesting a correlation between birth in Freetown, good schooling, and clerical employment. Of those not born in Freetown, 18.8% of the clerks said that they came to seek wage employment. 37.5% said they came for educational purposes, but a greater proportion, 43.8%, said they came for personal reasons such as to seek medical care or to live in the household of a relative. Among skilled manuals, a third came for personal reasons with the remaining two thirds coming for employment and education. A greater proportion of the casual and unskilled labourers, 61.5% and 73.6% respectively, reported coming solely for employment. None came for education (Table 5.8(b) has the details).

These dockers were also asked about their previous occupations before coming to live in Freetown. A clear pattern emerged. A small proportion of the clerks and the skilled manuals had been farmers,

1 Cf. J. I. Clarke, Sierra Leone in Maps, London, 1969, p.36.

2 Cf. Michael Banton, West African City, pp.48 ff.

TABLE 5.7(a)

Ethnic groups among clerks

ETHNIC GROUP	PERCENTAGE
Krio	41.66
Temne	19.44
Mende	19.44
Fulah	5.55
Loko	5.55
Limba	5.55
Sherbro	2.77
TOTAL	99.96

TABLE 5.7(b)

Ethnic groups among skilled manuals

ETHNIC GROUP	PERCENTAGE
Temne	25.00
Krio	24.99
Limba	18.33
Mende	15.00
Sherbro	5.00
Mandingo	3.33
Loko	3.33
Koranko	1.66
Susu	1.66
Fulah	1.66
TOTAL	99.96

TABLE 5.7(c) Ethnic groups among unskilled manuals

ETHNIC GROUP	PERCENTAGE
Temne	37.93
Limba	24.13
Loko	10.34
Susu	10.34
Mende	6.89
Fulah	3.44
Mandingo	3.44
West African National	3.44
TOTAL	99.95

TABLE 5.7(d) Ethnic groups among casual dockers

ETHNIC GROUP	PERCENTAGE
Temne	38.23
Mende	29.41
Loko	8.82
Limba	7.35
Sherbro	2.94
Kroo	2.94
Fulah	1.47
Krio	1.47
Susu	1.47
Mandingo	1.47
TOTAL	99.98

TABLE 5.8(a)

Percentage of dock workers not born in Freetown

CATEGORY	PERCENTAGE
Clerks ⁽¹⁶⁾	44.44
Skilled Manuals ⁽³³⁾	55.00
Unskilled Manuals ⁽²⁶⁾	89.65
Casual Labourers ⁽⁵³⁾	77.94
TOTAL 128 ^(a)	66.32 ^(b)

Numbers in parentheses are the actual numbers within each category of the sample.

(a) refers to the total number of dockers in sample not born in Freetown;

(b) refers to the total number of dockers not born in Freetown as a percentage of the whole sample

fishermen, or traders. On the other hand most of the unskilled manuals and the casuals, 73.1% and 73.6% respectively, had been farmers (cf. Table 5.8(c)). Table 5.8(d) provides data relating to the number of years dockers not born in Freetown had lived there and Table 5.8(e) gives a distribution of the ages of the dockers.

The educational attainment of dockers obviously varies with their occupational roles, as will be evident from Table 5.9(a). Their social background - using fathers' occupation as the index - also appears to be related to occupational roles. About 50% of the clerks in the sample had fathers who had been professional, managerial, clerical, or skilled manual workers in occupation. 28.3% of the skilled manual group had such fathers. 93.1% and 80.9% of unskilled

TABLE 5.8(b) Main reasons for coming to live in the capital (%)

REASON	CLERKS	SKILLED MANUALS	UNSKILLED MANUALS	CASUALS
Employment	18.75	45.45	61.53	73.58
Personal	43.75	33.33	38.46	26.37
Education	37.50	21.21	-	-
TOTAL	99.95	99.99	99.99	99.95

TABLE 5.8(c) Previous occupation of dockers not born in Freetown

OCCUPATION	CLERKS	SKILLED MANUALS	UNSKILLED MANUALS	CASUALS
Student	87.50	57.57	3.84	3.77
Farmer	12.50	21.21	73.09	73.58
Fisherman	-	3.03	-	1.88
Same	-	9.09	11.53	15.09
Unemployed	-	3.03	-	1.88
Trader	-	6.06	11.53	3.77
TOTAL	100.0	99.99	99.99	99.97

TABLE 5.8(d)

Years of residence of dockers not born in Freetown (by percentage)

YEARS	CLERKS	SKILLED MANUAL	UNSKILLED MANUAL	CASUALS
1 - 5	-	9.09	11.53	1.88
6 - 10	12.50	12.12	-	3.77
11 - 15	12.50	3.03	7.69	3.77
16 - 20	12.50	21.21	23.07	16.98
21 - 25	18.75	21.21	15.38	7.54
26 - 30	18.75	9.09	11.53	13.20
31 - 35	-	3.03	3.84	13.20
36 - 50	-	3.03	7.69	22.64
41 - 45	25.00	18.18	19.23	16.98
TOTAL	100.00	99.99	99.87	99.96

TABLE 5.8(e) Age of dockers (by percentage)

YEARS	CLERKS	SKILLED MANUAL	UNSKILLED MANUAL	CASUALS
Under 20	-	1.66	-	-
20 - 29	25.00	30.00	-	11.76
30 - 39	55.55	33.33	20.68	26.47
40 - 49	11.11	13.33	13.79	11.76
50 - 59	5.55	6.66	20.68	22.05
Over 60	2.77	3.33	13.79	14.70
Don't know	-	11.66	31.03	13.23
TOTAL	99.98	99.97	99.97	99.97

TABLE 5.9(a) Educational attainment among categories of dockers (%)

CATEGORY	PRIMARY	FORM 1 - 2	FORM 3 - 5	POST HIGH SCHOOL	NIL	TOTAL
Clerk	5.55	5.55	58.33	22.22	8.33	99.98
Skilled Manual	13.33	11.66	53.33	5.00	16.66	99.98
Unskilled Manual	3.44	-	3.44	-	93.10	99.98
Casual	10.29	4.41	8.23	-	76.44	99.37

TABLE 5.9(b)

Fathers' occupation (by percentage) among categories of dockers

<u>SKILLED MANUALS</u> %	<u>CLERKS</u> %
Labourer & Domestic 6.66	Labourer 2.77
Trader16.66	Skilled Manual . 19.44
Farmer45.00	Trader16.66
Clerk 1.66	Professional & Managerial . . . 25.00
Skilled Manual . 15.00	Farmer30.55
Professional & Managerial . . . 11.66	Clerical 5.55
Don't know . . . 3.33	
TOTAL 99.97	TOTAL 99.97
<u>UNSKILLED MANUALS</u> %	<u>CASUALS</u> %
Farmer93.10	Farmer80.88
Fisherman 3.44	Trader 4.41
Trader 3.44	Skilled Manual . 13.23
	Clerical 1.47
TOTAL 99.98	TOTAL 99.99

manual and the casual groups by contrast had fathers who had been peasant farmers (Table 5.9(b)). Such data of course suggests differences in the possibilities for intergenerational mobility among lower paid workers (which must be even more pronounced between the latter and the more elite groups). These inequalities are, moreover, not at all attenuated by a declining economy, the consequent contraction in employment opportunities, or by an official agricultural policy which discourages the small farmer and thereby encourages migration to the towns.

The survey also shows that the workforce at the port is fairly stable with a low incidence of job turnover. (This stability is, of course, in part a consequence of the lack of alternative and attractive opportunities either of or to urban employment). 75% of the clerks in the sample had been working at the port for more than five years. The corresponding figures for the other groups were 65% of the skilled manuals, 86.1% of the unskilled manuals, and 75% of the casuals (Table 5.10(a)). This stability may also be related to marital status and parenthood. Less than a fifth of each category of dockers reported that they had no children. More than two-thirds of each category were married (cf. Table 5.10(b)).

The sample was asked how they had obtained jobs at the port. 69.4% of the clerks reported that they got their jobs by direct application to the Port Authority or through the placement of the Freetown Labour Exchange. 66.5% of the skilled manuals, 20.7% of the unskilled manuals, and 39.7% of the casuals reported using these channels. The remaining proportions, 30.6% of the clerks, 33.3% skilled manuals, 79.3% unskilled manuals and 60.2% casuals (Table 5.11) gave replies which can best be summarised as by 'recommendation', a slightly euphemistic term for the working of the system of patron-clientelism in the public sector.

TABLE 5.10(a)

Labour turnover among categories of dockers

NO. OF YEARS AT THE PORT	CLERKS	SKILLED MANUALS	UNSKILLED MANUALS	CASUALS
Less than 1 year	5.55	16.66	-	2.94
1 - 2 years	-	1.66	3.44	8.82
3 - 5 years	19.44	16.66	10.34	10.29
6 - 8 years	22.22	15.00	31.03	11.76
9 - 10 years	22.22	15.00	6.89	8.82
11 - 14 years	11.11	16.66	20.68	7.35
15 - 20 years	19.44	10.00	20.68	17.64
More than 20 years	-	8.33	6.89	29.41
Don't know	-	-	-	2.94
TOTAL	99.98	99.97	99.95	99.97

What has emerged so far is as follows: dock workers are predominantly male with a small proportion of females in the clerical group only. They come from all over the country but the largest ethnic groups, Temne and Mende, are somewhat over-represented relative to their national percentages among all categories of dockers. Krios are also over-represented among both clerical and skilled dockers. It had been observed impressionistically that there was little sign of ethnic tensions among the dockers. This observation was borne out

in the survey. Dockers were asked with which group of workers they particularly liked to 'mix'; the alternative responses were deliberately standardised to include 'workers from your ethnic group or region' (cf. annexure, question 2.7). Without exception, the replies cut across the alternatives which had been isolated. It was perhaps significant here that one of the slogans of the Dock Workers' Union was 'One union, one (cooking) pot'. The heavy symbolism in this slogan must not be overlooked.

About two-thirds of the sample were not born in Freetown. In most cases it appears that the various facilities available and the possibilities of realising a higher standard of living in the capital have been the main attractions and have contributed to the decision to continue living there. There is little evidence of inter-generational mobility. In relative terms, the social backgrounds of individual dockers are related to their educational attainment and, hence, occupational status. While clerks and other skilled workers are in this (and other) respects relatively privileged, their economic and social distance from the truly elite groups is quite vast. This was clearly evident from observation of their standard of living during visits to their homes. It is also evident in their cultural and recreational activities.

The frequently repeated assertion (and the basis, very largely of the Fanonist position) that most urban workers are very much better off than most rural farmers does not appear to be clearly supported by the evidence for Sierra Leone. It is clearly not the case that, according to official income figures at least, the majority of manual workers (who in turn constitute the majority of urban workers) are very much better off. On the other hand, this does not mean that the rural farmers are at all fairly treated; it is not to deny that they are exploited in order to finance the provision of public sector jobs

TABLE 5.10(b) Percentage of married dockers

CATEGORY	PERCENTAGE
Clerks	63.88
Skilled Manual	81.66
Unskilled Manual	82.75
Casuals	95.58

TABLE 5.11 Means of obtaining employment among categories of dockers by percentage

CATEGORY	BY RECOMMENDATION	BY APPLICATION
Clerks	30.55	69.44
Skilled Manual	33.33	66.66
Unskilled Manual	79.31	20.68
Casual	60.29	39.70

which, collectively speaking, are somewhat parasitic. The degree of parasitism, however, is highly unevenly distributed within this collective (class) situation as between not only individuals but also different categories of urban wage-employees. It is, to say the least, somewhat over-simple and misleading, therefore, to view the majority of lower paid workers as parasitic on the rural peasantry.

Secondly, it would seem that the rural-urban migrants are attracted not by any real improvement in the living standards of the majority of urban wage-employees but by the need to supplement a family rural income with a male member's urban cash income (or by the greater opportunities for social mobility in the urban areas). Such opportunities are, the evidence would suggest, decidedly and increasingly limited. In so far as they exist, however, they would seem to hinge on two possible avenues of advancement: (1) via combination of employment in the formal sector with entrepreneurial success in the informal sector; (2) via cultivation of political patrons and of the opportunities presented by government or by para-statal employment for increased income through corruption. The second of these avenues is largely closed to lower paid manual workers and the reason why, once they have secured a job at the port, the great majority of dockers stick to it, is rather to be found in the increasingly high incidence of unemployment and severe underemployment.

Trade unionism and the world of work

The Port Authority is virtually a closed shop. All persons in the sample were members of the Dock Workers' Union with the exception of the stevedore casual labourers who accounted for 20.1% of the sample. (Stevedoring was only taken over by the Port Authority on November 1, 1978, and the Maritime and Waterfront Workers' Union continued to represent the stevedores. Casual shore cargo handling

labourers, who have always been in the employ of the Port Authority and are members of the Dock Workers' Union, accounted for 21.9% of the sample. The casuals will continue to be treated as a single group in this discussion of orientations to work and to trade unionism).

Lower paid workers at the Port Authority are subjected to very close supervision during the work process. It was also observed that the fringe benefits of employment at the Port Authority were distributed highly disproportionately among the workforce; while members of the senior staff and their families, for instance, were entitled to free medi-care at the well-equipped port health clinic, which was attended by two full-time doctors, a team of nurses and other para-medical staff, the families of lower paid dockers were prohibited from using the clinic.¹ Moreover casual dockers could only use the clinic if they happened to fall ill on the day that they had actually been working. A particularly sore point among the dockers therefore was the spectacle of medical teams being rushed to attend foreign crews and their families on board visiting ships. A canteen was also maintained at the port for the use of the workforce. It was observed that the canteen was divided into two lounges for the senior and junior staff. The former was by far the more comfortably furnished.

Another issue frequently mentioned by dockers when asked about the problems they experienced at work, was the infrequency of promotions. Because the port is so heavily overmanned, individual competitiveness and an achievement ethic are conspicuous by their absence. Accordingly, the management does not seem to have found it

1 During the first period of research in Freetown, officials of the Dock Workers' Union were negotiating a comprehensive medicare package with the port management.

necessary to institute programmes of manpower development as distinct from literacy classes and some basic training among the junior members of the workforce.

The psychological ramifications of these aspects of the organisation of work at the port are conducive to adversarial industrial relations. When asked whether their work made them feel within their hearts that they were doing something worthwhile, more than two-thirds of each of the four categories gave an affirmative response. This may however be related to the lack of alternative employment opportunities in Freetown. When asked what they generally thought of trade unions, the dockers' most common reply was that 'unions protect workers from being taken advantage of by management'. An accounts clerk wrote on his questionnaire that 'the only effective way workers can be powerful enough is through the union. It is the vehicle through which workers can be heard'. A welder (of the skilled manual group) wrote that 'unions are there to seek the interest of the workers and must also educate them'. Such manifestations of a developed trade union consciousness were rare in the sample as a whole, more especially amongst the unskilled workers. This suggests, however, that skilled workers (relatively well-off as they might be), far from being complacent about their position in the emerging class structure, are more likely to develop radical attitudes vis a vis their relative deprivation, in consequence of their possession of skills and generally higher level of educational attainment. The latter, also, no doubt, helps them to see through the facade of government claims to be pursuing the general interest in an impartial manner.

These differences within the sample as regards attitudes to trade unionism were also evident as regards attitudes to strike action. When asked what they thought of strikes, just over half the sample

were ambivalent, a typical reply being, 'it is good to join trade unions but I do not favour strikes except when absolutely necessary' (a cleaner of the unskilled manual group). The more educated workers in the sample gave replies which might be regarded as militant: 'Strikes are necessary when workers are dissatisfied with either the conditions of service or some other reason' (an electrician of the skilled manual group).

It was noticeable and impressive that each docker in the sample knew the name of the shop steward representing his/her section and the name of the union secretary or a senior official. When asked what they considered to be the qualities of a good trade union leader, 68.7% of the whole sample listed 'honesty' among their replies. Other frequent replies were that a union leader must be well informed (52.6%); approachable (42%), and articulate 'like a lawyer' (38%). 43% of the whole sample had had some experience of strike action.

Ideology and consciousness

The ambivalence in the attitudes of the dockers to the inequalities in the society around them, and more especially towards elite corruption, had been noted during informal conversations. Some questions were deliberately written into the questionnaire to bring out these contradictions. The dockers were told that, in Sierra Leone, there are Big Men or 'gentry people', there are those who are 'managing' and there are those who are poor. Dockers were then asked to which of the three groups they thought they belonged. 97.2% of the clerks, 61.7% of the skilled manuals, 75.7% of the casuals replied that they were 'managing' (cf. Table 5.12(a)). They typically reasoned that, since they were in good health, had a job, and every reason to be hopeful, to say that they were poor was being ungrateful to God or Allah. Dockers were then asked how and why they thought inequalities occurred in Sierra Leone society. 88.9% of the clerks,

61.1% of the skilled manuals, 89.6% of the unskilled manuals and 88.2% of the casuals gave some variant of the reply that people were unequal because it was the will of God. (In making this point during informal conversations, a docker would typically spread out all the fingers and say with impeccable logic that they were not all of the same size because God didn't want them that way). However, 41.7% of the clerks, 46.7% of the skilled manuals, 31% of the unskilled manuals, and 33.8% of the casuals also gave replies suggesting that the personal situation of the individual (education, inheritance, etc.) could contribute to his position in society. 16.7% of the clerks, 48.3% of the skilled manuals, 30.8% of the unskilled manuals, and 29.4% of the casuals also listed political power, influence, and corruption as factors that could contribute to inequalities in society. (The details are provided in Table 5.12(b)).¹

The ambivalence in such replies contrasted sharply with the replies given when dockers were asked, 'Compared with other people, do you think you and your family are getting a fair share or benefit for the work you do?' 52.8% of the clerks, 68.3% of the skilled manuals, 86.2% of the unskilled manuals, and 82.4% of the casuals replied in the negative. When asked to explain, they typically drew attention to their low living standards, and frequently mentioned that prices were rising faster than wages. Similarly, when asked what their future intentions and aspirations were, the dockers were clear about their priorities. 58.3% of the clerks, 46.7% of the skilled manuals, 13.8% of the unskilled manuals, and 23.5% of the casuals wanted to further their education or to learn a skill. 16.7% of the

1 Cf. Peter Lloyd, Power and Independence: Urban Africans' Perception of Social Inequality, London, 1974, esp. p.184 ff. and Margaret Peil, Nigerian Politics: The People's View, London, 1976 for survey reports and discussions of ambivalences among low income groups vis a vis inequalities in Nigerian society.

TABLE 5.12(a)

Self-assessment of socio-economic position in percentages

CATEGORY	POOR	'MANAGING'	GENTRY
Clerk	2.77	97.20	-
Skilled	33.33	61.66	5.00
Unskilled	17.24	75.86	6.89
Casuals	19.11	80.88	-

TABLE 5.12(b)

Main views on the origins of inequality by percentage⁺

CATEGORY	DIVINE DESIGN	PERSONAL SITUATION (EDUCATION, INHERITANCE)	DON'T KNOW	CORRUPTION POWER & INFLUENCE
Clerk	88.88	41.66	2.77	16.66
Skilled	61.11	46.66	-	48.33
Unskilled	89.60	31.03	6.96	30.76
Casuals	88.23	33.82	7.35	29.41

⁺ The sample was allowed to give up to four replies.

TABLE 5.12(c)

Future intentions and aspirations (by percentage)

CATEGORY	TO IMPROVE HOUSING	BUSINESS	TO IMPROVE EDUCATION	TO INVEST IN CHILDRENS' EDUCATION	COMMERCIAL FARMING	OTHERS	DON'T KNOW
Clerk	-	16.66	58.33	5.55	-	5.55	13.88
Skilled	1.66	41.66	46.66	-	5.00	3.33	1.66
Unskilled	6.89	27.58	13.79	3.44	37.93	3.44	-
Casuals	17.64	23.52	23.52	20.58	7.35	5.88	4.41

TABLE 5.12(d)

Assessment of politicians and public servants (by percentage)

CATEGORY	NEGATIVE	POSITIVE	DON'T KNOW
Clerks	66.66	30.55	2.77
Skilled	61.66	38.33	-
Unskilled	75.86	17.24	6.89
Casuals	82.35	16.17	1.47

TABLE 5.12(e)

Rural development as a national priority (by percentage)

CATEGORY	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	DON'T KNOW
Clerks	80.55	2.77	16.66
Skilled	90.00	1.66	8.33
Unskilled	75.86	17.24	6.89
Casuals	98.52	-	1.47

clerks, 41.7% of the skilled manuals, 27.6% of the unskilled manuals, and 23.6% of the casuals wanted to become involved in business or commerce. (38% of the unskilled manuals mentioned commercial farming). 21% of the casuals intended investing in their children's education (cf. Table 5.12(c)).

The sample was then asked to assess the country's politicians and top civil servants and, more specifically, to gauge whether politicians and public servants were setting an example by making a sacrifice or whether they were capable of improving the country's economic situation. 66.7% of the clerks, 61.7% of the skilled manuals, 75.9% of the unskilled manuals, and 82.4% of the casuals gave a negative response to either one or the other of the two propositions (Table 5.12(d)). The sample was also amenable to the idea that the government's priority ought to be rural development. (The survey was carried out some six weeks before Sierra Leone lavishly hosted an OAU summit conference - and at a time when the preparations in the capital were intense - at a reputed cost of Le200 million). Table 5.12(e) has the details.

Political clientelism and the world of the docker

About a third of the skilled dockers, and a much higher proportion of the unskilled report using informal channels to obtain employment. As we have seen in Chapter 4 (when documentary evidence from the port archive and the report of the Forster Commission was cited), influential persons can exert pressure on the port management to place political supporters and kinsmen on the pay roll. The General Manager of the Port Authority claimed that the port bureaucracy as a whole was overmanned by at least a third.¹

1 Interview with Ray Donker, 8 January 1980.

TABLE 5.13

Port work force 1980[†]

Clerks	432
Skilled Manuals	720
Unskilled Manuals	348
Casuals	6,528
Total lower paid	8,028

[†] It is useful to compare this table with Table 4.7 above

SOURCE: These figures are based on an enumeration of dockers in each category by this researcher.

It has also been shown that, at the work place, the ethnic identity of the docker is submerged. Work mates from different ethnic groups 'mix' freely with each other quite easily. In their social and cultural lives outside the work place however, some degree of ethnic cohesion is maintained through their religious activities and through their membership of descendants' associations. In their social and cultural activities therefore, dockers have the opportunity to 'mix' with influential Big Men or Mammies. Favours such as assistance in finding a job may be requested and granted. Dockers were specifically asked in the survey whether there were 'any groups who are helping you so that you can go before' (or improve your situation in life). Just under a third of the whole sample replied in the affirmative that influential people could give assistance in finding jobs and on family occasions such as births, marriages and deaths. There were no suggestions, however, of regular cash

hand-outs. Most dockers do recognise that they live in a political and economic world where patron-clientelism is the main answer to advancement - and many are prepared to use it. This helps explain their somewhat ambivalent attitudes.

Not all 'Big Men' are cabinet ministers or important politicians. 'Big Men' (or 'Mammies') are people with 'connections'. They are influential and form the strands of thread in the intricate web of patron-clientelism. They range from professionals, businessmen and party officials to trade union officials and even thugs and assorted hangers-on. This network of influential people is known to enjoy the confidence of the party and, in particular, its leader. It must not be assumed that 'Big Men' can rely on the loyalty of dockers to whom they have been patrons. However poorly they express their consciousness of the inequalities in the society around them, dockers do resent some of the activities of this political and bureaucratic kleptocracy. When specifically asked to assess the politicians and top civil servants (Table 5.12(d)), the dockers were overwhelmingly negative in their assessment. The chapter which follows continues this evaluation of the response to their economic situation by examining their trade union behaviour and organisation.

Chapter 6

A shop stewards' movement: the internal dynamics of the Dock Workers' Union 1963-79

Following the formation of the Dock Workers' Union in May 1963, a powerful shop stewards' movement - which has since become the 'keeper of the conscience' of the union - gradually emerged. Not originally provided for in the union constitution, and thereby having only an informal status, shop floor representation on the union executive via elected stewards descended directly from the system of workers' representation on the discredited Works Committee. Being the driving force behind the formation of the union, these representatives continued to act in an informal capacity as the recruitment agents of the union in the sections they had represented at the Works Committee. Within a few years other functions evolved: shop stewards became the main channel of contact between the ordinary members and the full-time leadership. Grievances for transmission to the union secretary or his assistant were reported to stewards; the interpretation of agreements reached with management, the union constitution, and other documents and notices were undertaken by stewards. Two important considerations appear to have influenced this development in the role and status of shop floor representation within the union. First, most stewards were literate, articulate, or had the experience of the procedures of bargaining in a committee of workers and management. These 'qualifications' were recognised and respected by their work mates. Second, the institution of an automatic check-off system shortly after the registration of the union meant that the leadership were in receipt of monies subscribed by the workers. The stewards made it their business to know how this money was being spent. In their attachment of some considerable importance to this

issue, informal means of accountability became established within the union. The term 'shop steward' appears not to have been in use at the port before 1967 when the union constitution was revised, the role formalised, and provisions made for annual elections. The year before, shop floor representatives had provoked a crisis over a proposal of the management to replace the overtime system with shift work as part of the re-organisation of the public sector urged by the IMF. The union secretary, a member of the Board of the Port Authority, had acquiesced in the implementation of the proposals. Urged on by floor representatives, dock workers resisted the introduction of shift work until it had been properly negotiated with the union. The dispute necessitated the setting up of a public inquiry which published a report¹ giving valuable insight into the union organisation during its early years. The report recommended the dismissal of the secretary who was by then thoroughly discredited. Four years after this dispute, in 1971, stewards forced the second secretary out of office on allegations of fraud and dishonesty. Throughout the 'seventies, this tradition of union 'watch dog' was maintained. In 1979, stewards again precipitated the dismissal of the third union secretary for misuse of union funds and instituted legal proceedings. In between leadership crises, floor representatives fully participated in the mapping of strategies to be adopted in bargaining with management, in securing the support of influential politicians on these occasions, and in the strategic use of such support. This chapter examines the internal dynamics of the Dock Workers' Union by focusing particularly on the structure of accountability within the union. A second section examines the

1 Sierra Leone, Report of the Board of Inquiry into the Docks Dispute, Freetown, 1967 (henceforth referred to as The Panda Report).

responses of dock workers to their employment by a parastatal organisation by focusing on the strategies adopted by the union in the process of bargaining.

The structure of accountability within the Dock Workers' Union

The formation of the Dock Workers' Union was a somewhat acrimonious affair as two of the older unions operating at the port, the Maritime and Waterfront Workers' Union and the Railway Workers' Union were determined to strangle the new organisation at birth. The organisers were equally determined to resist these attempts. At the Labour Department, where all trade unions were required to be registered, they argued forcefully that to prevent dock workers from forming their own organisation would be an infringement of international labour codes of freedom of association. Attention was further drawn to the practice in other countries where dockers are organised separately.¹ It was strongly believed by the organisers that 'our interests will not be properly protected in a bigger union. Apart from that, the railway union and the stevedore union were not progressive unions'.² Due to the success of the former representatives on the Works Committee in persuading their work mates to join the union, the Port Management Department became a virtual closed shop. Subscriptions were set at 6d. a month.³ The Works Committee itself became redundant. For the first year of its existence, the elected officials of the union - drawn mainly from the clerical and artisan

1 Interview with J. T. Kanu, founder member of the union and former union president, 26 February 1980. The same ground was covered in interviews of other founder members and in more informal conversations with dockers during the first and second periods of field research in 1980 and 1982. Cf. also Labour Department, Annual Report, p.7.

2 Interview with Aziz Kassim, founder member, 6 March 1982.

3 Interview with J. T. Kanu, 26 February 1980.

grades - were part-time; but in 1964 two clerks, J. I. Sandy and M. I. Mansaray, became the full-time secretary and assistant secretary respectively. Both resigned their appointments with the Port Management Department.¹ Other members of the union executive in 1964 were M. M. Fatoma, the union president, J. C. Solomon, vice-president, M. A. Jalloh, treasurer, A. J. Johnson and F. J. Seibure, internal auditors, H. B. Macauley and F. J. O. Johnson, trustees.² These were part-time appointments. The decision to appoint two full-time officials was a product of the realisation among the membership of the practical difficulties facing the main individuals who were employees in the port organisation but also involved in routine negotiations with the management on behalf of the union.³ Since the union had accumulated some funds from membership subscriptions,⁴ it was felt that these ought to be used to employ two full-time officials at rates comparable to those obtaining for clerks at the port organisation. The union also leased office space at Fourah Bay Road in the vicinity of the port and employed office staff, a typist and a messenger. In order that these overheads would be met, monthly subscriptions were increased to 15 cents⁵ in 1964, to 30 cents in 1965, and to 40 cents in 1966.⁶

1 Ibid.

2 Interview with Aziz Kassim, 6 March 1982.

3 Ibid.

4 Assuming that each of the 2,649 members of the union paid their subscriptions, monthly revenue of the union in 1963 would have been £55.1.6d.

5 In August 1964, Sierra Leone changed over to the decimal system and introduced new currency, Leones and cents.

6 Interview with Aziz Kassim, 6 March 1982.

During these early years, however, a problem which was to become perennial in the administration of the union emerged. This was the use and control of union finances. It can be shown that about half (at the maximum) of the union's monthly revenue between 1964 and 1967 was used to meet overheads, leaving a healthy balance in reserve (see Tables 6.1(a) and 6.1(b)). It is clear, however, from conversations with dockers, and indeed from the evidence heard by the Panda Commission in 1966/67, that a clique within the union executive converted monies from these balances for their own personal use and the use of their friends. Here, it is worth quoting Panda at some length.

'The finances of this union, if properly handled, would be a handy asset to the union itself. The check-off system is in force in the port...and workers contract in to pay union dues which is forty cents (40c) a month...Apart from the auditing of the accounts by the professional auditors of the union, the union appointed Mr. F. J. Seibure as internal auditor of the union, but evidence was led to the fact that notwithstanding this provision, Mr. Jalloh (the treasurer) flouted the authority of the internal auditor and submitted his accounts direct to the external auditors, thereby leaving himself open to suspicion by union members...Evidence was adduced that union funds were utilised in advancing loans to members and non-members of the union. Mr. Jalloh admitted in evidence that loans were given only to members of the union...(but) evidence was given by several witnesses that loans were given only to members who were friends of the members of the executive...There are several amounts outstanding to the union and steps should be taken to recover these immediately. I find the executive...were in default in granting loans to members of the union under the guise of benefits. For trade union purposes, benefits may include relief in sickness, accident, and unemployment from victimisation in the furtherance of a trade dispute.'¹

These allegations firmly placed the issue of accountability within

1 The Panda Report, p.2.

the union on the agenda for debate among the entire membership. This directly resulted in the re-organisation of the union structure in ways more radical than even Panda had envisaged. The Panda report recommended that the Labour Department, and specifically, the Registrar of trade unions, should periodically examine the audited reports of the union. 'The Registrar of Trade Unions should be required to review the entire accounts of the union, and submit his report to the Ministry of Lands, Mines, and Labour.'¹ At the docks, however, where the laxity of public service bureaucratic control was fully understood, a consensus emerged that elected floor representatives from each section of the port organisation should be made members of the executive. 'We felt that we don't have to wait for the Ministry to come and tell us that our money has been stolen. It is our money which we pay for the union to be organised to protect us. So it is we who should decide how to use the money and to know if it is being stolen.'² At the union's annual conference of March 1967 (in effect a mass meeting of the entire membership), the union constitution was amended to accommodate floor representatives, designated shop stewards, on the executive. Another amendment created the position of financial secretary whose function it was to maintain the financial records of the union and to approve all transactions carried out by the treasurer.³ Elections to all executive positions were held, and in all cases, none of the former members of the old executive were returned. Jack Sandy, the first union secretary, having been thoroughly discredited, did not contest. The former assistant secretary, M. I. Mansaray, was elected secretary.

1 Ibid.

2 Interview with Thema Conteh (former union shop steward), 5 March 1982.

3 Interview with Aziz Kassim, 6 March 1982.

TABLE 6.1(a)

Estimate of union revenue 1963/64 - 1966/67

YEAR	MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION	MONTHLY UNION REVENUE
1963/64	6d.(5c)	£55.1.6d (Le 110.30c)
1964/65	15c	Le 396.35c
1965/66	30c	Le 794.70c
1966/67	40c	Le1,059.60c.

Basis of estimate: Union membership in 1963 was 2,649 (cf. Labour Department, Annual Report 1963, Table 15). It is assumed that membership remained at this level (though it in fact increased over the period). The bias is however in the right direction as it is not known whether each member paid the subscription.

TABLE 6.1(b)

Estimate of average union monthly expenditure 1963/64 - 1966/67

ITEM	EXPENDITURE
Union Secretary's salary	Le 80
Union Assistant Secretary's salary	Le 60
Typist's salary	Le 30
Messenger's salary	Le 20
Other overheads (e.g. office lease, stationery, bills, etc.)	Le150
TOTAL	Le340

N.B.: First full year of union expenditure on these items is 1964/65

SOURCE: These estimates are based on figures provided by Aziz Kassim who was elected Union Financial Secretary in 1967 (interview with Aziz Kassim, 6 March 1982). Actual figures on union expenditure are available from 1971. These show that average monthly union expenditure was in the region of Le650 (Dock Workers' Union, minutes of Executive Meeting, 17 February 1972). Assuming a gradual increase in union expenditure over the years, the 1963/64 - 1966/67 estimates are realistic.

These two positions continued to be full-time.¹

It is clear the M. I. Mansaray was instrumental in bringing about these changes. At the end of 1964, Mansaray, then assistant secretary, was awarded a six months' scholarship to study aspects of trade union organisation in the USSR. Sandy, as union secretary, having cultivated a personal relationship with the leaders of the ruling SLPP, had himself attended a short course in industrial relations in Europe in 1964, and has secured the scholarship for Mansaray.² On Mansaray's return to Freetown in July 1965, he discovered the financial irregularities that were later investigated by the Panda inquiry. 'I was angered, because this was a young union, and within a year all these things were happening.'³ Furthermore, Sandy had been appointed a member of the Board of Directors of the Port Authority in January 1965, and Mansaray on his return recognised that the former's position as union secretary had, as a consequence, been hopelessly compromised. He decided to undermine Sandy's position as union secretary among the membership and, in particular, the former representatives on the Works Committee.⁴ The Panda inquiry also heard evidence to this effect.

'...allegations were preferred against Mr. Mansaray to the effect that he had been engaged in moves aimed at bringing the good

1 Ibid.

2 Interview with M. I. Mansaray, 28 April 1980; it should be noted that in Sierra Leone, an opportunity to travel abroad, particularly to the industrialised countries, is regarded with considerable excitement. This is because the individual is in effect presented with an opportunity to bring back consumer durables produced in these countries, which are scarce and extremely expensive locally.

3 Interview with M. I. Mansaray, 3 April 1982.

4 Interview with M. I. Mansaray, 28 April 1980; the same point was made during the 1982 interview.

name of the union to disrepute; that Mr. Mansaray had been heard on several occasions telling groups of members of the Dock Workers' Union that they were being exploited by Government because the union was very weak and was always taking sides with the employers.¹

A power struggle then ensued between Sandy and Mansaray, the former drawing his support from the union executive, and the latter from the union rank and file. In August 1965, the executive expelled Mansaray from the union in circumstances which Panda found 'to be not in accordance with the provisions of the constitution of the union'.² Mansaray, ignoring the expulsion order, continued his campaign to remove Sandy from the leadership of the union. The Panda Report noted that 'from the time Mr. Mansaray was expelled...there existed a complete rumpus within the union'.³ Sandy completely misjudged the mood of the membership and the influence of the former workers' representatives. He compounded this error with other tactless actions. The 1965 annual union conference was held behind closed doors at the V.I.P lounge of the Port Authority, Sandy being a director on the Board. The delegates to the conference were carefully hand-picked by Sandy, who was consequently able to secure a vote of confidence and a further term of office. Mansaray retaliated by organising an 'alternative' mass union conference at which it was resolved that the following letter of protest be sent to the Labour Department:

'Dear Sir,

Resolution of fully paid-up members of the Sierra Leone Dock Workers' Union at a meeting assembled at Cline Town on Tuesday 5th October, 1965, at 6.30 a.m. attended by approximately 1,600 fully

1 The Panda Report, p.3.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

paid-up members of the Sierra Leone Dock Workers' Union, the following matters regarding the mal-administration of the union were discussed and decided upon:-

- (1) Illegally convening of a so-called Annual Conference for the election of officers at which only thirty members including the present officers attended at a Very Important Personalities lounge of the Sierra Leone Ports Authority, instead of at the union's registered office.
- (2) Unsatisfactory and illegal use of union's fund.
- (3) Summary dismissal of fully paid-up members without a charge being prepared against them.
- (4) Contravening Rule 22 of the union's Rule regarding elections.

In view of the above we the undersigned fully paid-up members unanimously resolve as follows:-

- (1) That we have lost complete confidence of the executive body of the Sierra Leone Dock Workers' Union.
- (2) That the Annual Conference held by the union is both undemocratic and illegal and we consider it null and void; that arrangements be made for fresh election of officers (Rule 22) of the union to be supervised by the Labour Department
- (3) That an independent auditor be engaged to audit the union's finances
- (4) That the authorities concerned appoint an independent enquiry to probe into the matters complained of.

We remain to be Sir'

(signed) Members (Dock Workers' Union)¹

1 Paid-up members of the Dock Workers' Union to the Registrar of Trade Unions, Labour Department, 8th October 1965, quoted in The Panda Report, p.4.

No immediate action was taken in response to the letter. Sandy, however, attempted to consolidate his position by issuing a press statement in which he declared the support of the Dock Workers' Union for the single-party state mooted by the ruling SLPP which was being debated in parliament. This was regarded by Mansaray and others as a very skilful move, as Sandy had succeeded in giving the dispute a political dimension and could therefore count on the support of his patrons in the SLPP.¹ The Labour Department was eventually forced to intervene as the rank and file were resolute in their determination to make Sandy accountable;

'The Commissioner of Labour in his evidence said that his Ministry had done everything to educate the leaders of the union. He had personally insisted that the union should be run in accordance with its constitution. When he made efforts to reconcile the relationship between the General Secretary... and Mr. Mansaray...he received no cooperation from the former. It was after this that he was compelled to relax his efforts because the latter group had taken the matter to court to seek an injunction to restrain the executive from functioning.'²

The injunction was not granted because of a legal technicality.³

The Mansaray faction, however, appealed to a higher court. While the case was being heard, the rank and file of the union took action over the introduction of a shift system which had been approved by Sandy at Board level, but which had not been negotiated with the union. It was in response to the continuing dispute within the union that the Labour Department advised the government to appoint a commission to examine those issues and the relations between the

1 Interview with M. I. Mansaray, 28 April 1980.

2 The Panda Report, p.5.

3 Interview with M. I. Mansaray, 28 April 1980.

union and the Port Authority.¹ Mansaray and others immediately dropped their action.²

The commission found the convening of the 1965 annual conference of the union in the V.I.P. lounge of the Port Authority to be profoundly improper as this was meant to exclude the participation of workers' representatives in the deliberations and in the election of union officers. Moreover, since membership of the Port Authority Board had compromised the position of Sandy as union leader, the commission felt that some person, other than the secretary, ought to be appointed as the workers' representative on the Board:

'The General Secretary of a trade union is the chief executive of that union. He runs the day to day business of the union under the guidance of the executive council. A union secretary may find himself in a very untenable position as member of the corporation. There is no doubt that the present secretary, Mr. Sandy, found himself in the position described, having acquiesced at a Board meeting held in June, 1965, in a decision to introduce the shift system at the port. In order to give the workers effective representation and at the same time to avoid putting the union secretary in an embarrassing position, the Minister responsible for the appointment of members of the Board may consider appointing someone else outside the industry; for example a retired trade unionist of wide experience and knowledge of industrial relations in this country. The person so appointed may be appointed to the Staff Committee and the other organs of the Board. This would help to improve relations between the union and the Port Authority.'³

This recommendation has never been heeded inspite of its inherent logic. As governments attempt to extend their influence in the

1 Ibid; Mansaray has since said that the government was willing to appoint a commission as Sandy had become an embarrassment (interview with M. I. Mansaray, 3 April 1982).

2 Interview with M. I. Mansaray, 28 April 1980.

3 The Panda Report, p.10.

trade union movement, a paid directorship on the Board of the Port Authority has always been offered as a carrot to the secretary of the union.¹

The crisis within the union, however, exposed the whole of the membership to a learning process which resulted in a widespread realisation of the importance of maintaining and fostering means of accountability within the union. The measures taken at the union conference of March 1967, and in particular the amendment of the constitution to provide for floor representation on the executive, were a natural consequence of this learning process. Moreover, in becoming a part of the union folklore (as extended conversations with dockers has revealed), these lessons are being constantly reinforced. Mansaray's own eventual dismissal during the second leadership crisis of 1971, and indeed the third leadership crisis of 1979, can be related to the lessons which had been learnt.

One of Mansaray's priorities as union secretary was to increase the membership of the union, particularly among casual dockers. 'I realised that casuals are very difficult to organise but they needed union protection badly'.² Of a total lower paid workforce of 6,978 at the port in 1967, 5,678 dockers were casuals.³ (Almost the whole of the non-casual dockers were members of the union and it was in this sense a virtual closed shop.) During his secretaryship, Mansaray succeeded in increasing membership from 'just below 3,000 when I took over to about 4,200 when I left'.⁴ This was achieved

1 The point should also be made that the union leadership have been equally eager to grab the carrot and to enter into clientelist relations with politicians whose influence could be used in bargaining with management.

2 Interview with M. I. Mansaray 3 April 1982.

3 Labour Department Annual Report 1967; figure includes casual stevedore labourers; cf. Table 5.13 supra.

4 Interview with M. I. Mansaray, 3 April 1982.

by extending membership of the union also to labourers employed by the Produce Marketing Board engaged in the packing of produce for export in the Cline Town area close to the port. 'In a sense these labourers are cargo handlers. They pack produce for export which is sent to the port, where our own boys take over. I realised that these labourers needed union protection.'¹ Accordingly, Mansaray wrote to the General Manager of the Produce Marketing Board to inform him that over 200 labourers employed in his establishment had joined the Dock Workers' Union. The letter presented the issue as a fait accompli:

'I should inform you...that your workmen have expressly decided voluntarily, and have accordingly joined the Sierra Leone Dock Workers' Union with effect from November ending 1967...I am instructed by the executive of my union to repeat my information to you that you workers listed on the attached sheet have become members of the union and that henceforth represented by us'.²

The management of the Produce Marketing Board was initially reluctant to accept this development, but, following several meetings and exchanges of letters, the issue was eventually resolved.³ Two shop stewards were elected by the workers from among their numbers to represent them on the union executive.⁴

As union secretary, Mansaray supported the APC which came to power in 1968 and its patronage. (Since the formation of the union,

1 Ibid.

2 Dock Workers' Union, M. I. Mansaray to the General Manager Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Board, 14 March 1968.

3 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 12th June 1969 between the representatives of the Dock Workers' Union and the management of the Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Board.

4 Interview with M. I. Mansaray, 3 April 1982.

it had been affiliated to the APC-leaning national centre, the Council of Labour). In 1968, contrary to the recommendations of the Panda Report, Mansaray was appointed to the Board of the Port Authority. The following year, O. B. Conteh, Mansaray's deputy, was sent to Britain to pursue a course in industrial relations.¹ Mansaray's appointment to the Board was viewed with some dismay by many of the shop stewards and the union rank and file.² He argued that his appointment would improve the union's intelligence network and that he would never enter into any agreement without the mandate of the executive.³ 'He kept to this promise and we never suspected him of selling out'.⁴ Mansaray himself has said he never 'betrayed' the union and has insisted that he is very proud of his record as union leader.⁵ As a part-time director on the Board, he received Lel,080 a year in director's fees and was entitled to other perquisites.

During the absence of the assistant secretary in 1969-70 however, some irregularities in the use of monies voted for the administration of the union were discovered by the executive. The executive decided to bring this matter to a head at the 1970 annual conference of the union. Mansaray attempted to pre-empt this by drawing up a programme for a one-day conference - even though it had become the established practice for conferences to be spread over three days - at which the elections of members of the executive was the main item. (Except for

1 Ibid.

2 Interview with Mark Luseni (shop steward), 18 February 1980.

3 Ibid.

4 Interview with Aziz Kassim, 6 March 1982.

5 Interview with M. I. Mansaray, 3 April 1982.

minor changes, the 1967 executive had been re-elected each year.)

C. T. Patnelli, a shop steward in the accounts section, wrote to Mansaray to insist upon a detailed programme spread over three days:

' A day for annual conference is in my view too short for us...Three days at least could be utilised for putting things straight. You yourself as secretary-general of the union have been privileged to see the union run on democratic principles...This is one of the most essential times when fair play coupled with negotiation experience could be put into action, and your knowing that you are not dealing with uneducated people only, would suffice. The agenda as I see it calls for some re-arrangement and additional items...'¹

This agenda, supported by other members of the executive, was adopted.

At the conference, Mansaray drew attention to his successes in negotiations with management at the Produce Marketing Board and at the Port Authority. When the audit reports were discussed, it was clear that he had fraudulently converted monies voted for the administration of the union to his own use. 'The mood of the conference was that he had done a good job, so we warned him, and decided to increase our own vigilance.'²

It is clear from union records that the vigilance of the stewards was indeed increased after the conference. At an executive council meeting in June, a steward, J. T. Mahoi (representing traffic and claims section) was selected for the award of a scholarship to undertake a course in trade union studies in Israel. It was proposed that he should be given some spending money, a 'purse', to meet some of his expenses. An interesting discussion ensued:

'On the union's recommendation of Comrade J. T. Mahoi for a four months' study fellowship of Israel, the secretary-general

1 Dock Workers' Union, D. T. Patnelli to Secretary-General, 20th January 1970.

2 Interview with Aziz Kassim, 6 March 1982.

reported that the formal processes required by such missions have been completed and that from Israeli embassy sources the comrade could leave at any time between July and August or by September. In the circumstances, the Secretary-General continued, it was advisable that the executive council consider voting a purse as has been the union's practice to members leaving on such missions... should the comrade be called upon to leave at short notice. Comrade Foday Koroma (representing civil maintenance section) noted that as much as the union has not yet been officially notified as to that, an emergency meeting could be summoned at any time such notification is received while other members cited one or two other instances in which purses have been voted for trips which have not yet materialised or held up. The Secretary-General noted that in the two cases, his and the assistant secretary's, it was due to the invasion of Czechoslovakia, the host country, that his trip was called off, but had since materialised last year...and the assistant secretary having been selected for the industrial relations course last year, in which he could have been called upon to leave at short notice for Britain...after reconsidering the case in the light of the Secretary General's explanation, it was decided that the purse should be voted for, but should not be made payable to the comrade until notification for his departure to Israel is received.¹

Another instance of the vigilance of the executive is evident from discussions on salary increases for the union secretary and his staff at the union office:

'Comrade Patnelli (representing accounts section) expressed some reservations about the salary increase to the Secretary-General but supported all the other recommendations... He pointed out that the Secretary-General was receiving a remuneration of Le90 monthly as a member of the Sierra Leone Port Authority Board which put together with his salary of Lello from the union should be quite sufficient for him. He did not therefore consider a salary increase to the Secretary-

1 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of Executive Council Meeting, 17 June 1970.

General justifiable...Comrade Amadu Wilson (representing Marine Slipway section) reflected on the working conditions of members whose 40 cents dues is being so spent, and ended by warning that careful thought should be exercised over the way spending is approved by the council.¹

In the event, however, the meeting voted for a monthly increase of 10% in the salary of the secretary.² Aziz Kassim has explained that 'each time the union gives the secretary more money, we have to consider that he is trying to get us more money; so we should do the same for him. Scratch my back and I will scratch your own.'³ The records of the union show that, over the months, the executive continued to exercise its role as the 'conscience' of the union. When it was discovered the following year that monies voted for the administration of the union had been misappropriated, a stormy meeting took place:

'Comrade Santigie Sesay (representing casual tally clerks) wanted the Secretary-General relieved of his duties. He concluded by saying that he was tired to see the Secretary always falling short of expectations and precious time should have been otherwise spent discussing urgent issues wasted in repudiating the Secretary-General...Comrade Kadrie Kamara (representing Mechanical Plant Yard section) at this juncture moved that a disciplinary committee be set up to investigate the conduct and other activities of the Secretary-General, with powers to mete out any disciplinary measure it considered appropriate. Comrade C. N. John moved an amendment that such disciplinary action be taken by the executive council...which was the body supreme over any other committee. This was carried by a vote of 25 for and 3 against.'⁴

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- 1 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of Executive Council Meeting, 2nd July 1970.
 - 2 Ibid.
 - 3 Interview with Aziz Kassim, 6 March 1982.
 - 4 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of Executive Council Meeting, 25th August 1971.

It was eventually decided that Mansaray should be relieved of his position.¹ A mass meeting of all union members was convened to convey and ratify the decision of the executive:

'The meeting was called to order by Comrade N. R. Sesay (representing Lighterage). He said that as the executive was the government of the union, we the members of the executive have sacked the Secretary-General Comrade M. I. Mansaray...Contributing to the issue, Comrade Salifu Turay (representing Harbour Master's department) praised the workers and said that it is not a crime to be illiterate. But that though some of them were illiterate, it was the workers who put comrade Mansaray in the position he found himself...In contributing, Comrade J. D. Saidu (representing coopers) said that we have all been disappointed at the action of the Secretary-General because all of us fought hard for him to become Secretary-General of this union...At this juncture, Comrade O. B. Conteh (the assistant secretary) was asked to say something. In his speech, he said that he wanted to reserve his position...He swore to the almighty God that he was not a partner in the accusation against Comrade M. I. Mansaray. He said that if he wanted to fight Comrade Mansaray for his position as was rumoured, he will fight him constitutionally...He asked members to listen to the words of the executive who were prepared to set everything right...One of the workers was asked to say something. In his speech he asked for a short prayer; the Alfatia. He then addressed the executive. He said that he has many things to say which if he wanted to say all, will talk endlessly. He said there have been a number of thieves and crooks in this union. It began from Sandy's time...He said that as Comrade Mansaray had been suspended, let no man touch the union's money...He said that he was looking to the executive for appropriate action.'²

The meeting also resolved that the General Manager of the Port Authority, the press, the Commissioner of Labour, the Minister of

1 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of Executive Council Meeting, 3rd October 1971.

2 Dock Workers' Union, Summary of Mass Meeting, 9 October 1971.

Labour, and other important politicians should be informed of the decision to terminate the services of M. I. Mansaray as union leader.¹ O. B. Conteh was voted in as union secretary and J. T. Mahoi, a clerk and shop steward representing the traffic and claims section, became the assistant secretary.

Conteh having inherited Mansaray's seat on the Board, it was decided at the beginning of the former's term that his director's fees should be paid into the union's bank account'...in view of the general feeling of workers always against the Secretary-General being paid such fees by the Port Authority thereby weakening his position on the Board...'² But it was also decided to increase the secretary's salary by a '...full Le90 (a month) bringing his fixed salary to Le210 with effect from the month ending January 1972 which view was unanimously accepted and passed by the council...'³ Thus the principle that director's fees should be paid to the union was established and the secretary's salary increased by the same amount he would have received from the Port Authority.

The balances from expenditure on the administration of the union, affiliation fees to local trade union centres and the International Transport Workers' Federation having accumulated over the years, it is evident that the union's financial position was extremely buoyant. The main financial assistance the union offered its members was a death benefit of Le20 paid to the relatives of a deceased docker. Salary advances for the purchase of consumer durables were offered to the union's small staff from time to time and 'purses' were voted

1 Ibid.

2 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of Executive Council Meeting, Monday 20th December 1971.

3 Ibid.

for union members attending courses of Conferences abroad. In April 1972 the executive voted Le7,000 to be held in a fixed deposit bank account.¹ In 1974 Le1,000 worth of shares were purchased as a contribution to a consumer, cooperative venture sponsored by the Labour Congress.² Two years later, the union purchased Le3,000 worth of shares at Standard Bank (Sierra Leone) Limited.³ By August 1978, the union's total bank balances was Le18,015.58 cents.⁴

Throughout Conteh's leadership of the union, the records show that the executive continued to monitor the unions' expenditure carefully. Several instances of attempts to reinforce a system of accountability within the union can be cited. In February 1972, a few weeks after some new office equipment was brought, a steward suggested that an inventory of the union's assets should be made: 'Comrade D. E. Kamara suggested that it is necessary that an inventory of the equipment at the secretariat with particular reference to those recently brought...be drawn up and displayed for the perusal of any interested member of the union...After further exchange of views on the matter, the president ruled that an inventory... be drawn up by the Secretary-General as this was the majority view. After this, Comrade Salifu Turay appealed to members to try to forget past occurrences perpetrated by the previous and past administration headed by Jack Sandy and M. I. Mansaray which he felt were perpetuating these tendencies of mistrust among executive members.'⁵

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- 1 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of the Executive Council Meeting 13 April 1972.
 - 2 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of the Executive Council Meeting Monday 5th August 1974.
 - 3 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of the Executive Council Meeting 10 May 1976.
 - 4 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of the Executive Council Meeting Thursday 17th February 1978.
 - 5 P.T.O.

It is evident, however, that these tendencies of mistrust continued to manifest themselves among executive members and could be related to an apparent division of the executive into 'hawks' and 'doves' over the question of union expenditure. The leading hawks were Alfred Jackson, Kadrie Kamara, and J. T. King. The doves included E. P. K. Ceisay, F. M. Abu, and the secretary himself. Some sharp exchanges between these protagonists took place regularly at executive council meetings. In March 1972, for example, it was suggested that a 'purse' of Le600 be given to the secretary who was about to leave for a conference in Geneva. A majority of the members voted for this suggestion:

'After this, Comrade J. T. King sounded a note of warning that members should always try to appreciate that the union's money was not just the asset of a few members as some members felt, but owned generally by all the members; and that the Secretary-General was just going to be away for a few weeks. Next was Comrade R. M. Abu who reminded him and asked members to just take a quick mental stock of what the union has achieved just the past few months under the Secretary-General's leadership; and that members should be certain that when he is back from this very worthwhile course more will be achieved.¹

Another bitter exchange took place later that year over a suggestion by R. M. Abu and E. P. K. Ceisay that the union should host a dance in honour of some visiting port managers from other West African countries:

'Expressing his own view, Comrade Alfred Jackson said that it was rather preposterous for the union to spend the poor labourer's money on a dance just to please the Sierra Leone Port Authority and their guests. The vice-president supported this view and added that the money will not only provide ugly

(5) Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of the Executive Council Meeting Thursday 17th February 1972.

1 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of the Executive Council Meeting Thursday 14th March 1972.

rumours but will also bring confusion in the union. Making his own contribution, Comrade Kadrie Kamara said that the union should not take the entertainment of the Authority's guests on its head.¹

In the event, the suggestion was not accepted. In the absence of clearly defined objectives to which the union's accumulating balances were to be put, problems relating to the use of union funds obviously emerged. It has been established that the funds were not being held to provide assistance to members during any protracted strike action. 'We never thought of that...because we always reached agreement by negotiation. But this is possible now...Yes, benefits to members were virtually non-existent, but two years ago, the union started to give (school) scholarships to the children of members...We have also made some good investments.'²

One of the individuals best placed to exploit this vacuum relating to the use of union funds was the secretary, O. B. Conteh. In December 1972, he presented the union executive with an application for a Le2,500 loan for the purchase of a vehicle which was to be paid back over a two-year period. Although a majority of the members of the executive at the meeting voted for the application to be approved, it was clear that several other members resented this development. 'Comrade Aziz Kassim expressing his views maintained that all senior officers of the Sierra Leone Port Authority who took loans are paying interest...'³, and insisted on interest at five per cent. 'Comrade Kadrie Kamara wanted to know the amount the Secretary-General will have to pay in the 48 monthly instalments...Comrade

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- 1 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of the Executive Council Meeting, Thursday 17th February 1972.
 - 2 Interview with Aziz Kassim, 6 March 1982; the same ground was covered in conversations with dock workers.
 - 3 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of Executive Council Meeting, Thursday 21st December 1972.

G. A. Browne told members that none of we executive members can tell what other members will feel when things like this comes to their hearing, and cited the fact that even though (a car) is so much essential and moreover in the nature of the work the secretary is confronting, he also reminded the secretary that it was him who is asking for a loan...Comrade Salifu Turay explained to members the good work which the Secretary-General have been doing all these time and appeal to members to consider over the issue and try to satisfy the secretary so as to keep him happy in his job at all times..¹

The secretary did not in fact purchase a vehicle. He bought a house and came back to the executive for a further loan of Le2,000 to complete the transaction. This application was also approved but the secretary was required to write and inform the executive that the original purpose of the loan had been changed. His discomfiture is evident in his letter which was not, however, lacking in boldness:

'...I have no alternative but to honestly submit the fact that I cannot...discharge the understanding of buying means of transport ...I am constrained, and for the discreet consideration and understanding of you all, to withdraw the understanding of my original application to buy means of transport in place of which I wish to offer my house and landed property brought at four thousand two hundred leones, situated at No. 26 Will Street as a safe guarantee towards the repayment of the salary advance of Le4,500 which I have already started repaying at 5% interest.'²

Those members of the executive who resented these developments were not prepared to be 'discreet' or 'understanding' over this issue. The hawks quickly spread the word among the union rank and file that

1 Ibid.

2 Dock Workers' Union, O. B. Conteh to Executive Council, 16 March 1973.

the executive had approved a loan of such magnitude to the secretary. At an executive council meeting in May, they were warned that discord would be created within the union as a result of this 'gossiping':

'Comrade E. P. K. Ceisay intimated members... to stop the way some of them have started to spoil the smooth running of this organisation by means of gossiping. He referred members to a resolution taken some time ago...that all decisions taken by the executive should be confidential, but yet still some members are fond of telling other people what the executive decides on each executive meeting held being held...Comrade Borboh Turay and Comrade Ibrahim Jalloh also contributed to the debate and also warned that members should stop gossiping.'¹

The warning was directed particularly at J. T. King, Kadrie Kamara, and Alfred Jackson. Ignoring the warnings, they convened a series of meetings among dockers in the various sections of the Port Authority in order to undermine confidence in the secretary and the executive. O. B. Conteh himself interrupted one of these meetings after having been informed that papers relating to the loan had been removed from the union office:

'...the Secretary General first of all reported about how he was called down the Marine Slipway, Cline Town, in the early afternoon of the date of the meeting (August 22) where he was handed a copy of the letter of his application regarding his salary advance loan with a copy of the draft agreement said to have been seized from Mr. J. T. King who he met concluding his address to workers against the Executive's decision granting the loan they had made to him. The papers in question he said were kept inside one of the drawers of his office desk and could not imagine that these papers could ever have found their way out... this state of affairs the secretary concluded was one which the executive must view with all seriousness especially when it was now clear that the question of papers related to matters of a confidential nature were a

1 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of Executive Council Meeting, 29th May 1973.

security risk; and finally urged the executive to consider appropriate measures to preserve confidentiality in the secretariat.¹

The secretary also presented a resolution to the meeting purporting to be a popular endorsement of the decision to grant him the loan:

'We the members of the constituent sections comprising the general membership of the Sierra Leone Dock Workers' Union having today been addressed at this meeting concerning unscrupulous allegations documented by three members of the executive, and also having heard a detailed factual account offered by our union Secretary-General supported by inspected authentic documents in relation to the Executive decision of having made a Le4,500 salary advance loan to the Secretary-General, do by this unanimous resolution endorse that decision of the executive council which we take to be very consistent with conducive conditions of employment...'²

In retrospect, it is clear that confidence in Conteh's leadership of the union was badly shaken, and the events which were to eventually remove him from the leadership in 1977 may be said to have their origins in the divisions created within the union over this affair. Three sections of the union, Civil Maintenance, Marine Slipway, and Mechanical Plant Yard, made up primarily of artisans, and represented on the executive by King, Jackson, and Kamara respectively, were determined to bring about a change in union leadership.³ Being a sensitive political animal, Conteh himself attempted to consolidate his position by creating a clientele among the unskilled workers, particularly the casual labourers, numerically the largest group within the union. 'He successfully created a personal following among the casuals...the strategy I would say was to remind them that he was doing his best to improve things for them and that they should ignore

1 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of Executive Council Meeting, 30th August 1973.

2 Ibid.

3 Interview with Aziz Kassim, 6 March 1982.

the artisans, who as skilled workers did not have any problems and were secure in their jobs. It should also be remembered that what was at issue was not his suitability for being Secretary-General, for he was a shrewd negotiator who could deliver the goods, but his honesty and his tendency to behave like a dictator.¹ It is a tribute to his skills that, having failed in an attempt to expel King, Jackson, and Kamara from the union, he was successful in having them voted off the executive.² Conteh also attempted to consolidate his position further by seeking office in the Labour Congress. At the end of 1974, he was elected first deputy secretary of Congress.³ It was from this position of influence that he presented the executive with a request for a 25% salary increase in March 1975. This time however, he was careful in securing the approval of his 'constituency' among the casual labourers before bringing the matter to the executive. For this he was warned by the union president to refrain from 'going over their heads' to the membership:

'The President, Comrade Amadu Wilson warned the Secretary-General that when ever he needs anything from the union, he should first of all inform the executive instead of the masses.'⁴

Again, he was awarded the increase,⁵ and by the time he left office in 1979, Conteh had succeeded in increasing his salary by over 50%, from Le210 to Le333.33 cents.⁶ The artisan wing of the union had quietly

1 Ibid.

2 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of the Executive Council Meeting, 17 January 1974.

3 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of the Executive Council Meeting, Friday 23 December 1974; this was only a part-time appointment although Conteh did in fact act as Congress Secretary during the absence from the country of the substantive holder.

4 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of the Executive Council Meeting, Wednesday 26 March 1975.

5 Ibid.

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been securing changes in the membership of the executive. At the 1975 union conference, two of O. B. Conteh's strongest supporters, E. P. K. Ceisay and R. M. Abu, were voted off the executive.¹ The following year, the artisans made their biggest gain when the assistant secretary, J. T. Mahoi, was voted off and replaced by Alfred Conteh (no relation of O. B.).² The position of O. B. himself remained impregnable due to his strong popularity among the unskilled workers, but it is evident that he resented these developments, and in particular the appointment of an assistant secretary with an independent power base in the union:

'The Secretary-General reported that he intended having a mass meeting of all members on the matter of an assistant secretary as no one will impose someone on him, otherwise he would leave the job.'³

Conteh did in fact make an attempt to leave the job. In October 1977 he triumphantly informed the executive that he intended to present himself as a candidate for the secretaryship of the Labour Congress.⁴ In the event Conteh did contest the elections, only to withdraw his candidature at the very last minute when it was clear that J. B. Kabia of the Mines Workers' Union commanded the support of a majority of the delegates at the conference.⁵ 'It was a humiliation from which

(6) Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of the Executive Council Meeting, Thursday 28th September 1978.

1 Interview with Aziz Kassim, 6 March 1982; interview with Alfred Conteh, 23 February 1982; the same ground was covered in informal conversations with dockers.

2 Ibid.

3 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of the Executive Council Meeting, Monday 12th April 1976.

4 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of the Executive Council Meeting, 13 October 1977.

5 Interview with Aziz Kassim, 6 March 1982.

he did not recover. Since we wanted to get rid of him, we gave him support. But it was not fanatical support.¹

Although it is clear that a majority of the members of the union executive were, by the end of 1977, firmly resolved that Conteh must be relieved of the secretaryship, it has been established from conversations with dockers that his negotiating skills and his ability to create a network of contacts with important politicians continued to be widely admired by the union rank and file. Conteh appears to have been fully aware of the sources of his strengths and was apparently determined to resist attempts to remove him from the union leadership. He must also have been aware that his position as union secretary was secure (for a year at the very least) as periodic Trade Group Council negotiations for the review of wages and benefits in public utility establishments (as was required under the 1971 Industrial Relations Act) were due in 1978. The executive was also aware of this and indeed granted a 25% salary increase to Conteh while the negotiations were in progress in September 1978. In November, the secretary reported to the executive that negotiations had been concluded:

'In intimating members the cause of the meeting, the Secretary-General explained that it was in connection with the Trade Group Council increases and that as he had convened a union general meeting for the following day, he thought it wise to also convene this meeting so as to give Executive members a brief explanation on the purpose of the general meeting to enable them to explain some of these points to their respective sections...The Secretary-General then informed the meeting that after some hard bargaining the Trade Group Negotiating Council has awarded Le96 per annum, and an increase to all junior employees earning up to Le1,780 per annum, and an increase of 30 cents per diem to all casual workers. Other conditions like free Saturdays and

1 Ibid.

proper medical care will now be enjoyed by all workers immediately the agreement is signed.¹

Once these negotiations were over, Conteh's position again became vulnerable. The resentment, particularly of the skilled workers, that the secretary was using his position to exploit the union again surfaced. The old power struggle continued. At the union annual conference in March 1979, where Conteh triumphantly reported his successes in the previous year's negotiations, the executive successfully secured an amendment to the union's constitution which had been carefully designed to strengthen their position vis a vis the secretary. This was that '...the general membership which is the supreme authority of the union shall call for elections after every three years'.² The significance of this amendment was that executive members (but not the secretary or the assistant secretary) were no longer to be subject to annual election. Since a majority on the executive were critical of Conteh's leadership, this meant that the secretary would be unable to undermine them for the ensuing three years at the very least.

In April, the internal auditors on the executive discovered that two separate incidences of fraud had been perpetrated on the union by the secretary and reported the matter to a meeting of the executive council.³ The total amount involved was Le13,200; Le1,200 having been voted for the secretary to attend a meeting in Ghana, which he did not attend, and Le12,000, having been voted for the purchase of land at Newton, near Freetown, as an investment, for which there was no

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1. Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of Executive Council Meeting, Thursday 30th November 1978.
 2. Dock Workers' Union, Report on Union Conference, Friday 23rd March 1979.
 3. Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of Executive Council Meeting, 26 April 1979.

receipt. Since the secretary could not offer a convincing explanation to the meeting, it was decided to withdraw one of the allowances he had been receiving from the union until he did so.¹ The meeting also decided to report the matter to the Minister of Labour, one of Conteh's many patrons in the APC. Conteh, meanwhile, presented the issue to the union membership as being that '...his enemies among the skilled workers wanted to remove him as Secretary-General. He refused to work with the executive and secured a court injunction to seal up the office of the union until the matter was resolved'.² In May the executive voted to remove him from the leadership. The deliberations of the meeting are worth quoting at some length:

'Brother Luseni (representing clerks of the Operations section)...moved a motion that the Secretary-General be suspended from office indefinitely...Full Text of the Motion:... Mr. Chairman and members, considering certain predominant factors which tend to disrupt the smooth running of this important and essential organisation, I am left with no alternative but to move a motion that the present Secretary-General be suspended from office and an interim committee be formed to manage the affairs of the union...Finally, I ask you Mr. Chairman and members to invoke the provision of Rule 7.5 prescribed in the constitution of the Sierra Leone Dock Workers' Union for the suspension of Mr. O. B. Conteh for gross inefficiency and insubordination in the execution of his official duties...'³

After the meeting voted in favour of the motion:

'Brother Khalil Kamara (representing floating staff, Harbour Master's department) moved that the Secretary-General's suspension should be made known immediately to the following:

1 Ibid.

2 Interview with Aziz Kassim, 6 March 1982; the same ground was covered in conversations with dockers.

3 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of Executive Council Meeting, 28 May 1979.

- (a) His Excellency the President (President Stevens)
- (b) The Secretary-General APC
- (c) The Honourable Minister of Labour (Mr. Formeh Kamara)
- (d) The Honourable Minister of Transport and Communications (Mr. E. J. Kargbo)
- (e) The General Manager Sierra Leone Ports Authority
- (f) The Commissioner of Labour
- (g) The Registrar of Trade Unions
- (h) The Secretary-General Sierra Leone Labour Congress
- (i) The Consultant Sierra Leone Port Authority, etc.¹

The meeting also decided that '...court action be taken against the Secretary-General on the points raised in the motion of suspension'.²

Conteh fought back. He organised a deputation of his supporters among the unskilled workers to present the Minister of Labour, who was also his kinsman,³ with a resolution expressing confidence in his leadership of the union. The Minister subsequently intervened in the dispute to persuade the executive to drop the court action against Conteh in view of the service he had given to the union since 1971, or else to convene a union conference to ratify the decisions they had taken.⁴ Meanwhile a new secretary, Francis Brimah, formerly branch secretary of the Mines Workers' Union, was appointed after the executive had interviewed other nominees suggested by the Labour Congress. Congress, however, also required the executive to have its decisions ratified by a union conference:

1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 Interview with Aziz Kassim, 6 March 1982.

4 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of the Executive Council Meeting, 30th August 1979.

'Brother Alfred Sesay expressed the opinion that it was rather unfortunate that the Labour Congress had supported the Minister's proposal but that if even it was to be, the executive will surely win the conference. After a lengthy exchange on the matter, the president (D. F. Kanu) advised that the date of the conference should be announced after the meeting. Brother Mark Luseni expressed the opinion that every shop representative now had an important role to play (in ensuring that the executive wins) but suggested that before ever the conference will be held, the Minister of Labour should agree and sign the following proposals by the executive for the safeguard:

- (a) That the conference was only to show the popularity of Mr. Brimah
- (b) That if Mr. Brimah wins, he will then become substantive holder to the post
- (c) That whether Mr. Brimah wins or not the executive will remain in office until their term expires.

The president suggested that the proposals of the executive should be given to lawyer Campbell (the union solicitor) who will then write and forward them to the Minister for his approval before ever the conference will be held. This was unanimously agreed by all members present.¹

In the event, the executive did win the conference, albeit by a narrow majority.² All the decisions of the executive were ratified including the court action against the former secretary.³ Having examined some of the more important aspects of the structure of accountability within the union during the sixteen years after its formation in 1963, the focus now shifts - before discussing the theoretical conclusions towards which this account points - to an appraisal of the strategies of bargaining adopted by the union over the same period.

1 Ibid.

2 Interview with Aziz Kassim, 6 March 1982; the same ground was also covered during informal conversations with dockers. (O. B. Conteh himself declined to comment on these issues; interview with O. B. Conteh, 21 April 1980.

3 Ibid.; a letter from Mark Luseni of 25 August 1980 brought news
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The Responses of Dock Workers to their employment by a parastatal organisation: the dynamics of bargaining

The main priority of the union at the time of its formation was to secure the reversal of the illiberal employment policies of the port organisation. Where the colonial authorities had employed a host of measures to keep the costs incurred in the employment of lower paid workers fairly low, the Albert Margai regime was favourably disposed to an improvement in working conditions and benefits in the public sector in general. Indeed, at the first Board meeting of the Port Authority (at which Jack Sandy as secretary of the Dock Workers' Union was present), the Minister of Transport and Communications, Kandeh Bureh, in his address to the directors as guest speaker, emphasised that it was government policy to ensure that acceptable terms of employment were maintained in the public sector.¹ The nomination of the union secretary as a director by the minister was not only a concrete manifestation of the policy, but was arguably a calculated attempt to increase the influence of the ruling party in the labour movement which generally supported the opposition APC. In its attempts to reverse the illiberal employment policies at the port, the union was impressively successful. By 1967 a large proportion of daily wage workers had been absorbed into the permanent work force (cf. Table 4.7). Reliable figures as to wage rates of dock workers are not available on a time-series basis for the 1960's. To the extent however that the wage indices for unskilled and skilled dockers were 126.3 and 95.2 respectively between 1965 and 1971, it would

that O. B. had been found guilty by a Freetown High Court.

1 National Workshop Archive, Minutes of the Board of the Sierra Leone Port Authority, 12 January 1965.

appear that the union was largely successful in maintaining the real value of wages during this period at least (cf. Table 6.2). The fact that there was a considerable increase in the number of dockers employed at the port after 1962 while the total tonnage of cargo handled at the port remained comparable to pre-1962 levels (Table 4.5) suggests that the port was considerably overmanned throughout the 'sixties, a trend that was maintained during the 'seventies.

Successive leaders of the union have long recognised that much could be achieved for the union membership through the personal intervention of influential politicians. A former corporation secretary of the Port Authority has explained that 'In the public sector in this country, if the minister says this is what should happen, who are you to refuse? Management can advise government, but at the end of the day all decisions and requests, formal or informal, have to be implemented'.¹ Given this flexibility in the rules governing the management of public corporations, and the considerable scope for the exercise of power and influence, leaders of the union have naturally turned to politicians not only for support in bargaining with management, but also, as in O. B. Conteh's case, for assistance in preventing his dismissal by the union executive. This is the background against which the responses of dock workers to their employment by the Port Authority and the dynamics of bargaining should be examined.

After the formation of the union, Sandy carefully cultivated the friendship of certain politicians, including the prime minister himself, Albert Margai. 'After Albert became prime minister (in April 1964), a delegation of the executive went to congratulate him. Before we were

1 Interview with M. B. Bennett, 14 January 1980.

taken into the P.M.'s presence, Sandy told us that he will tell him that they both come from Moyamba and are brothers. And he did. He also became close to Kandeh Bureh (Minister of Transport and Communications, 1964-67).¹ As union leader, Sandy was consulted over the plans to establish the Port Authority as an autonomous public corporation. He used the opportunity to secure the absorption of daily paid workers and a good number of casual workers into the permanent workforce, and to negotiate new wage rates which came into effect in 1965.² Sandy appears to have been able to 'pull off' these successes for three reasons. First, he flirted with the SLPP at a time when most trade union leaders supported the opposition APC. Second, as a southerner, he could claim affinity with the leadership of the SLPP most of whom were southerners. Third, the government itself was favourably disposed to an expansion of wage employment in the public sector and an improvement in its benefits. Sandy was therefore in a position to enjoy the patronage of the government. He was nominated by the Labour Department for a short course in industrial relations in Europe in September/October 1964, and at the end of the year, M. I. Mansaray, then assistant secretary, was nominated for a Soviet Union scholarship.³

As a director on the Board, Sandy could take the demands of the union to the highest policy-making body of the Port Authority. In March 1965, he persuaded the Board to meet a part of the medi-care expenses of dockers and, subject to certain conditions, to give loans

1 Interview with M. I. Mansaray, 3 April 1982; it was established that Jack Sandy now lives in Liberia, and as such it was not possible to interview him during both periods of field research in Freetown.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

TABLE 6.2

Movement of daily wage rates, 1965 - 1979, of dock workers

Year	Unskilled wage rates (bottom end of scale) in Leones and cents	Skilled wage rates (top end of scale) in Leones and cents	Consumer price index [†] 1961 = 100	Index of real wage rates of unskilled dockers	Index of real wage rates of skilled dockers
1965	1.06	4.83	116.5(100)	100	100
1971/72	1.46	5.03	127.3(109.3)	126.3	95.2
1974/75	1.73	5.33	171.1(147)	111	75.1
1976/77	1.95	5.93	238.7(205)	89.8	60
1978/79	2.26	6.25	295.8(254)	84	51

[†] The Official Consumer Price Index has 1961 as its base year. In this table, 1965 has been taken as the base year and the figures in parentheses have been adjusted accordingly.

- SOURCES: 1. The Forster Report, Appendix 3 for 1965 - 1976/77 figures on wage rates.
 2. Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of Executive Council Meeting, Thursday 30th November 1978, for 1978/79 figures on wage rates.
 3. Bank of Sierra Leone, Annual Report 1969; Annual Report 1979, for figures on the consumer price index.

(See also Table 7.9).

for the purchase of consumer durables. The management was also required to provide protective clothing for dock workers exposed to dirt and grease.¹ Prior to the dispute within the union over misuse of funds and the introduction of shift work, it is clear that the union leadership had the upper hand over the management as a result of Sandy's influential contacts. The Panda inquiry heard evidence to this effect:

'...it emerged from evidence that management allowed the union to have an unusual say in its affairs which to all intents and purposes made the union a very powerful weapon against management...and it was said during the inquiry that the union used its influence unduly in the matter of appointments, dismissals, and promotions. The general manager at the time was Mr. Rockett (an expatriate). This position obtained until his departure when Mr. Ross (another expatriate) was appointed acting general manager...Mr. Ross in his evidence said inter alia: "...The awkward situation at the port was a legacy left to me by my predecessor...The top men in the union had too much say in matters which were not their concern. I also discovered that Mr. Sandy was a member of the Board and the staff committee which had to discuss the question of my appointment. Naturally, one should expect that I would to an extent give in to this man. As the months went by I found that if I should get time to carry out the specific duties as general manager of the Port Authority, I would have to delegate powers to other heads of various departments in the port. When ever I complied with the union's demands, they would say I negotiated; but if I rejected their demands they would say that I did not negotiate...I would like to say that I am still prepared to negotiate with the union if they have proper representation in their executive council."'²

1 National Workshop Archive, Minutes of the Board of the Sierra Leone Port Authority, 4th March 1965.

2 The Panda Report, p.8.

The Panda inquiry also heard evidence that it was not until after a new corporation secretary was appointed that the influence of the union was challenged by management:

'The position remained the same until the appointment of Mr. Greenwood (an expatriate) to the post of secretary...on 29th May 1965. Mr. Greenwood...no doubt took with him a 'new broom' to sweep the relics of indiscipline in the port...On the other hand, the union's executive council alleged that the misunderstanding within the union was brought about by the activities of Mr. Greenwood. This statement was not confirmed by the rank and file who thought that Mr. Greenwood, on account of his vigilance in seeing that the affairs of the Port Authority were properly handled became an eyesore to the union's executive council. By this time the influence of the executive council had dwindled because...Mr. Greenwood was no longer prepared to accept the demands which had hitherto been made on management. He adopted the attitude that for every request... the appropriate organs of the Port Authority would have to take decisions, and it was only those decisions that he was prepared to implement. The effects of Mr. Greenwood's alleged intolerable actions...came to a head when he attempted to carry out decisions of the Board and the staff committee in regard to the operation of the shift system in the port. It would be unfair to say the least, to suggest that Mr. Greenwood was acting of his own volition...'¹

In spite of Greenwood's attempts to reduce Sandy's influence, the latter felt obliged to support the proposals relating to the introduction of shift work. As a result of the IMF stabilisation programme which came into effect in mid-1966, public corporations were required to make substantial cuts in expenditure. Since redundancies would have been politically unacceptable, the overtime system, which was known to have been widely abused, was selected as the area to be subjected to economy at the Port Authority. The Panda Report noted that '...there were employees in the port industry who

1 Ibid, p.9.

earned over 200% of their salary as overtime'.¹ The Board decided to begin the introduction of shift work with the crane drivers as '...there were already sufficient men employed to permit the introduction of shift working without further recruitment or training of new staff'.² The workers involved refused to cooperate with the management:

'It is clear from the evidence that the question of the shift system for portal crane drivers was never discussed either by the executive of the union or with the workers concerned. It was only after management had given the green light to enforce the shift system, that Mr. Sandy discussed the question with the portal crane drivers and the leading hands. As it was to be expected, they were violently opposed to the proposal...Mr. Sandy realised that with the introduction of the shift system the total emoluments of employees in the industry would be reduced... It is not understood however why Mr. Sandy should have acquiesced earlier on in the decision of the Board to introduce the shift system.'³

It had also been decided at Board level (and with Sandy's agreement) that workers who refused to cooperate in the introduction of shift work should be subjected to disciplinary action. Recognising the unpopularity of shift work, over which the rank and file had begun to take unofficial action in the form of a work to rule, Sandy decided to make the action official and accordingly issued the management with a formal notice.⁴ However, the action of the rank and file was also a protest against the union secretary's leadership and, in particular, his initial agreement to the introduction of shift work without demanding any concessions in lieu. Management responded by 'spreading the word' throughout the port that it had been prepared to negotiate

1 Ibid, p.5.

2 Port Authority Archive, Matters leading up to and connected with the recent work to rule called by the Sierra Leone Dock Workers' Union, 22 November 1966.

3 The Panda Report, pp.5-6.

4 P.T.O.

but Sandy had not pressed for negotiations.¹ Sandy, who was by then thoroughly discredited, informed the Minister of Transport and Communications that the Port Authority management, and Mr. Greenwood in particular, had presented the issue of the introduction of shift work as not negotiable, and that accordingly he was calling a strike.² The rank and file however were satisfied with the assurances given by the management that shift work would be negotiated. As it was the union secretary who had failed to enter into proper negotiations in the first instance, they were not prepared to go on strike merely to 'save his face':

'...some members of the union advised... (the executive)...to withdraw the notice of work to rule and enter into negotiations with management. This request fell on deaf ears and it was at this juncture that a splinter group of the union emerged which later became vocal throughout the crisis. By that time, the workers had resumed normal working time and with the work to rule being clearly flouted, the executive council proceeded to give a 21-day notice to go on strike. The serving of the notice was rejected by a majority of the workers... There was now a complete rift in the union and the workers had become frantic over the manner in which the executive...had controlled the affairs of the union and the unnecessary hazards to which they had been subjected.'³

By this time, Sandy had become an embarrassment to the government, which appointed an inquiry to examine the dispute within the union as well as between the union and the management. Sandy's secretaryship is still remembered, however, for its early achievements. It was noted during conversations with dock workers that his method of

(4) Port Authority Archive, Matters leading up to and connected with the recent work to rule...

1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 The Panda Report, p.7.

cultivating the friendship of politicians, whose influence was used to alter the balance of power between management and the union, was regarded with approval. Dockers also spoke with regret of the fact that the secretaries who succeeded Sandy had not been able to attain the same degree of influence.

As union secretary, M. I. Mansaray negotiated the shift system with the Port Authority management. Agreement was reached that a special shift allowance would be paid. It was further agreed that meetings between the management and the union to review differences would be held regularly.¹ Over the years, these meetings became the main forum for aggressive bargaining between the union and the management. Issues discussed ranged from the provision of small increases in the wages of 'workers who have passed a trade test in their field of work...'², to the provision of leave gratuity or holiday bonus to workers entitled to paid holidays.³ It was testimony to the confidence of the union that, in December 1968, it put forward a proposal that the internal audit department of the Port Authority should be made completely independent of management.⁴ The thinking behind this proposal was to facilitate the access of the union leadership to documents which showed the correct financial position of the Port Authority, and which could be used in bargaining. Some of the union demands were accompanied with strike threats as a tactical means of manoeuvre during the negotiations. Strike notices

1 Interview with M. I. Mansaray, 28 April 1980.

2 Port Authority Archive, 'Record of a meeting held on 25th June 1968 between Management and the Sierra Leone Dock Workers' Union'.

3 Ibid.

4 Port Authority Archive, 'Record of a meeting held on 12th December 1968 between Management and the Sierra Leone Dock Workers' Union'.

were issued in May 1968 and in January 1969,¹ but subsequently withdrawn. At the port JIC negotiations in September 1969, Mansaray was able to secure a per diem increase of ten cents for all categories of workers. Working hours were reduced from 48 to 45 hours a week and a food allowance of 24 cents per shift (subject to a minimum of four hours being worked in each shift) was introduced for casual cargo handlers.² Many dockers readily admit that Mansaray was effective in bargaining and could therefore deliver the goods. He was also fortunate that his period in office coincided with a period of buoyant revenue receipts at the port and the regime of a competent managerial team. In 1971, the year he was voted out of office, the port recorded a profit of over Lel million. It was after this period that the diversion of funds by senior port officials became an increasingly worrying and, from the point of view of lower paid workers, damaging trend.

After the military interregnum and the return to civilian rule Mansaray, like Sandy before him, cultivated the friendship of APC politicians and, in particular, D. F. Shears, the Minister of Transport and Communications (with responsibility to nominate the directors of the Port Authority), and C. A. Kamara-Taylor, Secretary-General of the APC, who as Minister of Lands, Mines and Labour was in charge of the Labour Department. In November 1968 Mansaray was nominated director of the Port Authority. In a lengthy interview, Mansaray was forthright in elucidating his reasons for cultivating the

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- 1 Port Authority Archive, Secretary-General Dock Workers' Union to General Manager Sierra Leone Port Authority, 4th May 1968; ibid., 6th January 1969.
 - 2 Port Authority Archive, Minutes of the JIC for the Port Industry, Monday 8th September 1969.

politicians:

'I went to see Shears and C. A. (Kamara-Taylor) after they were made ministers... Even though the appointment of the Secretary-General (of the Dock Workers' Union) as director (of the Port Authority) was not popular with our members, I was convinced that to be effective, I should be on the Board. Also it had happened before (i.e. Sandy had created the precedent). If I was not a director, it will look as if I don't have prestige and contacts. Management like to snob we union people and carry on as if they are the only people in this world with education. But as director, I sit on the Board whether they (management) like it or not and become an important personality as far as Port Authority is concerned. So I went to see Shears and C. A.....(At each meeting) I told them that we have supported the APC from Opposition days. At '67 election I organise the workers (to vote) to remove Kandeh Bureh (former Minister of Transport and Communications whose constituency in the east end of Freetown covered the area on which the port is located) and vote solidly for APC. So I told them that now, the workers should have a voice on the Board where decisions on their interest are taken... Shears and C. A. (each) said they will look into the matter. After some time Shears called me and told me that he will made me director but I should see to it that there is no trouble from the union at water quay...C. A. helped us at the JIC negotiations (in 1969) when we wanted to reduce working hours. The employers did not agree, so I went to see C. A., and he wrote to them that the APC is for all sections in this country, including workers, and so they (the employers) should not be inflexible...'¹

It is in the nature of clientelist politics that prominent national politicians should seek to renew and extend their network of clients. This was recognised by union leaders like Mansaray who were prepared to adopt tactics of aggressive bargaining to increase wages, improve conditions, and defend gains at the work place or at

1 Interview with M. I. Mansaray, 3 April 1982.

the industry level, but were also willing to enter into clientelist relations in the political arena as another channel (and an effective channel) to reach the same objectives. Clientelist relationships are also attractive for the material rewards that are offered, such as the directorship in Mansaray's case, or the scholarship awarded to his assistant, O. B. Conteh, in 1969. This strategy, however, was not without risks. At the very least, it compromised the independence of union leaders to criticise (and to encourage union members to criticise) the performance and the policies of the regime publicly. This failure was (as we shall see in the next chapter) shared with other union leaders in the labour movement.

These strategies of bargaining continued to be adopted during O. B. Conteh's secretaryship of the union. Having inherited Mansaray's seat on the Board of the Port Authority, Conteh also cultivated the friendship of influential politicians and in particular the Minister of Transport and Communications (by then E. J. Kargbo) and the Minister of Labour (by then F. B. Turay).¹ The most difficult challenge which faced Conteh, however, was the rapid increase in consumer prices during the 1970's and, more especially, after 1973 (cf. Table 6.3). As the Sierra Leone economy entered into a recession (or a period of 'stagflation' as Bank of Sierra Leone economic researchers described it), the real value of wages, as shown by the indices, declined to 84 for unskilled and 51 for skilled dockers respectively by the end of the decade (cf. Table 6.2). Little wonder then, that the 'industrial peace' created out of the clientelist accommodation of trade union leaders with APC politicians was shattered

1 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of the Executive Council Meeting, Thursday 3rd February 1972.

by the first general strike in the country's history which took place in August/September 1981, and in which dock workers played a leading role.

TABLE 6.3

Index of consumer prices at Freetown 1970/71 - 1978/79

YEAR (1961 = 100)	
1970/71	127.3
1971/72	129.5
1972/73	136.5
1973/74	150.0
1974/75	171.1
1975/76	210.6
1976/77	238.7
1977/78	259.2
1978/79	295.8

SOURCE: Bank of Sierra Leone, Annual Report 1979.

In the face of an attempt in 1972 by the management of the Port Authority to introduce comprehensive terms of conditions of service for all workers in its employ, Conteh was resolutely determined to force the maximum number of concessions from the management. Given the absence of comprehensive terms of employment, the management had grown to believe that the union had exploited the resulting state of affairs by forcing concessions - often with threats of strike action - vis a vis working conditions. By setting out the conditions of service as part of the contract of employment

of each worker, the management hoped that the union would become limited to bargaining at the trade group council periodic wage reviews.¹ It was recognised by the union executive that comprehensive terms of employment would greatly circumscribe the leverage which the union had hitherto exercised. In October 1972, when Conteh was abroad with another union official, the management issued the service booklets to workers, who were requested to sign them. The assistant secretary of the union, J. T. Mahoi, acting as secretary, wrote to the general manager of the Port Authority:

'...the whole executive council of the union at its emergency meeting held yesterday, has authorised me to again convey the union's stand on the issue of these conditions of service. Accordingly, all union members in the Authority have been asked NOT to complete the forms accompanying the booklet containing the conditions of service until further notice. A copy of the circular is attached. In the name of industrial peace and goodwill, the union is asking management to suspend the issuing of these booklets to employees until the President and Secretary-General (of the union) return from an overseas tour...We believe that by doing so an explosive situation could be avoided.'²

As it had always been the strategy of the union to acquaint influential politicians with the details of difficulties with the management, this letter was copied to the Minister of Transport and Communications and to the Minister of Labour. The Management for its part was insistent that:

'...there had never been any comprehensive conditions of service for employees of this Authority which is the bed-rock of contract whereby workers become acquainted with the terms and conditions governing their employment and safe-guarding their interests. It is therefore overdue for positive action to be

1 Interview with M. B. Bennett, 14 January 1980.

2 Port Authority Archive, Acting Secretary Dock Workers' Union to General Manager Sierra Leone Port Authority, 18 October 1972.

taken in that direction as the present conditions of service provide these vital ingredients which are necessary in any industrial set up.¹

This letter was also copied to the ministers. On Conteh's return from abroad, the matter was again taken up with management which was insistent that the conditions could not be negotiated. The management only relented when E. J. Kargbo, the Minister of Transport and Communications, intervened.² Conteh laid down no less than twenty-six amendments.³ Most of these were eventually accepted and included as a supplement to the conditions.⁴ It is clear that shop stewards on the union executive fully supported the strategy of involving the two ministers in the dispute.⁵

Conteh's personal stature and influence within the labour movement had grown considerably since assuming office as union secretary. He represented the union on the executive of the Labour Congress and in October 1973, he was asked to act as secretary of Congress during the absence of the substantive secretary, George Palmer, from 20th November to 10th December.⁶ A year later, in December 1974, Conteh was voted first deputy secretary of Congress.⁷

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- 1 Port Authority Archive, Personnel Manager, Sierra Leone Port Authority to Acting Secretary Dock Workers' Union, 21 Oct. 1972.
 - 2 Interview with O. B. Conteh, 21 April 1980.
 - 3 Port Authority Archive, Secretary Dock Workers' Union to General Manager Port Authority, 21 February 1973.
 - 4 Interview with O. B. Conteh, 21 April 1980.
 - 5 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of Executive Council Meeting, 17 October 1972.
 - 6 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of Executive Council Meeting, Monday 11 October 1973; according to the minutes, '...joyous sentiments were expressed by the whole meeting which regarded this as a special distinction for dock workers...'
 - 7 Dock Workers' Union, Minutes of Executive Council Meeting, Friday 13 December 1974.

Another preoccupation of the union around this time was with the changing technology in cargo handling. During the 'seventies, shipping companies increasingly adopted the containerised method of cargo movement. Its many advantages include the reduction of the time a ship spends at port since containers enable great quantities of cargo to be loaded or unloaded at the same time. Containerisation however reduces the demand for cargo handling labour since special cargo handling equipment is used to move containers. Throughout the 'seventies, Conteh expended considerable energy in persuading management to introduce a 'supplementation of earnings' scheme for casual labourers (his 'constituency' in the internal politics of the union) threatened with loss of earnings as a result of containerisation. This campaign did not meet with much success. The present management of the Port Authority holds the view that '...since Sierra Leone is at the receiving end of the container revolution, there is not much that can be done to save jobs in the longer term'.¹ It has however been the strategy of management to generate more business at the port by making Freetown an important centre for the transshipment of cargo.² At the first meeting between union representatives and the British team of management consultants (to whom the management of the port was subcontracted following the financial collapse of the Port Authority, the publication of the Forster Commission report and the dissolution of the Board of Directors), Conteh was quick to make his anxieties over the new technology known:

1 Interview with Ray Donker of Waportman International, General Manager Port Authority, 8 January 1980.

2 Ibid.

'Mr. Osman Conteh, Secretary-General of the union introduced individually the entire body of representatives to management...He pledged the cooperation of the executive to the new management from whom in return he expected the continued realisation of the basic conditions of service which workers should enjoy...and for workers who become unemployed through the application of advanced technology, the introduction of a supplementation of earnings scheme...He asked that these processes be not unduly delayed...These issues cannot wait if the union should give their whole hearted support to Waportman International which they now pledge...Mr. J. E. Hughes, Chief Executive, replied, stating the international experience and composition of the Waportman Management Team which was founded in Switzerland and composed of British nationals with wide and very long experience in West Africa...He stated the levels at which they operate for inviting business and contracting with large shipping companies dealing in containers, transshipment, etc. The more business won the better it will be for the workers as more work will be created to use up the over-staffing existing at present.¹

Although Conteh failed in his attempt to become Secretary of Congress at the end of 1977, he had become an important figure in the labour movement in his own right. Dock workers have pointed out, however, that his kinsman relationship with Formeh Kamara, Minister of Transport and Communications from July 1975 to June 1978 when he became Minister of Labour, considerably 'helped along' his career in the labour movement. Be that as it may, it is clear that Conteh was never impeded by a lack of self-confidence in his bargaining with management. The Forster Commission was evidently impressed with his resolute determination to defend the interest of dockers in bargaining with management.² During the dispute between Conteh and the union executive however, the minister did intervene, initially to prevent

1 Port Authority Archive, Minutes of Management Union Meeting, Tuesday 30 May 1978.

2 The Forster Report, p.8.

his dismissal, and later to insist that the union rank and file must ratify the decisions of the executive.

The internal dynamics of the Dock Workers' Union: some theoretical conclusions

Two main conclusions may be drawn from this account of the responses of dockers to their employment by a parastatal organisation, and the structure of accountability within the union. First, dockers, through their union leadership are prepared to use the usual channels of management - union contact in bargaining, or in the frequent review of the multitude of problems inherent in any organisation with relatively large-scale employment, as well as the channels afforded by patron-clientelist accommodation of the union leadership by prominent national politicians. Individually or through their union leadership, and via patron-clientelist accommodation, dock workers have also been prepared to maintain and defend the many irregularities - tolerated in a public enterprise - being practiced, such as dishonest claims for overtime payment, overmanning, low productivity, the use of material and equipment belonging to the Port Authority in private contracts in the informal sector, etc., as documented by the Forster Commission report (see Chapter 4). These strategies and their substantive consequences circumscribed the extent to which the Port Authority operated as a typical capitalist enterprise.

Second, it is clear that the main conflicts within the union have centred on the effectiveness of its leadership in bargaining with management, defending gains, or on their 'honesty'. After extended conversations with dock workers, there should be no doubt that they resented and increasingly became paranoiac over the appointment of successive union secretaries as directors on the Board of the Port Authority, even going to the extent, in 1972, of insisting that

directors' fees must in principle be paid into the union account, and reimbursing the secretary with the same amount. But union leaders, generally having an inferior level of education than that of the management, correctly perceived that a directorship (or an appointment in the national union centre) can enhance their status, and hence their effectiveness in bargaining with management. In insisting however that the funds from the accumulating balances of the union must not be 'stolen', skilled workers in particular have placed a high premium on the honesty of the leadership. To the extent that this became a problem, it reflects the absence of any commitment to radical political objectives of the rank and file and the leadership alike. Throughout the history of the union, it was never envisaged that the union's substantial balances could be used to sustain workers in a protracted strike action, or to further clearly defined political objectives. Trade unions in post-colonial Sierra Leone have (as we shall see) shown little evidence of political radicalism and appear to be oriented towards aggressive bargaining at the workplace, displaying a concern with more parochial issues, and an 'economism' so much derided by Lenin. It is clear that no union leader, Wallace-Johnson included, has been able to sustain the interest of workers in mobilising for the furtherance of radical political objectives. It is significant that the two major strikes in the country's history (February 1955 and August/September 1981) occurred during periods when there had been an erosion in the value of real incomes and a shortage of rice, the nation's staple food. During negotiations to facilitate the representation by the Dock Workers' Union of workers engaged in the handling of produce at the Produce Marketing Board, M. I. Mansaray clearly spelt out the orientation of the Union, and his ideology on trade union organisation:

'Mr. Mansaray then addressed the meeting... he said that the union had the same aims as the employers: These call for the maintenance of good discipline, promotion of better understanding between employers and employees leading to the maximisation of profits, and ultimately resulting in general prosperity, increased earnings, and better conditions for all concerned.'¹

The 'accommodation' of lower paid workers in parastatal organisations and their involvement in the various irregularities - politically acceptable in public enterprises - does not necessarily imply that they are unproductive and unexploited. At the Port Authority, the productivity of dock workers is quite low (as a result of overmanning and the widespread use of casual labour), but at the very least, dock workers make a value-added contribution in the handling of cargo and related activities. The requirement that the port enterprise must be commercially viable has resulted in the conceptualisation of wages as a 'cost of production', and accordingly subjected to measures of economy. Moreover, in the day-to-day administration of the enterprise, the professional management employ a variety of labour control systems designed to minimise their perception of the adequacy of the worker in the performance of his tasks, and in so doing, reduce the autonomy of the worker. The rise of professional management in work organisations, the choice of technology, the adoption of labour control strategies, have resulted in what Braverman has called the 'degradation of work'.²

Furthermore, in the pursuit of daily work activities at the

1 Dock Workers' Union, minutes of Meeting held on Thursday 12th June 1969 between representatives of the Produce Marketing Board and the Dock Workers' Union.

2 Cf. H. Braverman, Labour and Monopoly Capital, New York, 1974.

port organisation, dockers encounter a managerial power structure which seeks to minimise the uncertainties arising out of the work process, and in so doing, subjects them to intense supervision as well as finding new ways to increase the rationalisation of work tasks. Moreover the rules which govern behaviour at the enterprise (such as the amount of time to be allowed for breaks) reflects the prevailing balance of power between management and lower paid workers. Dockers particularly resented the policy of the Port Authority which allowed supervisors and senior management and their families to use the medicare facilities at the port, but which denied them the same privilege. The power structure within the port organisation, as perceived by the docker, makes it clear to him that, in addition to his involvement in clientelist political relationships, he needs a trade union to protect his interests at the work place. When asked the purpose of joining the union, dockers frequently remarked that the union is 'like a lawyer'. During periodic wage reviews, or during the making of the rules of the work place, the union presents the workers' case. Indeed, this was the reasoning of the artisans and clerks who master-minded the formation of the Dock Workers' Union in 1963.

The absence of radical political pursuits in the actions and ideological orientations of the rank and file as well as the leadership of the union, does not necessarily suggest that dock workers constitute a 'labour aristocracy'. The poverty and squalor of their city life alone (as was shown in Chapter 5) ruled out the entertainment of such notions. Moreover, lower paid workers in Sierra Leone are not even the most direct beneficiaries of the appropriation of the resources of the state by the political kleptocracy. Indeed, there is evidence of an attitude of antipathy towards corrupt

politicians and officials (and even towards their own union leadership) among lower paid workers, thus confirming the observation of Melson and Wolpe that the clientelist relationships inherent in communalism are essentially opportunistic. At the same time, however, it is clear that traditionally-held beliefs mediate the responses of such workers to their situation of relative poverty. For instance, when asked to explain the origins of inequality in Sierra Leone, dock workers often expressed a fatalism, couched in religious terminology, and best captured perhaps by the Temne expression, sababun, meaning, one's lot in life.

Chapter 7

The responses of organised labour to politics in the post-colonial state

The union leadership of the dock workers has inevitably been constrained in its strategy and decisions by the policy and orientation of the trade union movement in Sierra Leone as a whole. Having located this study in its proper historical perspective, having argued and documented the thesis that the extent to which a public corporation in the post-colonial state operates as a typical capitalist enterprise is circumscribed by the system of political patronage, corruption and graft, and having assessed the responses of the dockers and the more general sociological characteristics they exhibit, this final chapter situates their trade union behaviour in the context of the nature and orientation of the labour movement in post-colonial Sierra Leone. The discussion which follows therefore focuses on the political posture of the labour movement under various regimes and on its own internal dynamics during the two decades of independence.

Main trends in labour politics in the first decade of independence

With the SLPP as the party of government, Sierra Leone became an independent state within the British Commonwealth on April 27th, 1961. In the period between the constitutional talks in London and the first elections held on the basis of universal suffrage in Sierra Leone, i.e. between August 1960 and May 1962, some spectacular political realignments occurred. These resulted in divisions within the labour movement as personalised by a rivalry for the leadership of organised labour between Marcus Grant and H. N. Georgestone. The realignments began with the formation of the All People's Congress (APC) by Siaka Stevens, who had broken ranks with the United National

Front (UNF), the coalition of all parties formed under the leadership of the SLPP to negotiate the administrative arrangements for the transfer of power from the British. Having lost his seat as an M.P. following the 1957 elections, and having unsuccessfully advocated 'elections before independence', Stevens left the UNF apparently over concessions made to the British for the continued use of Freetown as a naval base and other defence purposes. Refusing to sign the constitutional and independence instruments, Stevens flew back to Freetown and floated the idea of a populist political party in opposition to the SLPP-dominated UNF. A former political associate of Stevens who was also at the conference has written:

'Siaka Stevens...stormed into Freetown...He proclaimed himself to be...inspired by the highest patriotic zeal. There were those, however, who believed that Siaka Stevens found the courage to assume this posture because he was fully aware that he stood little chance of personally deriving much advantage from the arrangements of the UNF. The plum of a cabinet portfolio as he might have seen it was beyond his grasp... whatever his real motives, Siaka Stevens... announced in September 1960...the creation of a new political party under his leadership, the APC.'¹

In floating the idea of the formation of a new party with radical pretensions, Stevens was fully alive to the possibilities of deriving a solid base of support from various groups disenchanted with nine years of SLPP rule. The leading APC organisers were three northerners, S. I. Koroma, C. A. Kamara-Taylor, and M. O. Bash-Taqi, none having close family links with traditional chiefly families. Nor did they have high-status occupational backgrounds.² The constituency to which

1 Cf. Gershon Collier, Sierra Leone: Experiment in Democracy, New York, 1970, p.32.

2 S. I. Koroma and M. O. Bash-Taqi formerly ran small businesses and Kamara-Taylor was an ex-service man who had joined the clerical grades of the UAC after the war. The latter also had several friends in the labour movement, and in particular, George Palmer of The Clerical, Mercantile and General Workers' Union, a former

they hoped to appeal included liberal intellectuals (and especially faculty members of Fourah Bay College) who deplored the elitist nature of the transfer of power and, more especially, the reliance of the SLPP on a clientele of Big Men and chiefs throughout the country for its power base; at the local level lower paid workers who, during the early 'sixties (see Table 7.1) registered their discontent in a series of strikes; peasant farmers of the north, ever resentful of their chiefs who, as APC organisers were quick to point out, had allowed themselves to be incorporated into the southern-dominated SLPP; and the people of Kono amongst whom a communally-based anti-elitist political organisation had flourished for many years. This was essentially the same constituency as that to which the UPP had appealed in 1957 with some degree of success. By the end of 1961, however, only five M.P.s considered themselves as part of the opposition in parliament: two Kono M.P.s representing the KPM; two UPP M.P.s; and Wallace-Johnson who had left the UPP to become the sole voice of the APC in parliament. He was detained along with Stevens and other APC organisers during the independence celebrations.¹

As was expected, several trade unionists supported the APC, the most influential being H. N. Georgestone. He had been most impressed with the rhetoric of APC organisers, and had recently been provoked by the high-handed attitude of the government to the strike wave which reached its peak in 1962 (see Table 7.1) and Sir Milton Margai's open contempt for the strikers whom he described as 'lawless'.² Marcus

colleague at the UAC. (Interview with G. A. Wilton During, 13 April 1982).

1 Cf. LaRay Denzer, op. cit., Ch. 7.

2 Interview with H. N. Georgestone, 23 January 1980.

Grant, who was preparing his candidature as an 'independent' in the general elections of May 1962, did not express support for Stevens and the APC. Recalling Stevens' earlier career as a member of the Margai ministry of 1951-57, and in particular their confrontation during the 1955 strike, he has argued:

'I cannot accept that the APC was the party of the working class. Its leader came to prominence through the trade union movement; it is not necessarily working class. And my views are shown to be correct by recent history.'¹

Stevens himself now regards the formation of the APC as having been motivated by nationalist aspirations, by the need to assert control over the mining companies, and as an attempt to 'open up the country and provide the leadership for the aspirations of the masses'.²

Wallace-Johnson shared this analysis and was until his death in 1965 a fully paid-up member and activist of the APC.³

In the run-up to the elections of 1962, many union leaders openly campaigned for the APC. The United Mine Workers' Union, whose founder was the APC leader, played a prominent role, campaigning for the APC in the mining centres of Lunsar-Pepel in the north, Moyamba in the south, and Kenema and Kono in the south-east. In the diamond-mining areas of Kenema and Kono, a significant proportion of the miners were of northern origin and had migrated in search of jobs. Indeed, throughout the union's history, all but one of its general secretaries have been northerners or Konos (Table 7.2). Discussing the role of the union during the 1962 campaign, E. T. Kamara has said:

1 Interview with Marcus Grant, 16 January 1980.

2 Interview with President Siaka Stevens, 11 July 1980.

3 Ibid; see also LaRay Denzer, op. cit., Ch. 7.

TABLE 7.1

Industrial disputes, Sierra Leone, 1960-64

	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964
Number of work stoppages	2	4	22	11	4
Workers involved	1,078	318	4,042	1,893	824
Man-days lost	9,614	1,447½	44,230	1,185½	6,480
<u>DURATION OF WORK STOPPAGE</u>					
Less than 1 day	-	3	10	8	1
Less than 4 days	1	-	10	3	2
4 days but less than 1 week	-	-	1	-	-
1 week but less than ½ month	1	1	1	-	-
½ month but less than 1 month	-	-	-	-	1
<u>CAUSES OF DISPUTES</u>					
Wages or hours	2	-	5	5	2
Working conditions	-	-	6	3	1
Fringe rights or privileges	-	-	3	-	-
Personal relations between workers and management	-	1	6	1	1
Disagreement over management policy not directly related to wages, hours, or working conditions	-	3	2	2	-

SOURCE: Labour Department, Annual Report 1964, Table 14.

'We of the United Mines Workers' Union regarded the APC as our own and so we felt that we must support our founder...Our union is unique as we operate in each of the three provinces outside the capital, Freetown'.¹

In Freetown itself, where most of the unions were concentrated, trade union officials addressed APC rallies. Prominent among them were H. N. Georgestone (the part-time secretary of the national centre, the Council of Labour) and A. O. Walker of the Transport and General Workers' Union, Basco George and George Palmer of the Clerical, Mercantile and General Workers' Union, Abdul Wakheed Hassan of the Motor Drivers' Union, A. Bai Conteh of the Artisans and Allied Workers' Union, P. S. Mammah of the Railway Workers' Union, and Amos Sawyerr of the Articled Seamen's Union.² It is significant that each of these union officials originated either from Freetown or from the north.

The results of the 1962 elections clearly revealed not only that the SLPP was faced with a formidable opposition for the first time, but also that the old Freetown-upcountry cleavage had been replaced by a new ethnic and regional cleavage between the Mende south and south-east and the Temne north. The APC concentrated its campaign in the north and in the greater Freetown area. It won 12 of the 19 northern seats and 4 of the 12 seats in Freetown and its environs. It failed to win any seats in the south and south-east where it fielded only two candidates in 32 seats. The SLPP on the other hand won 18 of these seats, five of the northern seats, and five seats in the Greater Freetown area. The Kono-based KPM (an ally of the APC won all four Kono seats).³ Reflecting on these results, Cartwright observes that

1 Interview with Egerton Tamba (E. T.) Kamara, 26 May 1982; E. T. Kamara was secretary of the United Mine Workers' Union from 1964 to 1969, and part-time secretary of the national centre, the Labour Congress from 1966 to 1969. He is now the administrative head at the APC national headquarters.

2 Interview with C. A. Wilton During, 13 April 1982.

3 This account of the 1962 elections has been taken from Cartwright
P.T.O.

the APC combined an anti-chief appeal with a clear sectional base in the north:

'(Stevens apart)...the APC leaders and members of parliament constituted a 'new class' entering the political elite for the first time. Relative to the SLPP oligarchy, the APC members came from lower status occupations, had more limited formal education, were younger, and had fewer links with traditional ruling families. They did not articulate any coherent set of beliefs that could be called a radical ideology, but they did have rather strong feelings about the existing social structure, and in particular about the abuses they felt the chiefs were able to perpetrate against their people...this...served to some extent to inoculate them against the ever present temptation to move en masse to the government side...'¹

As can be seen from the presentation of the results in Table 7.3, the SLPP failed to win an overall majority, the balance being held by the independent M.P.s. These M.P.s, including Marcus Grant who won a seat in the Freetown Suburb of Waterloo, were induced to join the SLPP. Approaches were also made to APC M.P.s, two of whom 'crossed the carpet' to the SLPP side a few months after the elections. A young member of the APC national executive, Samura Sesay, was appointed a manager at the Sierra Leone Cement Works, a company in which the government owned a majority of the shares, after joining the SLPP.² Three of the four Kono M.P.s declared themselves members of the SLPP in July 1963. The Kono movement was immediately re-organised and re-invigorated by the remaining M.P. by building upon the solid base of anti-government feeling.

op. cit., Chapter 9. The same ground is also covered in Victor King, 'The Search for political stability in Sierra Leone 1960-72', Chapter 2.

1 J. Cartwright, op. cit., p.166.

2 Ibid, p.168.

TABLE 7.2

Secretaries, United Mine Workers' Union and their regional origins,
1946 - 1972

SECRETARY	DATES	REGIONAL ORIGIN
Siaka Stevens	1946 - 1951	Northern Province
T. Lahai	1951 - 1954	Northern Province
B. E. D. Komba-Kono	1954 - 1961	Kono
J. S. Kamara	1961 - 1962	Northern Province
J. Ngegba	1962 - 1964	Southern Province
E. T. Kamara	1964 - 1969	Northern Province
S. S. Foday	1969 - 1972	Kono
J. B. Kabia	1972 - 1977	Northern Province
D. Gbenda	1977 -	Kono

SOURCE: Interview E. T. Kamara, 25 May 1982.

Marcus Grant's 'defection' to the ranks of the SLPP, as it was regarded by his colleagues in the labour movement, precipitated a crisis. A large section of the rank and file of his union, the Artisans and Allied Workers' Union, were incensed by his decision and proceeded to attempt to remove him from the leadership:

'Bai Conteh (the assistant secretary), the shop stewards and myself (regional secretary at Bo, southern province), could never understand why Pa Marcus did that. He knew that the rank and file were solidly for the APC. He could have even remained independent. It was a stab in the back, so it was decided that he should go. Some of the things which we had overlooked in his leadership were exposed.'¹

At the national union centre, the Council of Labour, Georgestone as secretary, convinced that Grant was motivated by personal ambition, demanded his expulsion.² Anticipating that this would be carried out, Grant and two union secretaries who supported his decision to join the SLPP resigned their affiliation to the Council and formed a rival centre, the Sierra Leone Federation of Labour (SLFL).³ This increased his difficulties within his own union.⁴ Marcus Grant himself has explained that it was his electoral constituency which recommended that he supported the SLPP in parliament:

'After the election, I called a meeting to find out which party to declare for. With R. G. O. King (an SLPP M.P.) at Koya (the neighbouring constituency), because of the nearness and closeness of the relationship between the two constituencies, my constituency favoured me joining the SLPP.'⁵

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- 1 Interview with Tejan Kassim, secretary, Artisans, Ministry of Works Employees' Union (nee Artisans' and Allied Workers' Union), 26 March 1982.
 - 2 Interview with H. N. Georgestone, 23 January 1980.
 - 3 Interview with Marcus Grant, 16 January 1980; cf. Labour Department, Annual Report 1962, p.8.
 - 4 Interview with Tejan Kassim, 26 March 1982.
 - 5 Interview with Marcus Grant, 16 January 1980.

TABLE 7.3

Election results 1962

PARTY	NO. OF CANDIDATES	NO. OF SEATS WON OUT OF 62 CONSTITUENCIES	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL VOTE
SLPP	59	28	34.7
APC (and Kono ally, SLPIM)	36	20	22.0
UPP	4	-	0.4
Independents	114	14	42.6
TOTAL	213	62	99.7

SOURCE: J. Cartwright, op. cit., Chapter 9.

Grant and his supporters in his constituency presumably calculated that they would receive the favourable consideration of applications for development grants and other benefits that normally went with support for the ruling regime. The Artisans' Union, however, demanded his resignation, and for three years Grant resisted the attempt to remove him from the union leadership. As an M.P. of the ruling party, he was supported by influential cabinet ministers and a sympathetic Labour Department.¹ In 1965, however, following a long campaign against him by union officials and the rank and file, Grant resigned:

'Allegations were made against me, even though I had been with them for 26 years as founder and organiser of that union.

1 Interview with Tejan Kassim, 26 March 1982.

Because of the pressure that was brought to bear on me, in order not to lose my patience and to keep the peace, I had no other alternative than to resign in 1965 after 26 years.¹

Bai Conteh, the union assistant secretary, was immediately elected secretary.²

The two union leaders who followed Marcus Grant out of the Council of Labour were George Thomas and M. J. A. Coker, who had established reputations as 'solid Labour Department men'. Thomas, the leader of the stevedores' union, the Maritime and Waterfront Workers' Union, had been vociferously opposed to the 1955 strike (cf. Chapter 2). In 1963, he led a campaign to prevent dock workers in the employ of the Port Management Department from setting up their own union organisation (cf. Chapter 5). Coker was leader of the Sherbro Amalgamated Workers' Union which operated in the SLPP stronghold of Bonthe-Sherbro. During Thomas's long illness in 1963/4, Grant acted as secretary of the Maritime and Waterfront Workers' Union and, after the former's death in 1964, he was elected secretary, a position he has since held.³

The voting record of Grant reveals that he was a loyal SLPP M.P. who supported the government on all occasions. During the debate on the One Party State Bill, for instance, he intervened to correct Siaka Stevens, the leader of the Opposition (who had made a statement that only one trade union, the Dock Workers' Union, was in favour of the Bill), that his Maritime and Waterfront Workers' Union was also

1 Interview with Marcus Grant, 16 January 1980; vide Labour Department, Annual Report 1965, p.9.

2 Interview with Tejan Kassim, 26 March 1982.

3 Interview with Marcus Grant, 16 January 1980; cf. Labour Department, Annual Report 1964, p.10.

in favour of the bill.¹

In 1963, four new unions, including the Dock Workers' Union, joined the Council of Labour, bringing the total number of affiliated members to 19,441 as compared with 14,191 in the SLFL (cf. Table 7.4). Encouraged by the minister with responsibility for the department, Labour officials attempted to bring the two sides back together.² This was for the obvious reason that SLPP leaders realised that it was politically dangerous for a large section of the labour movement to be so hostile to the government.³ Following Albert Margai's assumption of the premiership in 1964, he personally intervened to persuade Grant as secretary of the Federation and Georgestone as secretary of the Council to come together:

'It was Georgestone who was the stumbling block. It was difficult to entice him. After this he was left alone.'⁴

The Brussels-based International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) was also concerned to bring about a settlement to the dispute. From the point of view of ICFTU officials, the numerical strength of the unions in Sierra Leone being relatively small, the logical strategy for local trade unionists would be to remain united in one strong national centre in order to consolidate their resources and foster the development of trade unionism.⁵ Such reasoning, of course, did not take into account the realities of the local political environment. However, the ICFTU also found it expedient to concentrate

1 House of Representatives, Proceedings of 20 December 1965.

2 Labour Department, Annual Report 1963, p.7.

3 Interview with E. T. Kamara, 25 May 1982.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

its financial (and other) assistance on one strong union centre, rather than duplicate such hand-outs between small rival centres. After much persuasion by ICFTU officials, the two factions finally came together in 1966. As E. T. Kamara has pointed out, however, this was only made possible by the fact that Marcus Grant had been ousted from the leadership of the Artisans' Union. Although he had taken over the secretaryship of the Maritime and Waterfront Workers' Union, the latter, with a membership of casual stevedore workers, was far less influential than the former union. The new national centre was named the Sierra Leone Labour Congress. Marcus Grant and Georgestone agreed to work under E. T. Kamara, who became the part-time secretary of Congress.¹

Regarding the tendency for the fragmentation of the labour movement and the setting up of rival national centres, a Labour Department official has perceptively commented:

'Splits (within the labour movement) always take the same pattern. One faction overtly support the government; another wants to hold back. They split...(but)...they all come back to government to beg favours...To set up a national union centre was too easy in this country. 1. You print you letter heads. 2. You stick a sign on your office doocr. 3. You obtain a cable address. 4. You inform fraternal organisations the world over that you represent so many thousands (of workers). That's all. You don't need to worry about salaries, organisation, and so on, because you are all part-time officials in the centre, and full-time in your union.'²

The four-year rift in the labour movement was as much a consequence of disagreements over political strategy as of personality differences. Georgestone and Grant both belonged to that generation of union

1 Ibid; cf. Labour Department, Annual Report 1966, p.7.

2 Conversation with L. E. Johnson, Labour Commissioner, 3 March 1982.

leaders who had spent their formative years in the Youth League. They had both been the standard bearers of the League during the period of decolonisation. While Grant appears to have reached an understanding of the realities of patronage and political influence in the post-colonial state, however, Georgestone appears to have preferred to remain 'uncontaminated'. Grant could not bring himself to believe, quite rightly as it turned out, that the APC could possibly become a radical political force. From his point of view, union leaders would be wise to seek some kind of accommodation with the party in power. Several union leaders in fact adopted this strategy while remaining affiliated to the Council of Labour. J. I. Sandy, the secretary of the Dock Workers' Union, for instance, carefully cultivated the friendship of leading SLPP politicians and was 'rewarded' with a directorship of the Port Authority which came into being in January 1965 (see Chapter 5). Later that year, Sandy declared himself in favour of the One Party Bill. It has been established that even the Mine Workers' Union exploited the patronage of the SLPP during disputes with the management of the mining companies and during wage negotiations.¹

The attempt to introduce a one-party state stemmed from the realisation by the SLPP hierarchy of the potential threat posed by the APC. Significantly, when the Bill approving the principle of a one-party state was voted on in parliament, Stevens and his group of APC M.P.s abstained. Cartwright comments:

'The most striking feature of the debate was the lack of criticism by the All People's Congress of the principle of a one party system...In discussions after the debate, both

1 Interview with George Morten (former manager of the Sierra Leone Selection Trust in Kono, and presently a London-based director of Selection Trust Ltd.), 14 January 1981.

TABLE 7.4

Registered trade unions and affiliation, December 1963.

Sierra Leone Council of Labour		Sierra Leone Federation of Labour	
UNION	NO. OF MEMBERS	UNION	NO. OF MEMBERS
Railway Workers' Union	1,785	Artisans' and Allied Workers' Union	7,612
Mine Workers' Union	5,500	Maritime and Waterfront Workers' Union	5,600
Clerical, Mercantile, and General Workers' Union	3,259	Sherbro Amalgamated Workers' Union	979
Transport and General Workers' Union	1,606		
General Union of Construction Workers	800		
Sierra Leone Articled Seamen's Union	960		
Motor Drivers' Union	1,500		
Dock Workers' Union	2,649		
TOTAL	19,441		14,191

SOURCE: Labour Department, Annual Report 1963, Table 15.

(M. O. Bash-Taqi) and Stevens appeared quite willing to enter a coalition with the SLPP; neither showed much concern about the effect of eliminating all organised opposition to the government... This failure of the APC leaders to argue for the desirability of an organised opposition was no momentary aberration. Nowhere in the columns of We Yone (the party newspaper) up to this time had there been a rejection on principle of the one party state; all its arguments had been concentrated on the unrepresentativeness of Sir Albert and the SLPP. Stevens himself some months earlier had said that it was only the SLPP's weakness that disqualified it from seeking a one party system.¹

Georgestone, in his capacity as secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, joined other APC supporters in making a successful application for a supreme court injunction to prevent the meeting of a committee set up to work out the details of a constitution for the one party state.² Georgestone therefore continued to uphold what he saw as the traditions of the Youth League. Younger labour leaders, on the other hand, displayed remarkably agile footwork in mobilising support for the APC, in exploiting the patronage of the SLPP, and at the same time in articulating the demands of their members, especially after 1966 when the stabilisation programme of the IMF imposed some considerable hardship on lower paid workers.

As before, the unions played a decisive role in the 1967 election campaign, addressing APC rallies and ensuring that workers and their families turned up to vote on election day.³ The Mine Workers' Union was particularly influential in mining constituencies where its officials campaigned for the APC. In a few mining constituencies where the

1 J. Cartwright, op. cit., pp.216-217.

2 Interview with H. N. Georgestone, 23 January 1980; vide J. Cartwright, op. cit., p.225.

3 Interview with M. I. Mansaray, 3 April 1982 (see Chapter 6); interview with E. T. Kamara, 25 May 1982.

party failed to win seats, its vote was still appreciably high.¹ The APC narrowly won an election which revealed the importance of the growing regional cleavage as the basis of the division between the two parties. The SLPP won only three seats outside its southern and south-eastern strongholds: one in the north, and two in Kono. The APC won all the remaining northern and Kono seats, and all seats in the Western area of Freetown and its environs. It is clear that a coalition of northern ethnic groups, supporters of the Kono movement, the Krios, urban workers and the liberal intellectuals of Freetown, swept the APC to electoral victory. The intervention of the army prevented the party from taking office for a year.²

This account of the history and dynamics of union-government relations should not obscure the fact that considerations of political strategy were not the only concerns of the union leadership. Serious and genuine attempts were also being made to consolidate and develop trade unionism in the country. Once the two factions of the labour movement had been brought together, the ICFTU concentrated its assistance on the new Labour Congress. The priority area was to be trade union education: the training of shop stewards and union officials in bargaining procedures and trade union practices. E. T. Kamara was asked to assess training needs in Sierra Leone:

1 Interview with E. T. Kamara, 25th May 1982; full details on the election campaign, the results and subsequent events are provided in Cartwright, op. cit., pp.249-255, and in V. King, op. cit., Chapter 3. In the south and south-east, six SLPP supporters or M.P.s who had grown dissatisfied with Sir Albert's leadership stood as 'independents' and were successful. For a detailed account of the cleavages within the SLPP in the south-east, cf. W. Barrows, Grassroots politics in an African State, New York, 1976.

2 A comprehensive study of the intervention of the army has been undertaken by Thomas Cox, op. cit.

'Trade union sponsored education programme for workers in Sierra Leone is comparatively recently gaining root. No educational programme was embarked upon either by the Sierra Leone Council of Labour or the Sierra Leone Federation of Labour until they were replaced by the Sierra Leone Labour Congress... From this dry-as-dust background, the Congress is building up an educational programme in coordination with individual trade union programmes and the Sierra Leone Workers' Educational Association... (which)... was formed in 1963 with the help of an International Labour Organisation expert.'¹

In cooperation with the ICFTU and other interested parties, the Labour Congress ran a series of courses in labour education from 1967 in the main areas of large-scale employment throughout the country. Individual unions also embarked on campaigns to increase membership; in the case of the Dock Workers' Union, labourers at the Produce Marketing Board were organised for the first time. Table 7.5 provides a list of the unions and their officials as of March 1967.

The relationship between labour leaders and the military junta of 1967-68 was fundamentally different from the relationship with civilian politicians. Within a few days of taking office, Andrew Juxon-Smith, the Chairman of the National Reformation Council, made it clear that his mission was to rescue the country from political and moral decay. Political patronage as practiced by civilian politicians and 'corruption' in official circles were no longer to be tolerated. This meant that neither the union leaders nor the employers could seek the assistance of members of the government and other important officials to influence the outcome of bargaining as before. All leading trade unionists were invited to meet the chairman, who urged them to show restraint in wage demands. Marcus Grant, who lost his seat as an SLPP candidate in the elections, was a member of the

1 Labour Congress, E. T. Kamara to H. A. Tulatz, Assistant General Secretary ICFTU, 11 April 1967.

delegation, but Georgestone, who personally never recognised the junta, declined the invitation.¹ As part of its economic strategy, the junta encouraged the newly created Employers' Federation and the Labour Congress to sign a special 'code of conduct' designed to reduce the likelihood of strike action. The Congress executive (made up of officials of affiliated unions) used the opportunity to secure some important trade-offs:

'Comrade (E. T.) Kamara said that his union accepted the document (the code) on the whole but that they were of the opinion that this document should serve as the base for future negotiations with the employers.'²

In view of the drive to increase membership of the union, the clerical union proposed that 'all affiliates to the Employers' Federation implement the check-off system at all times'.³ The United Mine Workers' Union proposed that the 'code of conduct' be re-titled 'code of conduct to ensure industrial peace', in view of the authoritarian connotations of the former title.⁴ These suggestions were accepted. In spite of the code, strike statistics for 1967 and 1968 show significant increases in man days lost and number of workers involved (cf. Table 7.6).

The relationship between labour leaders and the junta was evidently strained by the IMF austerity measures which the NRC implemented with considerable enthusiasm. In his 1967 budget statement, Colonel Juxon-Smith went out of his way to dispel notions,

1 Interview with H. N. Georgestone, 23 January 1980.

2 Labour Congress, Minutes of the committee on the code of conduct for industrial peace held on Tuesday 18 April 1967.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

especially current among labour leaders, that the IMF was running the country or that it was a tool of the imperialist powers:

'I should like to record our sincere debt of gratitude to the IMF for coming to our rescue in time...I wish to reassure my countrymen that Fund visitation is neither a sign of national failure nor an abrogation of national sovereignty. Rather, it is a sign of our determination to seek and implement sound economic policies. It is an indication to interested observers that we recognise our difficulties and with international support we are resolved to overcome them.'¹

The deflationary impact of the budget resulted in redundancies both in the public and private sectors of the economy. The government wages bill was reduced by a significant proportion:

'The total for personal emoluments for 1967/68 is Le9,919,000 compared with Le10,555,500 in 1966/67, a decrease of 6.03 per cent.'²

E. T. Kamara has described the reaction of labour leaders to the NRC's economic policies:

'We challenged the NRC on these points. They said that the outgoing SLPP government had ruined the economy and therefore there was no alternative but to reduce employment in the public sector. Employers (in the private sector) were also given a free hand to make redundancies. When a government practices redundancies as its policy, workers lose their rights. Trade unions become weak... The NRC men were hypocrites. They made the rest of us suffer, but they were enjoying.'³

Since the Labour Congress was represented on the largely civilian NRC Advisory Committee, it was decided that a detailed memorandum, stating the dissatisfaction of the labour movement with the regime's economic policies, be forwarded to the committee. It is worth quoting

1 Statement on the Budget for 1967/68 broadcast by Col. A. T. Juxon-Smith, Chairman National Reformation Council on 30 June 1967, p.6.

2 Ibid, p.8.

3 Interview with E. T. Kamara, 25 May 1982.

TABLE 7.5

Unions of the Sierra Leone Labour Congress and their officials, March 1967

UNION	SECRETARY
Transport and General Workers' Union	H. N. Georgestone
Clerical Mercantile and General Workers' Union	G. E. E. Palmer
Construction and General Workers' Union	H. D. Charles
Motor Drivers' Union	J. B. Mahoi
Railway Workers' Union	P. S. Mammah
All Seamen's Union	Kekura Sanday
Dock Workers' Union	M. I. Mansaray
Articled Seamen's Union	Amos Sawyerr
Mine Workers' Union	E. T. Kamara
Maritime and Waterfront Workers' Union	Marcus Grant
Artisans' and Allied Workers' Union	A. Bai Conteh
Sherbro Amalgamated Workers' Union	J. A. Coker

SOURCE: Labour Congress, Affiliated Union, March 1967.

this document at length:

'Unemployment is the present day problem... and the future does not look very bright due to probable redundancies in some corporations. What can we do to ensure that unemployment does not rise?...government must be made aware that increased (import) duties...raises the cost of living, and the cost of goods, and companies will again be cutting down staff... broadcast talks delivered from time to time by members of the NRC to workers, seem to lead to one and only one conclusion, i.e., that this government in grappling with the economic situation is to resort to the retrenchment of labour...As a result of these policy statements...there is now going on in the private sector of the economy mass retrenchment. Without prejudice...perhaps some employers see this as a golden opportunity to cut down running costs and add to their already huge balance of profits...No one is against these measures (the economic strategy) but those concerned, i.e., Employers' Federation, Labour Congress, and the Department of Labour should of necessity be consulted when it is proposed to take decisions on this matter of unemployment of such magnitude.¹

The statement also drew attention to government figures on employment, 7,294 in 1967, which were 'unreliable in view of the fact that most of the unemployed....are unregistered'.²

One suspects that the suggestion for meetings of employers, labour leaders, and Labour Department officials, was an attempt to return to the status quo ante military intervention when labour leaders and employers could use informal means to influence the outcome of bargaining or government policy. Moreover, the NRC member with responsibility for the Labour Department, Mr. Alpha Kamara, a senior police officer, was known to be more flexible with regard to the economic strategy than some of the military members of the junta.

1 Labour Congress, Item for inclusion in the agenda for consideration of the Advisory Committee, submitted by Mr. E. T. Kamara, n.d., circa August 1967.

2 Ibid.

The chairman of the NRC, who was in charge of financial and economic matters, stuck to his guns. The budget proposals were implemented. It was clear that the Chairman was not prepared to 'accommodate' union leaders.¹

Indeed, the junta had no need to create a clientele either among labour leaders, the traditional chiefs, 'big men' at the local level, or any other social groups. The basis of the NRC's power was its military might. It largely ignored the sullen resentment of the coalition which had provided the APC with electoral victory, though the various commissions of inquiry which were set up to investigate the activities of the Margai regime were popular among this group. The economic policies to which the Chairman (with what must have been a sense of messianism) committed the junta, the documentation of the corrupt practices of the previous regime, was partly an attempt to justify the intervention of the NRC. In so far as the junta was to conduct this 'house cleaning' exercise for a limited period, it commanded the support of the rank and file of the security forces, and secured the grudging (or resigned) acceptance of the civilian population. However, when the NRC (and especially the Chairman) wavered over the question of the return to civilian rule, its support among the lower ranks of the military crumbled. In April 1968, junior officers of the army ejected the junta from power and installed Siaka Stevens and the APC in government.

It was with some considerable relief that the leaders of organised labour welcomed the new APC regime. Four days after Siaka Stevens' appointment as prime minister, the Congress executive presented a

1 Interview with E. T. Kamara, 25 May 1982.

TABLE 7.6

Industrial disputes, Sierra Leone, 1965-69

	1965	1966	1967	1968	1969
Number of work stoppages	3	9	7	9	12
Workers involved	1,320	781	1,951	1,714	6,964
Man-days lost	3,245	542	1,163	2,574	14,659
<u>Duration of Work Stoppage</u>					
Less than 1 day	1	5	4	5	-
1 day but less than 2 days	1	2	2	1	4
2 days but less than 4 days	1	2	1	3	5
4 days but less than 1 week	-	-	-	-	3
<u>Cause of Dispute</u>					
Wages or hours	1	-	-	1	-
Working conditions	-	3	3	6	7
Fringe benefits or privileges	1	-	-	-	-
Personal relations between workers or with management	-	6	3	2	4
Disagreement over management policy not directly related to wages, hours, or working conditions	1	-	1	-	1

SOURCE: Labour Department, Annual Report 1969, Table 14, Freetown 1969.

congratulatory message to him in which it was made clear that they regarded the government as their own:

'In his address, Mr. Caramba-Coker (president of Congress) commented on Dr. Stevens' trade union links and former career as a trade unionist. "We, as workers' representatives", he declared, "are very much delighted at the thought that one of us, after going through the crucibles, could now be elevated to the enviable and responsible position of Prime Minister. Your patience and courage, your subtle intellect and winsome personality, have already endeared you to us, and we feel happy and proud beyond measure that we have our own man at the helm of affairs in this country with whom we can confer and consult."¹

The appointment by Stevens of C. A. Kamara-Taylor as Minister of Lands, Mines, and Labour was welcomed by Congress. As a former employee in the clerical grades of the UAC, Kamara-Taylor had worked alongside George Palmer of the Clerical Union with whom he had maintained a close friendship. It is evident that labour leaders greeted the assumption of office by the APC with much euphoria and great expectations. On May 24, 1968, 'thousands of workers and trade unionists from all over the country defied torrential rain to rally in honour of Prime Minister Stevens...(who) told them that government would consider ways to provide more low cost housing for low income workers and that measures to control the price of rice would be announced shortly...E. T. Kamara, Secretary General...of... Congress assured the Prime Minister and Government of their cooperation in the tasks that lay ahead'.² On July 7, Stevens was crowned 'chief motor driver' by the Motor Drivers' Union. At the ceremony, the secretary of the union asserted that they hoped to be government's 'comrade-in-arms against want, disease, oppression, and inequality'.³

1 Cf. 12 years of Economic Achievement and Political Consolidation under the APC and Dr. Siaka Stevens (1968-80), p.9.

2 Ibid, p.13.

3 Ibid, p.17.

While the APC was formally committed to the reform of the institution of chieftancy and to effect a re-distribution of income through reformist social and economic policies, the logic of its political strategy once in office - to reduce the numerical strength of the opposition in parliament, to create, maintain, and extend its own network of clientele via political patronage, and to reward loyalty to the regime and in particular its leader - conflicted in several respects with the higher ideals which had surrounded the formation of the party and which had sustained it during the difficult years in opposition. Indeed, the APC leadership had served notice of this political strategy by its refusal to criticise the principle of a one-party state. Labour leaders, and the leaders of the coalition of interest groups which supported the APC in opposition, failed to sustain an interest in, or to enter into a debate on, how the principles of reform on which they had campaigned for the APC could be translated into successful policies. Leaders of the interest groups readily accepted the ambassadorships and other appointments offered by the APC. Individual trade union leaders also reached their own 'accommodation' with the new regime. At the Port Authority, M. I. Mansaray, the secretary of the Dock Workers' Union, was able to persuade the Minister of Transport and Communications to make him a director on the Board, contrary to the recommendations of The Panda Report. In April 1969, E. T. Kamara, the secretary of the Mine Workers' Union and part-time secretary of the Labour Congress, resigned from the Labour Movement to pursue a course in management studies in Britain,¹ and was later to become head of administration at the APC national headquarters.

1 Interview with E. T. Kamara, 25 May 1982.

In their concern with the more economic and parochial issues relating to the practice of trade unionism (to effect marginal increases in wages and to secure marginal improvements in working conditions), labour leaders also failed to address the more important questions relating to the sources of inequality, or the nature of power and authority in the post-colonial state. It was not until an unprecedented bout of inflation had by the mid-1970's considerably eroded the real value of wages (and after the hopes raised by the coming to power of the APC had been dashed), that union leaders began to address themselves to these crucial issues. On the other hand, in view of the historical development of the practice of trade unionism in Sierra Leone, and in view of the political conditions associated with neo-patrimonial leadership, it is perhaps understandable (if not justifiable) that union leaders should have been concerned to reach an 'accommodation' with the regime and to exploit the patronage of the politicians for personal advancement. It could also perhaps be argued that it was only through such an accommodation that it was possible to secure and defend gains at the work place. Apart from the adoption of these tactics of bargaining, some labour leaders did also demonstrate a genuine commitment to the development and consolidation of trade unionism. The success of these attempts to create a viable labour movement was invaluable during the confrontation with the APC regime in the late 1970's. The kind of trade unionism consolidated during the early years of APC rule, however, did not involve any very strong or consistent assertion of the right and duty of the labour movement leadership to criticise government policy and performance publicly. In a sense, the silence of these leaders was bought.

The main priorities, then, of union leaders at the beginning of

APC rule were to strengthen the viability of the movement and to secure and defend gains at the work place. In November 1968, E. T. Kamara proposed the centralisation of all trade unions into one single national union having a similar organisational structure to that of the Israeli Histradut.¹ The reasoning behind the proposals was that individual unions had acquired (via members' subscriptions) the economic resources to maintain viable organisations with full-time officials, office accommodation etc., while the national centre was poorly organised. By coming together into one national union, the resources of the union would now be concentrated in the national centre. It was envisaged that 'departments' within the national union centre would be in charge of the various areas of trade union activity, such as the docks, the mines, clerical workers, artisans, etc.² A committee of Congress was eventually formed to examine the issue. In its four-point recommendation, the committee ignored the idea of a Histradut-like national centre, but made suggestions for the strengthening of Congress:

'That Congress persuade small unions of like interest to merge and form one strong unit;....that Congress endeavours to get the check-off system on a national basis... and thirty per cent of all union dues collected at source be paid to Congress;...that...a full-time paid secretary be employed with two assistants and a clerk-typist;...that a campaign be launched for the following:- the setting up of an industrial relations charter...

1 Ibid; Labour Congress, E. T. Kamara to General Secretaries of all registered trade unions of Sierra Leone, 10 November 1968. It was this structural model that had also been adopted for the Trade Union Congress in Ghana under Nkrumah after 1958 with the consequences of rank and file opposition and government suppression of this which have been described by Richard Jeffries in Class, Power and Ideology, Chapters 5 and 6.

2 Interview with E. T. Kamara, 25 May 1982.

to serve as a modus operandi for the labour movement...the encouragement of trade union education.¹

In view of the rejection of the idea of one National Union, one is led to suspect that individual union leaders wished to preserve their autonomy within a strong national centre. These suggestions also reflected the more urgent needs of the labour movement as perceived by the committee. The suggestion for a new industrial relations charter stemmed from a growing realisation among union leaders, employers, and labour department officials alike, that the existing institutions of collective bargaining, the wages boards and the JICs, had become outmoded. One of the most notable features in employment trends during the first decade of independence was the growth of the manufacturing, commercial, and services (hotels, restaurants, entertainment, etc.) sectors (cf. Table 7.7). Newer employers tended to offer more favourable working conditions and fringe benefits than employers in the traditional sectors.² While four new JICs had been created in addition to the artisan and transport JICs to reflect the growing diversification of employment, most of the benefits offered by employers were negotiated and awarded outside the framework of JIC or Wages Board Agreements. Unlike the Dock Workers' Union, which was essentially a 'house' union, the Clerical Union, for instance, operated in several sectors and consequently there was considerable heterogeneity in the range of benefits available to its members. Indeed the increase in strike activity in 1968 and 1969 in terms of man-days lost and numbers of workers involved was directly related to

1 Artisans, Ministry of Works Employees' Union, Report of ad hoc committee on centralisation, 5 March 1969.

2 Interview with Uriah Davies, formerly Assistant Secretary of the Clerical Union, and currently Secretary of the Hotels, Food, Drinks, Tobacco, and Entertainment and Services Workers' Union, 19 June 1980. The same point was made with further elaboration in a second interview with Davies on 5 April 1982.

attempts to reduce anomalies in working conditions and benefits offered by different employers (see Table 7.6).¹

Following E. T. Kamara's resignation from the labour movement in April 1969, George Palmer of the Clerical Union was elected Secretary of Congress. During the seven years of his leadership of Congress, Palmer was able to bring into fruition three of the four main recommendations contained in the report of the ad hoc committee of Congress of March 1969 - the recommendation relating to mergers between unions being the most elusive objective to realise. Palmer faced little opposition in his bid for the secretaryship of Congress. Under his leadership, his union, the Clerical, Mercantile and General Workers', had become one of the largest and most influential unions in the country. His friendship with C. A. Kamara-Taylor, the minister in charge of the Labour Department, had been well publicised within the labour movement at the time of the latter's appointment. He had been one of the leading campaigners for the reform of the JIGs and Wages Boards and the adoption of a new industrial relations charter and, indeed, had proposed in December 1968 what was in effect an abandonment of these institutions. Marcus Grant, having been 'isolated' within the labour movement following his defeat as a SLPP candidate in the 1967 elections, did not contest. H. N. Georgestone,

1 According to the day-to-day record of the activities of Stevens and the APC leadership, on April 1, 1969, 'Dr. Stevens called a meeting with General Secretaries and executive members of all Sierra Leone's trade unions...(and)...appealed to...(them) to ensure that all other means had been exhausted before embarking on strike action, and emphasised that trade union rights should be exercised responsibly. Dr. Stevens reminded them that the country was theirs and that they should therefore pursue its best interests...The Prime Minister finally gave assurances that Government would take care of workers' grievances.' (Cf. 12 Years of Economic Achievement and Political Consolidation under Dr. Siaka Stevens and the APC, p.39.)

TABLE 7.7

Changing pattern of employment trends

INDUSTRY	1960 (Monthly Averages)	1968/69 (Monthly Averages)
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	1,813	3,202
Mining	6,047	9,197
Manufacturing	3,004	6,670
Construction	8,689	7,475
Electricity, Water and Sanitary Services	993	1,857
Commerce	4,355	6,197
Transport, Storage and Communications	8,961	8,444
Services	14,012	20,564
All Industries	47,874	63,542

N.B. Figures are based on returns from employers of six or more persons.

SOURCE: Labour Department Reports 1960 and 1969.

a more serious contender, withdrew at the last moment when it became clear that his union, the Transport and General Workers', did not support him. The perennial problem of mal-administration and misappropriation of funds had surfaced within his union, and the rank and file were demanding a public inquiry. Government appointed a commission of inquiry in October 1969.¹ H. D. Charles of the Construction Union was elected assistant secretary, G. A. Caramba-Coker of the Artisans' Union continued in his position as Congress president or chairman.²

Shortly after becoming part-time secretary of Congress, Palmer and his union executive council ran into difficulties with other unions affiliated to the centre over the reform of the institutions of wage bargaining. In December 1968, the clerical union had proposed that JIC awards should not be made to apply to workers covered by separate collective agreements between unions and employers.³ The Clerical Union was in effect suggesting that free bargaining should be allowed between employers and the unions. The basis of this suggestion was the realisation that better terms of employment could be negotiated directly with employers, and in particular, employers in new businesses. The raison d'être of the JICs was to standardise awards throughout the sector covered by its agreements. Although the ability of employers to offer more favourable terms varied, there was nonetheless considerable pressure for JIC awards to be made at levels

1 Interview with H. N. Georgestone, 23 January 1980; cf. Labour Department, Annual Report 1969.

2 Interview with Tejan Kassim, 26 March 1982.

3 Artisans, Ministry of Works Employees' Union, G. E. E. Palmer to permanent Secretary Ministry of Lands, Mines, and Labour (copied to the Hon. Prime Minister) 18 December 1968.

acceptable to all employers within the sector. Since the Clerical Union had a high proportion of skilled workers (who are not easily replaceable) among its members, it had been highly successful in securing more favourable terms and conditions than those offered by the JICs, via threats of (and actual) strike action and other arm-twisting tactics. Most of the other unions, with a high proportion of unskilled workers, did not possess such bargaining strength and were in fact protected by standardised JIC awards. One of E. T. Kamara's last actions as secretary of Congress was to inform the Ministry of Labour about the reservations of most unions affiliated to Congress vis a vis the Clerical Union's proposals:

'...I have to inform you that Congress does not support the amendment sought by the Clerical, Mercantile and General Workers' Union at this moment...Congress has however considered that from the fact itself that the present wage machineries of the JICs have existed for a period of over 20 years now, and more so because these arrangements were concluded in a colonial regime, it is the general feeling that the need for reassessment is fully justified and we therefore recommend that a meeting be arranged... so that the whole question of wage negotiation machinery appropriate to present day circumstances be looked into thoroughly and amendments made where this is found necessary and acceptable in the interest of all concerned.'¹

This was also the line of argument adopted by the Employers' Federation and other Congress affiliates at a meeting of the Joint Consultative Committee which accepted the principle of the adoption of a new industrial relations charter.² The meeting also agreed that technical assistance should be sought from the ILO in the formulation of the charter.

1 Artisans, Ministry of Works Employees' Union, E. T. Kamara to permanent secretary Ministry of Lands, Mines, and Labour (copied to the Hon. Prime Minister and to the Employers' Federation), 17 April 1969.

2 Labour Congress, Recommendations affecting wage negotiating

In February 1970, the ILO sent its Regional Adviser, Charles Spencer-Cooke, to Sierra Leone to undertake the research relating to the formulation of the industrial relations charter.¹ A month later agreement was reached between the Employers' Federation and the Labour Congress on the principles and details of the new charter. Its main provision was the establishment of Trade Group Negotiating Councils to replace the JICs and Wages Boards.² The economy was divided into fourteen sectors and the TGNC was to become the forum for negotiations on wages and other benefits in each sector designated viz: mining, building and construction, commercial and insurance, shipping and forwarding, industrial, oil (marketing and refining), public utilities, banking, hotels and entertainment, printing, transport, agriculture, municipal and local government, and air transport. Each TGNC was to be responsible for setting the minimum level of wages and benefits in each sector. As it was envisaged that these 'agreements' would be given legal force, the level of wages and benefits reached at negotiations was to become the statutory minimum applicable in each sector. Negotiations at TGNCs were to be held biennially, but '...it being understood that in extraordinary circumstances affecting the national economy it may within this period be reviewed at the petition of either party to such agreement'. Each TGNC was to be composed of an equal number of representatives drawn from employers and the unions in the sector concerned. Disputes were to be referred to the Commissioner of Labour (the senior industrial relations specialist

machinery made by the Joint Consultative Committee, n.d., circa May 1969.

- 1 Artisans, Ministry of Works Employees' Union, Secretary-General Labour Congress to all secretaries of affiliated unions, 18 February 1970.
- 2 Labour Congress, An agreement between the Sierra Leone Labour Congress and the Sierra Leone Employers' Federation, 13 March 1970.

at the Labour Department) for arbitration, and if agreement could not be reached, to an industrial court, the decision of which was to be final. Notices of strikes and lock outs were to be given at least fourteen days in advance of the action. The Clerical Union was apparently able to force through the concession for which George Palmer had been campaigning. It was also agreed that: 'Notwithstanding agreements reached by the Trade Group Negotiating Councils, employers will be at liberty - where they have the ability to do so and without prejudice to employers who adopt the terms and conditions to which these agreements refer - to offer better wages, terms and conditions than are provided for in these agreements.' A Joint National Board was also proposed under the agreement. It was to be responsible for fixing national minimum rates of pay, maximum hours of work, the rates of pay applicable on national public holidays, and terms of employment of children or young persons, apprentices, and the disabled.

During conversations held by this researcher with Labour Department officials, the point was made that this 'formal' model of industrial relations contained some of the more favoured prescriptions of the ILO (and in particular the recommendation that an industrial court should become the final arbiter of industrial disputes) so as to take 'politics' out of industrial relations. Labour Department officials further perceived that it was unlikely that the formal model would work as envisaged in the agreement, in view of the pervasive tendency among union leaders and, indeed, employers, to use their clientelist relationships with important politicians to influence the outcome of bargaining. After eighteen months of study by government legal advisers, however, a Bill containing some of these recommendations was submitted to parliament in September 1971.

During this intervening period, some progress was made by Congress

in bringing to fruition some of the priorities defined in the report of the ad hoc committee of 5 March 1969. In an attempt to make Congress financially viable, it was agreed that each affiliated union should make a monthly per capita payment of ten cents and, as George Palmer reminded union leaders, '...if Congress is to work effectively, one of the most responsible factors is money. Please see that your union pays her per capita monthly'.¹ The formula adopted for the financing of the national centre meant that the unions with the greater number of members, such as the Mine Workers, the Transport Workers, the Clerical Workers, the Artisans, and the Dock Workers, contributed over three-quarters of the revenue of Congress. Reliable figures relating to these arrangements are not available until 1972 (by which time Congress had been able to employ full-time officials with the assistance of the African-American Labour Congress (AALC)), but it can be estimated that total monthly receipts from affiliates was in the region of Le2,500.²

Progress was also made in the field of trade union education. An important area of patronage for a ruling party in Sierra Leone lies in the distribution of government scholarships. The APC regime had provided Congress with representation on the national scholarships committee, and two scholarships were reserved on an annual basis for the training of trade union officials.³ In October 1970, the national centre with ICFTU assistance ran a series of seminars for shop stewards.⁴ In accordance with its official policy of 'non-alignment',

1 Artisans, Ministry of Works Employees' Union, G. E. E. Palmer to secretaries of all affiliated unions, 9 April 1970.

2 This estimate is based on the assumption that the numerical strength of the unions affiliated to Congress was about 25,000.

3 Artisans, Ministry of Works Employees' Union, E. T. Kamara to all secretaries of Congress affiliates, 5 February 1969.

4 Artisans, Ministry of Works Employees' Union, G. E. E. Palmer to
P.T.O.

Congress accepted scholarships for the training of workers' representatives from trade union organisations in Eastern Europe as well as in the Western Alliance and Israel. With regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict, Congress defined its position in July 1970:

'The Sierra Leone Labour Congress has a very nice and cordial relationship with the workers of the Arab states and those of Israel and reaffirms its policy that the Big Powers should help bring about peace in the Middle East, since it is the working class that is suffering the most at this time.'¹

In spite of its neutrality in the Cold War and other conflicts professed by Congress, it is clear that the relationship which had been developed with workers' organisations in the Western Alliance (and in Israel) was greatly valued. Moreover, it is further clear that labour leaders in Sierra Leone have preferred the ideologies underlying the mildly reformist strategies of American trade unionists. None of the Sierra Leonean trade unionists encountered by this researcher professed a commitment to socialist or communist ideologies prevalent among European trade unionists. When Congress was asked by the ICFTU (which together with the AALC provided the national centre with most of its external aid) not to send delegates to a conference in Moscow held under the auspices of the Eastern bloc's World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), the principle of non-alignment was not invoked. The advice was accepted.² Assistance given to Congress to develop its educational and training programmes as well as for other purposes evidently compromised its professed neutrality in international political conflicts.

The content of educational programmes has been examined. These

all secretaries of Congress affiliates, 30 September 1970.

2 Labour Congress, Minutes of a special meeting, Thursday 2 September 1971.

2 Labour Congress, Minutes of a special meeting, Thursday 2 September 1971.

have been geared towards promoting literacy among union members, and towards disseminating information on the purposes and functions of trade union organisation. Regarding the latter type of courses, booklets which are used in instruction are distributed among participants. These contain slogans which are explained by a simple text and by pictorial displays. For instance, the Congress Shop Steward Manual admonishes floor representatives:

'When a worker comes to you with a grievance, get the facts, listen to the members, look at the job, talk to other workers, check past grievances...When presenting a grievance, find a precedent. Cite a similar case that has been settled the way you want it...Be sure to file the grievance on time. A late grievance is a lost grievance.'¹

Shop stewards at the Port Authority have been asked to assess the usefulness of Congress training programmes. Without exception, those stewards who had attended courses maintained that the instruction received was useful in their role as workers' representatives. Needless to say, participants have not been introduced to debates concerned with the political role of trade unions. The AALC representative in Sierra Leone between 1977 and 1981 maintained that the content of education training programmes was related to the experience of the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO). The motives for assisting trade unions in Sierra Leone were allegedly based on altruistic considerations:

'It is a case of putting money where your mouth is...we are here on the invitation of Congress and will leave as soon as agreed programmes have been completed...We also give assistance in training managers of (Congress) cooperatives and in providing anti-malaria and other medical drugs.'²

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- 1 Labour Congress, Shop Steward Manual (produced in conjunction with the AALC), n.d.
 - 2 Interview with John Kilhefner, AALC representative in Sierra Leone, 18 April 1980.

Another area in which progress was made on the priorities of Congress as defined on 5 March 1969 was the proposal to construct a modern headquarters. This was facilitated by a grant of \$47,000 from the AALC.¹ The government of Sierra Leone agreed to provide a site at Wallace-Johnson Street in central Freetown, and work commenced in mid-1972.²

By the end of the first decade of independence, the trends in national labour politics which had become established during the years of decolonisation continued to be manifested. During this period, trade union leaders also demonstrated a commitment to the strengthening of the organisational base of trade unions in Sierra Leone, albeit within political parameters that had been narrowly defined, and within the terms of a political cosmos which they accepted uncritically and indeed helped to sustain. Developments during the second decade of independence initiated a reconsideration of the assumptions governing the political behaviour as well as the political values of labour leaders. The focus now shifts to a consideration of trends in national labour politics during this latter period.

Main trends in labour politics in the second decade of independence³

In March 1971, almost three years after coming to power, the APC was faced with its first major crisis. A corps of senior army

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- 1 Artisans, Ministry of Works Employees' Union, Minutes of Meeting of the Sierra Leone Labour Congress held on 7 January 1971.
 - 2 Labour Congress, Minutes of Meeting held on Wednesday 4th October 1972.
 - 3 For an overview of trends in national politics during this period, cf. the later chapters of Victor King, 'The Search for Political Stability in Sierra Leone'; Chris Clapham, Liberia and Sierra Leone, and Chris Allen, 'Sierra Leone', in John Dunn (ed.), West African States, 1979, pp.189-210.

officers alleged to be associates of leaders of the United Democratic Party (UDP) attempted to assassinate the prime minister, Siaka Stevens, by raking his office and home with gun fire. The leaders of the UDP, Dr. Mohammed Fornah, Dr. John Karefa-Smart, Dr. Sarif Easmon, and the Bash-Taqi brothers (M. O. and Ibrahim) had either been senior cabinet ministers or leading supporters of the APC, and had resigned from the party in protest at the harrassment of Opposition M.P.s and at allegations of government complicity in the Great Diamond Robbery at Hastings Airport near Freetown.¹ The formation of the UDP was a serious threat to the ruling party as four of its leaders, Fornah, Karefa-Smart, and the Bash-Taqi brothers were Temnes from the north. Sarif Easmon symbolised the growing disenchantment of the Freetown elite with the APC regime. The UDP leadership was also distinguished from senior APC politicians by the fact that they were all highly educated professionals or were relatively affluent in their own right. Three of the senior UDP politicians were successful medical practitioners, while Ibrahim Bash-Taqi had been a successful journalist. With the exception of M. O. Bash-Taqi, the others had joined the APC rather late in the day and had been particularly identified with the liberal intellectual supporters of the party.² Thus the banning of the UDP, and the subsequent ascendancy of C. A. Kamara-Taylor and S. I. Koroma in the hierarchy of the party, may be described as the resurgence in political dominance of the original group of APC activists from lower status occupations as described by Cartwright, who were initially protesting against the elitism of the SLPP and the excesses of the chiefs, but who showed little concern with liberal values and whose

1 Chris Allen, op. cit., loc. cit., p.205; the theft of the diamonds has been listed in the Guinness Book of Records as among the greatest crimes of all time.

2 I am grateful to Abdul Salami Williams, a former aide of Ibrahim Bash-Taqi, for bringing this to my attention.

own political survival had replaced the reformist spirit in relevance and in importance. During this second decade of independence, the APC leadership consolidated its position by the adoption in April 1971 of a Republican Constitution giving a wide range of powers to the presidency which Stevens himself assumed, by the 'incorporation' of senior army officers, and by the adoption of a single party regime in June 1978. This the APC had been able to achieve not only by creating an efficient nation-wide organisation which was used to renew and extend its network of clientele, but also by creating a security unit, independent of the army, and loyal to the party leadership. It is against this background that the responses of organised labour to trends in national politics need to be assessed.

Most labour leaders came down firmly on the side of the APC in relation to the cleavage which had given rise to the UDP and the assassination attempt on the prime minister in March 1971. A few days after the assassination attempt, a meeting of Congress was called to discuss the situation. '.....a letter written to the Prime Minister by the Secretary-General dated 25th March sympathising with him...was read'.¹ A statement was presented to Stevens on 30th March and is recorded in the official diary of the APC leadership:

'The Sierra Leone Labour Congress, representing the entire national workforce, condemned the actions of a small dissident army group in their attempts on the life of Prime Minister Siaka Stevens and pledged their support for the government under Dr. Stevens' leadership. The Congress also called for a People's Militia to replace the armed forces and declared support for government's decision to invite Guinean troops into the country.'²

1 Artisan, Ministry of Works Employees' Union, Minutes of extraordinary meeting of the Sierra Leone Labour Congress held on Tuesday 26th March 1971.

2 12 Years of Economic Achievement and Political Consolidation under the APC and Dr. Siaka Stevens, p.85.

By August it was clear that this statement of support was not the unanimous view of leaders of Congress affiliates. Before the events leading up to the assassination attempt, H. N. Georgestone who - following Marcus Grant's loss of credibility and influence after his unsuccessful foray into national politics - was respectfully regarded as the 'father' of trade unionism in Sierra Leone, had advocated that Congress ought to re-assess its relationship with the APC.¹ George Palmer, the Secretary of Congress, did not share this view. According to Georgestone, 'sometime in 1970' he had even warned Stevens that the growing authoritarianism of the APC was a betrayal of the ideals of those who had supported it in opposition.²

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- 1 Interview with H. N. Georgestone, 23 January 1980. Around the time of Georgestone's public statements of reservation on trends in the conduct of the APC, he was informed that his union, 'Transport and General Workers', was to be investigated by a public inquiry for corruption and other malpractices. There is evidence that some sections of the rank and file demanded the inquiry. Georgestone and other union officials were found guilty of mis-using union funds and other instances of mal-administration. (Cf. Report of the Faulkner Commission of Inquiry into the Finance and Administration of the Transport and General Workers' Union and Government Statement Thereon, Freetown, 1970, pp.74-77). The government, in its statement accepting the report, sounded an indignant note: 'Trade unionism is an important social institution, and those who set themselves up as leaders or are appointed leaders should realise that they have a moral obligation to perform the duties of their office with probity and integrity. There should be no place in the trade union movement for weak, incompetent, negligent, and irresponsible leaders...Government will not allow the subscriptions paid from the sweat and toil of the ordinary masses to be manipulated and squandered by rascals who keep themselves in positions of authority when they have long passed their usefulness.' (Cf. The Faulkner Report, p.i).
 - 2 Interview with H. N. Georgestone, 23 January 1980; Georgestone's reservations and his disagreement with George Palmer over this issue have been corroborated by Uriah Davies: 'Kamara-Taylor and Palmer were friends since they worked together at the UAC. It was also a fact that Palmer was pro-APC'. (Interview with U. O. H. Davies, 5 April 1982).

Matters came to a head in June 1971, when the Labour Department nominated Palmer as the workers' delegate to the annual ILO meeting in Geneva. Georgestone interpreted this as an unwarranted exercise of government patronage and protested that, in principle, an invitation should have been issued to Congress which should in turn have selected a delegate (usually the secretary) as was the established practice.¹ The Labour Department ruled that there were no procedural irregularities. Georgestone and three other leaders of Congress affiliates issued a statement of no confidence in the elected officers of Congress.² At a meeting of Congress in August, H. D. Charles and Georgestone insisted that this statement be discussed as a regular item on the agenda. When the chairman refused, Georgestone, Charles, and the representative of the Mine Workers' Union walked out. The meeting went on to discuss other issues including the Industrial Relations Bill which George Palmer was anxious to have enacted, not least because of its provision for the statutory recognition of Congress.³

After this episode, approaches were made to Georgestone, Charles, and S. S. Foday, the secretary of the Mine Workers' Union (on whose behalf F. A. Brimah, regional secretary of the union at the Mokbanji bauxite mines had signed the statement of no confidence) to have the issue resolved. Georgestone and Charles insisted that their criticisms of Congress officials were based on strongly held principles. They

1 Interview with U. O. H. Davies, 5 April 1982.

2 Artisan, Ministry of Works Employees' Union, Statement signed on behalf of the Transport and General Workers' Union, the United Mine Workers' Union, the General Construction Workers' Union, and the Motor Drivers' Union by H. N. Georgestone, F. A. Brimah, H. D. Charles, and A. W. Hassan respectively. The statement also referred to the Industrial Relations Bill based on the Agreement of March 1970, to draw attention to the fact that the government had decided to make Congress the statutory national labour centre.

3 Labour Congress, Minutes of Meeting held on Thursday 5th August 1971. (Four unions had initially signed the statement of no confidence, but the Motor Drivers' Union dissociated itself from the criticisms of Congress officials). Georgestone and Charles insisted on having the statement as a separate item on the agenda

resigned affiliation from Congress and established a rival centre, the Council of Labour.¹ Foday, however, agreed to dissociate the Mine Workers' Union from the statement.²

By the middle of September, it was clear that the split within the national centre could not be easily resolved. A meeting was called to review the situation and it transpired that representatives of Congress affiliates (including the secretary of the Mine Workers' Union who had expressed some reservations) were unanimous in the belief that the rival centre should be ignored. There was no serious attempt to debate the 'activities' of Congress officials or the 'connotations' of the Industrial Relations Bill, to which the statement of no confidence had referred:

'...Comrade Pratt (Motor Drivers' Union) pointed out among other things that the fight in the (national centre) had started since the time of the late Mr. Wallace-Johnson and this fight will never come to an end; so if Congress wanted to beg the two dissident unions, they could do so; if not, then Congress should forget about the unions concerned and continue with their normal activities...Comrade Marcus Grant (Maritime and Waterfront Workers') remarked that he did not know of two centres but only one, and went further to state that the move taken by Congress to send letters of invitation to the dissent unions was a good one...Comrade S. S. Foday (Mine Workers' Union) suggested that in order that Congress may get the sympathy of the public, a complete history in connection with recent happenings should be drawn up by the Secretary-General for publication and scrutinised by a committee of three before it is made public...The Secretary-General pointed out that it was not proper for any organisation to use the name of the Sierra Leone Council of Labour as it had

so that it could be debated. As correspondence, it might only have been 'noted'. It also transpired from the discussions at the meeting that Marcus Grant had been rehabilitated into the counsels of Congress.

1 Interview with U. O. H. Davies, 5 April 1982.

2 Labour Congress, S. S. Foday to G. E. E. Palmer, 25 August 1971.

long been dissolved and replaced by the Sierra Leone Labour Congress. For this reason, he felt that this should be brought to the notice of the Minister of Labour and the government for appropriate action, and that Congress should see to it that the government makes a press release re-affirming its official recognition of the Sierra Leone Labour Congress...Comrade Hamilton (Railway Workers' Union) congratulated all other speakers who strongly criticised the behaviour of the two leaders of the seceded unions and appealed to all members for stronger support and cooperation in order to work not only for the benefit of self but for the benefit of the members we represent, and concluded that we make a statement to the outside world for them to know the facts.¹

These developments are significant for two reasons. First, the anxiety of the representatives of Congress affiliates that the outside world (including the ICFTU and the AALC, the major donors of aid) should be informed of the 'real' facts (i.e. Congress's position) is obvious. The logic underlying the provision of assistance by these organisations is a genuine desire to help build a united labour movement with a solid organisational base and with an ideological orientation acceptable to western geo-political interests. Indeed, during the earlier dispute between the Federation of Labour and the Council of Labour under the Margai regime, the ICFTU had helped to bring about a rapprochement between the two factions. It is unfortunate that in wanting to create and maintain an influence in third world labour movements, these international organisations often fail to understand the trends in local national politics. Throughout the dispute, the AALC and the ICFTU continued to provide Congress with various types of assistance. From 1972, the AALC actually paid the salaries of the full-time officials of Congress.²

1 Labour Congress, Minutes of Extraordinary Meeting held on 23rd September 1971.

2 Labour Congress, AALC Budget Provision - 1972 to Sierra Leone Labour Congress, 2 December 1972. According to this document, the contribution of the AALC to salaries and other organisational

Second, the nature of the issues relating to the split within Congress posed some key questions centring on the choice of the future political posture of the labour movement in Sierra Leone. The statement of no confidence referred to the 'activities' of Congress officials and to the 'connotations' of the Industrial Relations Bill. As already noted, Congress made no serious attempt to discuss these issues, contributions to the debate of 23 September being mere homilies on the correctness of extending invitations to the 'dissident' unions to come back to the fold. In view of trends in national politics under the APC, Georgestone in particular, with great foresight, wanted Congress to re-assess its relationship with the ruling party. He had perceived that certain provisions in the Industrial Relations Bill were designed to bring the labour movement under the control of the party. In this regard, H. D. Charles of the Construction Workers' Union had brought back with him from Ghana (where he had been a union official in the early 'sixties) the experience of the Ghanaian Trade Union Congress under Nkrumah. 'Until he died (in 1978) Pa Charles always said that there are opportunities in cooperating (with the ruling party) but also dangers'.¹ The issue, then, was not whether labour leaders should seek to enter into clientelist relations with politicians (the effectiveness of these informal channels was fully understood and not controversial as such), but whether the labour movement could preserve and maintain its independence especially to criticise those areas of government policy that were perceived not to be in the best interests of lower paid workers. The failure of Congress to debate the issue in these terms was tragic. On the other hand, however, the premium placed on the

expenditures of Congress was Le15,786.80.

1 Interview with U. O. H. Davies, 5 April 1982.

loyalty to political patrons by those who enter into clientelist relations with them is high. Within the terms of such relationships, criticism or oppositional activities which are directed at the very nature of the political system (and in consequence, the very survival of the regime) cannot be accommodated. Having chosen on 23 September to (in effect) submerge their own particular interests beneath those of the ruling party, Congress however lost the tactical advantage to be accrued by remaining an independent interest group. That is to say, Congress lost its psychological advantage over the politicians who would otherwise have not been certain a priori of the political posture of the labour movement.

By the end of 1971, two conclusions with regard to APC-Congress relations could be drawn. First, the ruling party had achieved effective control over Congress via clientelist relationships and via industrial relations legislation, just as it had been able to reduce the significance of the SLPP Opposition via inducements to 'cross-the-carpet', harassment, and the adoption of the Republican Constitution. During the mid-'seventies, university students were to provide the most vocal opposition to the regime. Second, and crucially important to the situation of lower paid workers, the priorities of the APC were in the area of economic nationalism (reducing the shares of foreign businesses in the mining companies, the setting up of state-owned insurance, commercial bank, trading, and shipping companies - see Chapter 4 - all of which increase the scope for the exercise of patronage) and not in the area of reducing inequalities by the adoption of policies of redistribution. These conclusions can be related, respectively, to the Industrial Relations Bill and to a government policy statement on industrial relations.

The provisions of the March 1971 agreement on the Industrial Charter were written into the Bill presented to parliament in

September 1971, with some crucial modifications. The government increased the statutory period of strike notice required from fourteen days to twenty-one, and in the public utilities sector, prohibited strikes completely. The Employers' Federation and the Labour Congress were given statutory recognition. Trade Group Negotiating Council Disputes were to be mediated by the Minister with responsibility for the Labour Department and not by the Commissioner of Labour before being presented to the Industrial Relations Court if agreement could not be reached. The check-off system was given legal recognition and employers who failed to pay minimum wage rates were to be subjected to stiff penalties.

In making the provision that the Minister of Labour should mediate disputes arising out of industry-wide bargaining, the Bill gave recognition to the existing practice whereby informal political channels are used to influence the outcome of bargaining by the unions and the employers alike.¹ The most controversial aspect of the Bill, however, was the provision for the statutory recognition of Congress. This not only implied that such recognition could be withdrawn (and was therefore contingent on the relationship between the party and Congress) but also that unions which wished to operate out of the framework of Congress might not be able to do so. These were the 'connotations' (especially in view of national political trends) about which Georgestone had expressed reservations. This point was made by Salia Jusu-Sheriff, the Leader of the SLPP Opposition during the debate on the Bill in parliament:

1 It should be noted that the Industrial Relations Court has never been constituted in view of successful interventions of the minister, and indeed senior politicians (including the president) in settling disputes.

'I want to know how those unions which are not members of Congress are going to go about their business...in view of the fact that by ILO convention, no government can force them into a secondary union.'¹

The Attorney General, L. A. M. Brewah, replied on behalf of government:

'...it is not Congress that has to decide how the Minister of Labour should act in recognising any group of people who form themselves into a union. The question that the honourable member is asking does not arise if these people form a union and do not want to join Congress to enjoy the facilities of Congress, whose fault?'²

At the end of 1971 the government issued an important policy statement which clearly revealed for the first time the ideology of the APC on industrial relations reform:

'When trade unionism started in Sierra Leone in the early 1940's, the country was a dependent territory...Since independence, the position has completely changed. Terms and conditions of service of workers have improved much more than they were in the early years of trade unionism...It is the view of government that trade unions should now play a role consonant with the overall development of Republican Sierra Leone... Sierra Leone belongs to all of us and the time has come for all sections of the community to work for the general welfare and development of the nation. To meet this new challenge, trade union leaders now have a duty to inculcate in their members the habit of honest work, which should help to eliminate malingering, reduce unnecessary absenteeism and increase productivity on which the economy of the country depends. It should constantly be borne in mind that a strike in one section of industry invariably brings out a chain of repercussions on various spheres of our gross national product. Claims made on both the public and the private sectors should be realistic...New industries should be allowed to grow without unnecessary industrial

1 Sierra Leone House of Representatives, Parliamentary Debates, 13 October 1971.

2 Ibid.

strife. In Republican Sierra Leone, trade unions should strive to ensure that their activities do not drive away investors or cause industries to stagnate...Government wishes to see a strong and united Labour Congress providing an example of efficient trade union organisation. Splinter groups whose aim is merely to publicise the importance of their leaders and to peddle patriotic sentiments for personal gain must not expect any support from government.¹

The Council of Labour was allowed to function not only because it posed no threat either to the regime or to the Labour Congress, but also because to have banned it would have been an infringement of ILO codes. The government however never recognised the Council. For instance, when the Joint National Negotiating Board (JNNB) was convened in May 1972 to fix minimum wages, Council was not invited to take part in the deliberations. While Congress was officially invited to give evidence at the Barthes-Wilson Commission on Prices in mid-1971, this recognition was not accorded to Council. Congress also took pains to present the Council as an 'insignificant minority of disgruntled elements' to the international organisations to which the former was affiliated.²

One of Congress's main preoccupations during the 'seventies was with the rising trend in prices (cf. Table 6.3 above for the details on the Consumer Price Index during the 'seventies). At the inaugural meeting of the JNNB at which the Minister of Labour, representatives of the Employers' Federation and Labour Department officials were present, Marcus Grant, as spokesman for Congress, made it clear that the movement was concerned:

'The inflation of prices...needs looking into...I hope much will be done to solve this ever burning question.'³

1 Sierra Leone Employers' Federation, Newsletter No. 52 January/February 1972. The statement was reproduced in full in the newsletter.

2 Labour Congress, Minutes of Meeting held on 8th January 1972.

3 Labour Congress, Minutes of the inaugural meeting of the Joint

It is at least a tribute to Congress's influence that government responded by using that familiar instrument of public administration to show that it was also concerned. A commission of inquiry under J. Barthes-Wilson, a senior cabinet minister, was set up to inquire into the inflationary tendencies in the economy. Congress representatives gave evidence at the commission and, shortly before the publication of its report, Congress presented the government with a detailed memorandum on the inflationary situation:

'...(Congress) notes with grave concern the persistent increases in the cost of food, clothing, drinks, rent and all necessaries which have no bearing on adequate economic factors to justify the increase...The cost of pharmaceutical products are unnecessarily high, and realises the predicament of the common man...and therefore appeals to government to take immediate steps by compelling the dealers to drastically reduce their profit margin...Government to take action to withdraw the monopoly of the National Trading Company on (imported) commodities which is chiefly responsible for the present high cost of living...and for a National Price and Income Committee comprising of substantial numbers of workers' representatives to consider ways and means of effectively controlling the level of prices of commodities from time to time.¹

When the Commission reported in May 1974, it pointed out that the inflationary tendencies in the economy were imported, but recommended the review of the Trading Company's monopoly and increased vigilance of Price Inspectors of the Ministry of Trade and Industry.² The monopoly of the Trading Company was withdrawn but price control has been a notorious failure. From 1973, government had also been subsidising certain essential commodities including petroleum products,³

National Negotiating Board, 15th May 1972.

- 1 Labour Congress, Resolutions adopted on Tuesday 2nd April 1974 on the persistent inflationary trend in the economy of Sierra Leone.
- 2 Cf. President's Annual Address to Parliament, June 21 1974 (reproduced in 12 Years of Economic Achievement and Political Consolidation..., pp.235-243.
- 3 P.T.O.

but the deterioration in the relationship between Congress and the regime from 1977 onwards can be related to the considerable erosion of living standards since the early 'seventies.

Towards the end of 1972, the question of the centralisation of Congress affiliates into one trade union was again considered. Part of the problem of the looseness of the organisation of the national centre resided in the fact that individual unions were fairly effective in achieving their objectives as perceived by their executive councils or union officials. Affiliation to Congress afforded contact with foreign labour organisations and provided the means of coordinating the activities of the affiliates as for instance, in the expression of concern over the inflationary tendencies in the economy. Congress of itself, however, existed outside the bargaining framework of its affiliates, and was in this sense remote from the rank and file of unions affiliated to it.

In mid-1972, the Council of Labour lost the Transport Workers' Union which rejoined Congress following Georgestone's resignation as union secretary in consequence of continuing internal dissension. Over the next twelve months, however, the Construction Workers' Union was joined in the Council by two new unions, the Printing and Allied Workers', and the Municipal and Local Government Employees'.¹ The late Emerson Davies of the Printers' Union became part-time secretary of Council while H. D. Charles of the Construction Workers' became president. In March 1975, another new union, the Hotels, Food, Drinks, Tobacco, Entertainments and Services Union, joined the Council.²

(3) Cf. Budget Speech delivered to Parliament by the Hon. Minister of Finance, C. A. Kamara-Taylor, June 29 1973 (reproduced in ibid, pp.200-210).

1 Interview with U. O. H. Davies, 5 April 1982.

2 Ibid.

Between 1972 and 1975 however, four new unions joined Congress. These were the Teachers' Union, the Provincial and General Workers' Union, the Public Utilities' Employees' Union, and the Electricity Corporation Employees' Union.¹ The proliferation of new unions not only increased the significance of the Council of Labour vis a vis Congress, but also increased the difficulties relating to centralisation. There is evidence that the AALC encouraged a rapprochement between Congress and the Council, even suggesting that centralisation of Sierra Leone trade unions would enable Congress to become self-sufficient. A. W. Hassan, of the Motor Drivers' Union, reported to Congress in October 1973, the results of discussions held in the United States with Patrick O'Farrell, a senior AALC official.²

It had been decided within Congress that a merger with the Council would be sought as a prelude to centralisation.³ Approaches made to the Council, however, were rebuffed.⁴ It was not until after a new Minister of Labour was appointed following a cabinet re-shuffle in November 1974 that some progress was made. According to James Kabia (later to become Secretary of Congress):

'Gobio (George Gobio Lamin, the new minister) was a diplomat. He understood the situation. When we went to acquaint him with our difficulties, he agreed to use his good offices to bring about a solution.'⁵

1 Ibid.

2 Labour Congress, Report on AFL-CIO Convention, October 1973, by A. W. Hassan.

3 Interview with J. B. Kabia, Secretary of Congress November 1976 - March 1982, 26 February 1982.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

The minister assumed office with one major advantage; he had not been involved in the formulation of the Industrial Relations Act or associated with the policy of the Labour Department to 'isolate' the Council. 'He was careful to let us know that he had inherited a situation which he did not create'.¹ In February 1975, Congress and the Council met at the office of the minister and agreed in principle to come together to form one national centre. Over the next few months a committee of Congress and Council representatives deliberated the issues related to the merger. Towards the end of the year, the committee prepared a report for the consideration of the affiliates to the two centres. (Having achieved the merger, there is evidence that attempts were made to consolidate the resources of the national centre. While the AALC was committed to continuing its financial assistance to Congress,² there was an understanding that this was to be matched by contributions of affiliated unions).³ It recommended that '...a national centre be created and called Sierra Leone Labour Congress...;...that the constitution of Congress be reviewed and fresh elections of the new body be arranged...;...that mergers between existing unions be encouraged in the immediate future to make them viable and strong'.⁴ Other recommendations were the adoption of standard rates of union subscription, the creation of a research department of Congress, and with regard to the proliferation of unions, the adoption of '...recognised spheres of influence of

1 Interview with U. O. H. Davies, 5 April 1982.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Labour Congress, Report of the 18 Man Committee of the Sierra Leone Labour Congress and the Sierra Leone Council of Labour to seek ways and means for the merger of the two organisations, n.d., circa December 1975.

existing registered trade unions...¹

During the early months of 1976, the report was deliberated by affiliates of the two centres and eventually adopted.² In September the new centre was formally inaugurated by President Stevens.³ Elections of officers to serve in the new centre were held prior to the inauguration ceremony and it seems evident that the outcome had been pre-arranged as all candidates were unanimously elected. George Palmer retained the full-time secretaryship of Congress while H. D. Charles became part-time president. James Kabia of the Mine Workers' was elected (part-time) first deputy secretary and O. B. Conteh of the Dock Workers' Union (part-time) second deputy secretary. Details of Congress officials elected are provided in Table 7.8.

In the months preceding the formal inauguration of the new centre, the future political posture of Congress had been vague. The merger committee, for instance, made no reference to national political trends. During the early months of 1977, however, it became evident that Congress had adopted a critical political posture. This was partly facilitated by the change of personnel in the hierarchy of Congress. On January 29 1977, students of Fourah Bay College, protesting at the deteriorating economic situation, allegations of official corruption, infringements of civil liberties, etc., staged demonstrations during a ceremony of the conferment of degrees by President Stevens in his role as Chancellor of the University of Sierra Leone. The vehemence of the demonstrations brought the ceremony to

1 Ibid.

2 Interview with J. B. Kabia, 26 February 1982.

3 Report of the Acting Secretary-General, J. B. Kabia, to Delegates Conference, 28 October 1977.

TABLE 7.8

Congress Executive Committee 1976-77

President (Part-time)	H. D. Charles (Construction Workers' Union)
Vice President (Part-time)	(1) T. E. Yambasu (Teachers' Union) (2) A. W. Hassan (Motor Drivers' Union)
Secretary-General (Full-time)	G. E. E. Palmer (Clerical Union)
1st Deputy Secretary-General (Part-time)	J. B. Kabia (Mine Workers' Union)
2nd Deputy Secretary-General (Part-time)	O. B. Conteh (Dock Workers' Union)
Treasurer (Part-time)	T. A. Kassim (Artisans' Union)
Deputy Treasurer (Part-time)	J. E. Davies (Teachers' Union)
Trustees (Part-time)	(1) I. Langley (Artisans' Union) (2) C. A. W. During (Clerical Union)
Auditors (Part-time)	(1) M. K. Kargbo (Municipal Employees' Union) (2) A. A. Savage (Teachers' Union) (3) D. Din Gabisi (Transport Workers' Union)
Director of Trade Union Education (Part-time)	M. A. Bailor (Teachers' Union)
Administrative Officer (Full-time)	Marcus Grant (Maritime Workers' Union)

SOURCE: Labour Congress, Election of Officers, Wednesday 15 September 1976.

a premature conclusion. The president and his entourage left the campus of the University. Hours later, thugs 'invaded' the campus. Several students were severely beaten and raped. The leaders of the demonstrations were arrested and detained.¹

The action taken by the students occurred after a four-year absence of public criticisms of the ruling party or other oppositional activity. Following widespread incidences of violence and intimidation at the 1973 elections, in which APC candidates were returned 'unopposed' in more than half the parliamentary seats, the opposition SLPP withdrew from the contest in protest. Voting actually took place in only five constituencies in four of which APC candidates were successful; the fifth constituency, Freetown West III, was won by an independent candidate with strong local support.² He declared for the APC and was appointed Foreign Minister. Between 1973 and 1977, therefore, Sierra Leone was de facto a single party state. This period coincided with severe economic decline, unprecedented levels of inflation, and considerable erosion in mass living standards. In the absence of an opposition in parliament, or of a critical press, and in view of the cooperative posture (or, at least, unwillingness openly to criticise political trends) of the major pressure groups such as professional organisations, religious organisations and the Labour Congress (to which a majority of the unions were affiliated during this period), the protest action of the students was an indication of popular discontent that had for long been tightly bottled up. Indeed, the subsequent attack on the students and the detention of

1 Interviews with Pios Foray and Samuel Tumoi (two of the leaders of the students) 14 June 1980; cf. Pios Foray, 'The Students' Crisis of January 1977', B.A. dissertation, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, 1977.

2 Cf. Chris Clapham, Liberia and Sierra Leone, p.94.

their leaders provoked demonstrations throughout the capital city which was brought to a standstill. On the third day of the students' crisis, a press release signed by James Kabia as acting secretary, (following George Palmer's resignation from the movement in November 1976 to take up an ILO appointment in East Africa), and H. D. Charles as president, was issued. This threatened action in support of the students if the harassment and victimisation of their leaders continued:

'The executive council of the Sierra Leone Labour Congress, meeting at a special emergency session at Congress' secretariat today... reviewed the incident at Fourah Bay College... the executive regrets the incident all the more in that it involved the head of state and chancellor of the university... Congress would have imagined however, that a democratic government headed by no less a personality than a veteran trade unionist of no mean order, the government would have exercised restraint...in the interest of national peace, the Sierra Leone Labour Congress calls upon government to secure the release of all students detained. The Sierra Leone Labour Congress wishes it to be understood that if no immediate action is taken to release the students already detained, it will sympathise with them.'¹

A few hours later, however, a second statement signed by Kabia and Charles, as well as S. I. Koroma the Vice-President and C. A. Kamara-Taylor the Prime Minister, withdrawing the earlier statement, was released.² It transpired that, after the first statement was issued, representatives of Congress affiliates were invited to meet senior APC politicians:

'Appeals were made to us that any action taken by us would only lead to national chaos. It was agreed that the students would be released...that they should apologise

1 Labour Congress, first Press Release, 31st January 1977.

2 Labour Congress, Press Release, 31st January 1977.

to his excellency the president and agree to call off the demonstrations. We were invited to send our grievances to government and assured that action would be taken. Government also said that it was prepared to call elections within three months to seek a fresh mandate.¹

The students for their part regarded the action of Congress as a sell-out and have argued that, if Congress had called a general strike, '...a revolution would have taken place'.² Be that as it may, it was evident that the national centre had adopted a critical (if not militant) posture vis a vis the regime. A few days after the crisis had subsided, Congress for instance challenged a news item broadcast over national radio and television:

'The attention of...Congress has been drawn to a broadcast...over SLBS/TV in which the following statement was attributed to the Hon. George Gobio Lamin, Minister of Labour, at a meeting held recently in Kono:- 'The Minister said that the executive of the Mine Workers' Union had pledged their support and loyalty to the President and the Government. He assured them of the support of all trade unions in the country for the APC'...Congress wishes it to be known that at no time did it agree to, nor did it mandate anyone to issue such a statement...all affiliated unions have expressed grave concern over the second part of the statement quoted above, as it was pointed out that none of the unions, either jointly or severally, ever issued or mandated the issuing of such a statement...Congress therefore wishes it to be known that it totally dissociates itself from the statement complained of as it has no foundation. However...Congress as a matter of policy, has always and will continue to cooperate with the Government of the day in all matters appertaining to the common good of the nation.'³

Further evidence that the national centre had begun to question the character and nature of the regime is provided by some proposals

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- 1 Interview with J. B. Kabia, 26 February 1982.
 - 2 Interviews, Pios Foray and Samuel Tumoi, 14 June 1980.
 - 3 Labour Congress, Press Release, 24th February 1977. The release was signed by Kabia and Charles.

issued in connection with the pending general elections:

- '...Congress strongly appeals to Government that the pending general elections be conducted in a free and fair manner. To achieve this end, we hereby suggest the following:-
- (a) that all registered political parties be allowed to put up candidates in all constituencies they may wish;
 - (b) that all eligible citizens wishing to contest the elections as independent candidates be allowed to do so...;
 - (c) that contesting political parties and independent candidates be allowed unrestricted use of the press, radio, and television...after the campaigning period is officially declared;
 - (d) that the present state of emergency and curfew be lifted very well in advance of the campaign period;
 - (e) that political parties and independent candidates be under strong obligation to publicly (sic) declare their opposition to, and non-condonement of all forms of violence and thuggery by their members, supporters, and sympathisers during the electioneering campaign and on nomination and polling day;...
 - (j) that the internal security unit (ISU) be disbanded and the personnel be absorbed into other areas of productive employment, because in Congress' opinion, the continued retention of this unit is not in the best interest of the nation. Congress feels that the military and police forces can adequately cope with the nation's security problem.¹

Other proposals contained in the document specifically called for economic reforms:

- '(h) as an austerity measure to tide over the difficult financial and economic period, the Sierra Leone Labour Congress suggests that government cut down on the number of Sierra Leone foreign missions...
- (k) that the number of ministries be reduced to twelve...²

Elections were held in May, a full year before they were due, amid much violence and allegations by the SLPP Opposition of intimidation.

1 Labour Congress, Proposals of the Sierra Leone Labour Congress to Government in connection with the pending general elections...and for the economic reconstruction of our beloved Sierra Leone, 28 February 1977.

2 Ibid.

APC M.P.s had been declared unopposed in more than a quarter of the constituencies. The beleaguered SLPP Opposition - which had withdrawn from the 1973 elections in protest at the violence - was determined to fight the elections as there had been much discussion in APC circles of legalising the de facto one party parliament.¹ The SLPP won 15 of the 85 parliamentary seats in the south, south-east, and in Freetown. Its majority in the Freetown Central II constituency, a former APC stronghold, was convincing. A few weeks after the elections, on 30 May, a resolution on the adoption of a one party system of government was passed at the APC national delegates conference at Mahera, Lungi, in the northern province, and therefore became party policy.² In his speech before the conferences, President

1 At the APC national delegates conference in March 1974, President Stevens in his key note address discussed the concept of a one party system of government: 'Whenever I have been asked whether I favour a one party or a multi party system, I have always replied that if Sierra Leone is to become a one party state, then the process must be by evolution and not by revolution, and when at the 1973 general election the APC was able to sweep the polls, it was an indication that the majority of Sierra Leoneans are no longer willing to dissipate their meagre resources and energies in useless conflict. They are determined to get together and work for the national...good. It is for us to study our own conditions and find the best ways and means of giving people an opportunity to have a real say in the direction of government. I don't say that all is evil in the political arena...but I do say with all the emphasis at my command that many of us are too ready to adopt ideas and methods without studying our own traditions and particular requirements.' (Cf. Sierra Leone, The Path to One Party System of Government, Freetown, 1978, p.8.) The most obvious interpretation of this concept of a one party system of government is that the APC leadership recognised that the party of government in Sierra Leone presides over a spoils system. In electoral competition therefore, the stakes are exceedingly high; hence the large number of 'unopposed' candidates; hence the violence. 'Our own traditions and particular requirements' is to recognise the facts of the situation and adopt a system of government that is consonant with them. The fallacy in this argument is the assumption that a one party system of government would eliminate 'useless conflict'. Not only do contenders for seats in parliament (and hence of positions of influence in the appropriation of the spoils) continue to compete violently, but as the general strike of 1981, the first in the nation's history, was to show, the growing number of lower paid workers perceive their interests as very different from those of their rulers.

2 P.T.O.

Stevens repeated his thesis that a one party system of government would minimise the violence of political competition:

'I urge members of the All People's Congress national delegates conference to adopt a One Party System for Sierra Leone if the country is not to disintegrate into tribal factions.'¹

During the next twelve months, the APC took the one party issue to the country, and stage-managed appeals from various social groups for its speedy implementation. In June 1978, one party government was formally adopted following a referendum which recorded a dubious 97% majority in favour of the new system.² While the Labour Congress took part in the presentation of resolutions of support for the single party state (as was done by other pressure and interest groups such as the United Christian Council, the Council of Imams, the Freetown City Council, the Senate of the University of Sierra Leone, APC Women, the Petty Traders Association, etc.),³ Congress affiliates had taken action aimed at distancing themselves from the regime. At the delegates conference of Congress in October 1977, where elections of officials were held to serve for the ensuing three years, two candidates closely identified with the regime were rejected. A. W. Hassan of the Motor Drivers' Union, who had been nominated by President Stevens as an M.P. in May,⁴ challenged H. D. Charles for

(2) Cf. The Path to One Party System of Government, p.14.

1 Ibid.

2 Cf. 12 Years of Economic Achievement and Political Consolidation..., p.434 for the details relating to the organisation of the referendum and the results.

3 Cf. The Path to One Party System of Government, pp.28-32.

4 Cf. 12 Years of Economic Achievement and Political Consolidation..., p.378. Although Hassan was appointed to parliament to represent the interests of labour, Congress was not consulted over his appointment. He had also been defeated at the elections having run on the APC ticket (interview with J. B. Kabia, 26 February 1982).

the presidency of Congress while O. B. Conteh of the Dock Workers' Union (believed to have kinship relations with a senior cabinet minister) challenged James Kabia for the secretaryship.¹ When the votes were taken:

'Pa Charles won by a huge majority, and O. B. (Conteh) after seeing that Hassan had been beaten withdrew at the last minute. Kabia was then unanimously elected.'²

Several union leaders have confirmed that Hassan and Conteh were rejected because they advocated a close relationship with the regime.³ Most union leaders had grown to believe that, while they should cooperate with the government (and continue to use the informal channels of bargaining), they should nonetheless maintain a distinct identity. Indeed, the Teachers' Union had presented a paper to the conference calling attention to (among other things) the '...undue loyalty of union officials to employers and government for remunerative jobs and other rewards'.⁴

Under the single party constitution, the secretary of Congress is automatically a member of the Central Committee (the policy-making body) of the only recognised party, the APC. James Kabia, however, maintains that, although the constitution provides for representation of a wide variety of interests on the Committee, meetings are not held on a regular basis and key policy decisions are taken by senior APC politicians at cabinet level.⁵ The decision to host the 1980 OAU

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- 1 Labour Congress, Delegates Conference, 28 October 1977.
 - 2 Interview with Alhaji Savage, assistant secretary Sierra Leone Teachers' Union, 26 March 1982.
 - 3 Ibid; interviews with J. B. Kabia, 26 February 1982; F. A. Brimah, 11 March 1982; and Tejan Kassim, 26 March 1982.
 - 4 Sierra Leone Teachers' Union, Suggested Topics of Discussions, presented to the delegates conference, 28 October 1977.
 - 5 Interview with J. B. Kabia, 26 February 1982.

summit and ministerial conferences, for instance, widely believed to have cost the government some Le200 million, was taken by senior APC politicians, and not by the Central Committee. Although the preparations (construction of a conference centre, a luxurious hotel, villas for the dignitaries, road works, etc.) created about 700 jobs,¹ the decision resulted in a further deterioration in Congress-government relations² culminating in the general strike of September 1981.

The profligacy in public expenditure associated with the hosting of the conferences and the 'demonstration effect' of the luxurious way in which the delegates were feted (at a period of declining living standards in view of the inflationary trends in the economy) served as a catalyst to the manifestation of anti-pathetic attitudes (which had been latent) towards the kleptocratic elite among lower paid workers. Graffiti which appeared in various parts of the docks (and the capital) prominently displayed slogans such as 'OAU for you, IOU for we' (or we pay the debt for hosting the OAU). While there was much talk among the rank and file of the Dock Workers' Union about misplaced priorities, Congress leaders were resolved, however, to wait for the end of the round of negotiations on wage increases in the various TGNCs which were concluded by December 1980. Dock Workers were awarded 50 cents per diem for the lowest paid, and Le156 per

1 Cf. Bank of Sierra Leone, Economic Review, January-June 1980, p.13.

2 Informal conversations held by this researcher with the rank and file of the Dock Workers' Union and with Congress leaders during the months preceding the conference and during the conference itself. This account of the strike has also benefited by witnessing the proceedings of the Taju-Deen Commission of Inquiry (appointed to examine the issues leading up to the strike) in February and March 1982. Conversations with a Freetown correspondent of West Africa magazine were useful. I am very grateful to the correspondent for allowing me to study copies of despatches to the magazine on the strike. The records of Congress relating to this episode were destroyed when its offices were 'invaded' by thugs during the strike.

annum (about 52 cents per diem) for those at the higher levels of the wage scale. Even after these awards, wages were in real terms about 60% below their 1965 levels (cf. Table 7.9).¹ In an interview with West Africa magazine shortly before the strike, James Kabia described the strategy which Congress decided to follow with regard to falling living standards:

'Actually there have been two schools of thought...the first was to demand salary and wage increases to augment the rise in the cost of living. The second was to submit to government, Congress' view on the economic situation in the country. This second school of thought carried the majority. A committee was appointed to work out the details.'²

While the work of the committee was in progress, Kabia informed the Minister of Labour in May 1981 that Congress would shortly present government with proposals for economic reform. He also warned the minister that the labour leadership was resolved to call a national strike if the proposals were not carried out.³ The report of the Congress committee was submitted to government in June in the form of a memorandum. It contained proposals for reducing the number of staff in Sierra Leone's embassies around the world, reforming tax collection and foreign exchange control, reforming the import licensing system, the price control mechanism and the land tenure system, encouraging small businesses and setting up state farms. The memorandum also stated:

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- 1 Since the wage rates of other lower paid workers in Sierra Leone are comparable to those of the dockers, and since the 1980 awards were also comparable, the decline in the real value of wages must also be comparable. The actual figures, however, have not been obtained and computed.
 - 2 Despatches to West Africa magazine; cf. West Africa, 10 August 1981, p.1822.
 - 3 Notes taken by this researcher at the proceedings of the Taju-Deen Commission. The report of the Commission has not yet (August 1982) been published.

'We do not believe that recourse to IMF loans is the answer...a look at some of the conditionalities that follow IMF loans such as devaluation of the domestic currency, restrictions in public expenditure and removal of subsidies on items such as transport and food (which hit the poor hardest), restriction on bank lending, and encouragement to foreign investors are all positive processes of underdevelopment.'¹

By August there had been no reply from the government. Congress therefore decided to publish the memorandum. Following demonstrations and a nation-wide strike on 14 August, government responded by inviting Congress to re-submit the proposals in order of priority. A government statement also argued that the June memorandum of Congress was not related to 'industrial' but to 'political' issues. The legality of a general strike (vis a vis the 1971 Industrial Relations Act) was also called into question. Congress had moreover published the memorandum in a foreign newspaper (meaning West Africa) before the government could reply.² In response to the invitation, a new memorandum dated 24 August was submitted by Congress to the government. This included proposals for price control, rent subsidies, improvement of medical facilities, and '...a reduction in the exorbitant and economically unjustifiable price of rice...'³ President Stevens immediately responded by announcing a new control price for rice. When it was suggested to Congress that a committee of government advisers and Congress officials be formed to examine the other proposals, Congress replied that this would be construed by the workers as 'delaying tactics' on the part of government. An indefinite general strike was called for the first of September.⁴ Negotiations

1 Despatches to West Africa magazine; cf. West Africa, 10 August 1981, p.1821.

2 Despatches to West Africa magazine; cf. West Africa, 24 August 1981, p.1911 and p.1913.

3 Despatches to West Africa magazine; cf. West Africa, 7 September 1981, pp.2030-2031.

4 P.T.O.

which were held between labour leaders, senior APC politicians and government officials right up to the 31st of August could not find a solution to the impasse.

The strike brought business activity throughout the country to a standstill. The government responded by declaring a state of emergency. A broadcast by President Stevens also declared that workers who failed to turn up for work would not be paid and hinted that they might lose their jobs. Ministers were to be issued with hand guns to defend themselves should they be attacked. Labour leaders who had barricaded themselves in the offices of Congress on Wallace-Johnson Street in central Freetown were rounded up, arrested, and eventually detained for a month. The government had the situation under control within a week.¹

In conversations with this researcher, dock workers have argued that the strike failed because they were faced with a government much stronger than the labour movement as a whole. Be that as it may, the strike (and the events leading up to it) is significant for two reasons. First, it illustrates the dynamising potential of a more truly expressive Congress leadership as well as, of course, the limits of government tolerance. For much of the first and second decades of independence, labour leaders had been content with entering clientelist relations with politicians whose influence could be used to effect marginal improvements in wages and working conditions during collective bargaining, as well as, it must not be forgotten, for personal gain. Several years of APC authoritarianism, declining living standards and the 'demonstration effect' of the

(4) Despatches to West Africa magazine; cf. West Africa, 31 August 1981, pp.2019-2020.

1 Despatches to West Africa magazine; cf. West Africa, 14 September 1981, pp.2089-2090.

hosting of the OAU conferences created the conditions for a radical reformulation of the relationship between the labour leadership and the regime. Second, it is clear that some of the proposals of Congress for economic reform suggest an inherent conflict of interest between peasant farmers and lower paid workers in the urban centres. Pressure from the urban workforce on government to control the price of foodstuffs also means lower receipts for peasant farmers, who respond by growing less food. Government is then forced to import higher levels of food (cf. Table 7.10) resulting in a further discouragement of farmers. This of course underlines Bates' argument that to the extent that there is a rationale underlying the development process in much of sub-Saharan Africa, it is political rather than economic. The other proposals of Congress such as reducing staff in the country's embassies, reform of tax collection, foreign exchange control, etc., are laudable. The role of the IMF (which should be one of the strongest allies of Congress in its struggle with the regime) is evidently misunderstood. The Fund has a long record of consistently warning successive post-colonial regimes about the damage inflicted on the country's productive base by the adoption of policies which can only bring short-term political benefits or personal gain to the politicians and their clientele. Moreover, in the face of a 60% increase in the rate of inflation in the economy during 1980, devaluation, a reduction in public expenditure and a reduction in the levels of bank borrowing by the public sector are some of the hard headed policies that would help to resuscitate the economy. Furthermore, Sierra Leone has suffered not from too much foreign investment, but from too little foreign capital to assist the development of its productive base.¹ It is also curious that

1 The ideologies of the labour leadership in Sierra Leone vis a vis economic reform are similar to those of the Left in Ghana; cf. Richard Jeffries' 'Rawlings and the Political Economy of

Congress's analysis of the economy and proposals for reform gave little prominence to the damaging effects of OPEC price increases on the economy of a non-oil producing country like Sierra Leone. Nonetheless, the labour leadership has demonstrated, even if belatedly, that it is fully alive to the nature of the political economy of Sierra Leone, though it has yet to come to terms with the contradictions in its ideas for economic reform. In its identification of the political elite (and the other major beneficiaries of the appropriation of the resources of the state by this elite) as the 'exploiters', however, the labour movement has correctly identified the 'enemy' in the 'class struggle' in contemporary Sierra Leone.

Underdevelopment in Ghana', or the same author's 'Revolution in Black Africa' in C. Dodd and N. O'Sullivan (eds.), Revolutionary Theory and Political Reality, London (forthcoming).

TABLE 7.2

Index of real wages of dock workers in December 1980

YEAR	UNSKILLED WAGE RATES (BOTTOM END OF SCALE) IN LEONES AND CENTS	SKILLED WAGE RATES (TOP END OF SCALE) IN LEONES & CENTS	CONSUMER PRICE ⁺ INDEX (1961 = 100)	INDEX OF REAL WAGES OF UNSKILLED DOCKERS	INDEX OF REAL WAGES OF SKILLED DOCKERS
1965	1.06	4.83	116.5(100)	100	100
1980	2.76	6.77	361.4(310.2)	84	43

⁺ The official Consumer Price Index had 1961 as its base year. In this table, 1965 has been taken as the base year and the figures in parentheses have been adjusted accordingly.

SOURCES: 1. The Forster Report, Appendix 3, for 1965 figures on wage rates

2. The Sierra Leone Gazette, Friday 6 June 1980, for 1980 wage awards to the Public Utility TCNC. (This award has been added on to the 1978/79 wage rates obtaining at the Port Authority. Cf. Table 6.2 above).

3. Bank of Sierra Leone, Annual Report 1969 for 1965 figures on the Consumer Price Index; and Bank of Sierra Leone, Economic Review, July - December 1980, for 1980 figures on the consumer price index.

TABLE 7.10

Rice imports - 1954-1981

YEAR	QUANTITY (Tons)	VALUE (Le)
1954	4,586	580,000
1955	21,065	1,937,000
1956	36,800	3,301,000
1957	31,052	2,859,000
1958	21,784	2,055,000
1959	43,305	3,984,000
1960	28,542	2,475,000
1961	4,108	419,000
1962	26,827	2,718,000
1963	20,812	1,881,000
1964	543	94,000
1965	18,725	1,826,000
1966	34,549	3,449,000
1967	23,846	2,362,000
1968	10,581	2,541,000
1969	12,680	1,526,000
1970	49,365	5,541,000
1971	26,929	2,696,000
1972	6,668	881,000
1973	43,724	6,100,000
1974	45,025	17,173,000
1975	N.A.	N.A.
1976	15,000	4,321,000
1977	6,700	1,666,212
1978	22,500	8,835,227
1979	76,536	27,216,000
1980	51,054	24,085,167
1981	54,246	25,717,000

N.A. = Not available

SOURCE: Olu Williams, op. cit.

CONCLUSIONS

In the introduction to this study, the theoretical problem was said to be that of 'situating' lower paid workers within the political economy of Sierra Leone when these are workers in a public corporation, which is in turn an integral part of a patron-clientelist political and economic system. Several important questions were raised. These relate to the rules of operation of a public corporation such as the SLPA and how they have been affected by the development of a system of political clientelism; to whether lower paid workers in the employ of the Port Authority could be said (in a Marxist sense) to be exploited; to the influence that is exerted on their political perceptions and behaviour by the role of patron-clientelism in labour recruitment and managerial structures of labour control; to the most notable features of their trade union organisation and action; confrontation with government over major policy issues. It was also hoped that in the consideration of these issues some theoretical advance will be made.

These questions were subsequently and systematically examined in the three sections and seven chapters which make up this work. The conclusion toward which they point is that both of the familiar positions - workers as a labour aristocracy and workers as the most exploited and potentially revolutionary class in an ostensibly capitalist system - are inapplicable. Post-colonial regimes in Sierra Leone have used the surplus appropriated from mining, peasant production etc., to expand what is a largely parasitic public sector and thereby to provide 'jobs' for political clients. This has not been very clearly in the interest of the development of capitalism or any form of economic development. To this extent, the senior public salariat constitute a class exploitative of the peasants, mine workers, etc. To the extent that the more junior public sector employees benefit from this patron-

clientelist system (e.g. through the recruitment system and through the creation of additional but largely artificial jobs), and to the extent that they benefit from policies designed to cheapen (artificially) the price of foodstuffs, they constitute a kind of labour aristocracy. However, this is only partially the case, and there is another side to the story. To the degree that they also labour in roles that contribute to production and that they are relatively poorly remunerated for such work; to the degree that they suffer from the corruption and inefficiency of the public sector managerial class, they are in a position of antagonism to the political-bureaucratic (kleptocratic) class. Hence, they are objectively in a distinct ambivalent class position, and their 'progressiveness' or otherwise depends on the line which they choose to take, e.g., the degree to which they actively oppose the 'kleptocracy' and/or identify with the interests of the peasants and urban poor more generally.

The preceding chapters then illustrate, amongst other things, how the dock workers (and other lower paid workers), although their opposition to the elitism and corruption of the political and bureaucratic class has generally been conceived within fairly narrow limits of economic self-protection, have at least had some success in maintaining the accountability of their union organisation (and the labour movement) against clientelist incorporation. More recently especially (in view of their solidarity with other lower paid workers in Sierra Leone - the majority of whom are also employed in the public sector - in the 1981 general strike), the dockers have developed a fuller consciousness of the major mechanisms of exploitation in their society.

APPENDITURE

Department of Economic & Political Studies
School of Oriental & African Studies
University of London

Labour Studies Questionnaire
S L P A MAY 1980

Interviewer:

Date:

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 1.1 Residence - street/neighbourhood
- 1.2 Sex
- 1.3 Ethnic group
- 1.4 Marital Status/No. of children
- 1.5 Year/period born
- 1.6 Where born
- 1.7 IF RESPONDENT WAS NOT BORN IN FREETOWN: TOWN/CHIEFDOM/DISTRICT
- 1.7a When did you come to live in Freetown?
- 1.7b What were you doing before that?
- 1.7c What made you decide to come to town?
- 1.8a Education (last level)
- 1.8b Other training
- 1.9a Number of siblings
- 1.9b Educational level of each sibling
- 1.9c Occupation of each sibling
- 1.9d Father's education/occupation
- 1.9e Mother's education/occupation
- 1.10 What are your future intentions and aspirations?

2. WORK HISTORY AND WORK PLACE AND PRIVATE AFFILIATIONS

- 2.1 When did you first begin work at the quay?
- 2.2a How long did you have to wait to find work there?
- 2.2b How were you managing?
- 2.2c How did you find and get the work?
- 2.2d What are the different tasks you have done at the quay?

- 2.2e Starting with first work experience, list all subsequent work, including periods of unemployment and returns upline
- 2.3 SECONDARY EMPLOYMENT: Do you have, at the moment, any other work that brings in money or provisions? Yes/No
(If yes, specify type of work/earnings/goods)
- 2.4 Can you list the main problems related to your work at the quay
- 2.5 Does your work make you feel within your heart that you are doing something worthwhile? Yes/No Why?
- 2.6 Do you use the port canteen? If yes, how often? If no, why?
- 2.7 Have you used the medicare facilities? If yes, what is your opinion of the facilities?
- 2.8 Do you interact with other workers outside working hours (but including the mid-day break)? If yes, which of these groups of workers do you like to mix with:
- i Workers working in your department/section
 - ii Workers in your age group
 - iii Workers from your ethnic group/region
 - iv Workers living in your neighbourhood
 - v Cuts across the groups above
 - vi Other (specify)
- 2.9 Do you have friends outside the port whom you mix with?
If yes, do they fall into any of the groups listed above?
- 2.10 Do you belong to any groups or associations, for instance
- i Religious (e.g. Church, Mosque)
 - ii Mutual Aid (burial societies, osusu)
 - iii Ethnic/Regional (e.g. Bo descendants, Limba Friendly Society)
 - iv Social or sports club (e.g. East End Lions, Old Bo School Boys)
 - v 'Societies' (Masons, Ojeh, Porroh, Hunting)
 - vi Other
- 2.10b If so, do you hold any special position in the group?
3. TRADE UNIONISM
- 3.1a In any of the work you have had, did the workers or staff go out on strike? (If yes, specify)
- 3.1b Were there ever any trade unions to represent workers? (If yes, specify)

- 3.1c In general, what do you think of unions?
- 3.1d What about strikes?
- 3.2a Do you belong to a trade union here?
- 3.2b If yes, i What is the name of the union?
ii How long have you been a member?
iii How has the union helped you?
iv What is the name of your shop steward?
v What is the name of your union secretary?
- 3.3 What do you consider to be the qualities of a good trade union leader?
- 3.4 Do you think the unions should do something about the decasualisation of the shore casual labourers and the stevedores? If yes, what? If no, why?

4. HOUSEHOLD AND HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY

- 4.1a At the place where you stay now, what other persons are living with you (starting with head of household). List all permanent residents sharing same dwelling unit
- 4.2 Do you have (other) children not staying with you now? If yes, please give sex/schooling/occupation
- 4.3 Like anyone living in Freetown these days you must have alot of expenses (e.g. rent/rates, school fees, food, medicare, clothes). Do you have to take responsibility for all of these yourself, or do other persons (in the family) contribute?
- 4.4 Apart from your own children, family and household, are there any persons you are helping? If yes, specify
- 4.5a At the end of the month, do you usually find that (Tick one)
You have to borrow just to make ends meet
You have just enough to get by
You are able to save a bit
- 4.5b (If borrows): Who is it that helps you?
- 4.5c (If saves): What do you plan to do with the money?
- 4.6 How does your household/family generally buy some of these necessities (Tick)
i Rice: by cup/by bag
ii Palm Oil: by pint/bottle or by gallon can

- iii Cooking Oil: by pint/bottle or by gallon can
 - iv Sugar: by cubes/spoonfuls or by packet
 - v Coffee: by spoonfuls or by jar
 - vi Tea: by bag or by packet
 - vii Salt: by spoonfuls or by packet
 - viii Cigarettes: by sticks or by packet
 - ix Shoes: From Street Hawkers or from shops
 - x Household repairs: Done by local craftsmen through informal arrangement or by contractor
- 4.7 Compared with other people, do you think you and your family are getting a fair share or benefit for the work you do? Why?
- 4.8 In the place where you live now, (tick)
- (a) Is the house pan body/cement/board/mud
 - (b) Is the pump inside/outside in the compound/street
 - (c) Electricity (Yes/No)
 - (d) How many rooms do you have for self/family?
 - (e) Do you rent or own?
 - (f) If own,
 - i Did you (or spouse/parent) purchase/inherit the land only/
the land and house together?
 - ii Are you renting any rooms or flats to other people?
 - iii If yes, how many units, at what rent?
 - iv (If house purchased or built), in what year? Approximate
cost
- 4.8 Consumer durables which have been acquired:
- (a) Fridge?
 - (b) Radio/Tape?
 - (c) TV?
 - (d) Car?
 - (e) Motorbike/Bicycle?

5. GENERAL QUESTIONS

- 5.1 In this country now, we can see that there are some 'Big Men' or Gentry People, and we can also see that there are those who are managing, and those who are poor. Thinking of people like yourself, to which of the groups do you belong? Why?
- 5.2a How do you think people come to be Gentry?
- 5.2b How do you think people come to be Poor?

- 5.2c How do you think people come to be only Managing?
- 5.3 Apart from these differences between gentry, poor, and people who are managing do you know of any other difference between people which are important?
- 5.4 Do you think Sierra Leone's politicians and senior civil servants are
- (a) Setting an example by making a sacrifice?
 - (b) Capable of improving the country's economic position?
- 5.5 Thinking of people like yourself, would you say that there are any people or groups that are helping people like you so that you can 'go before'? If yes, who, and how? If no, who is making your life more difficult, and how?
- 5.6 Do you agree that government's first priority should be rural development?

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