

RESISTANCE AND HIDDEN FORMS
OF PROTEST AMONGST THE PETROLEUM
PROLETARIAT IN NIGERIA

Julius O. Ihonvbere

IN THE MAJORITY OF RADICAL WORKS ON LABOR IN NIGERIA, THE FOCUS HAS BEEN on overt indicators of consciousness, particularly strike actions and the relationship between political parties and trade unions. This is largely because these indicators of working class action lend themselves more easily to measurement. The net result has been "too much reliance on data relating to strikes, unionization, overt political resistance, and, for the most part, a failure to discover and evaluate the silent, unorganized, covert responses . . . [of] workers."¹ This is not to deny the validity of studying the overt responses to labor control and exploitation. Yet there is an urgent need to focus on those forms of protest which are not readily quantifiable and which require painstaking study to expose and comprehend. These are the *covert* as against *overt* forms of protest.

Covert forms of resistance are those actions employed by workers, mostly at an individual level and in small groups, to "get even" with employers or resist exploitation. They are informal or "underground" and constitute part of "the everyday forms of consciousness and action" of the proletariat.² At first glance they look unorganized, infrequent, irrational and even of limited effect on existing relations of production. A careful study would however reveal the opposite of these features.

It is extremely difficult to study covert forms of protest in any conclusive manner. In fact, to get a worker to admit involvement in such modes of protest requires great trust. This is because the workers involved in such acts are to all intents and purposes violating company rules and

regulations, and the laws of the land. In addition, such modes of struggle being largely individualistic in nature can cost the worker his job or attract other severe sanctions if discovered.

Covert Forms of Resistance in the Oil Sector

Though oil workers are few in number – six percent of the total number of workers in the modern labor force in Nigeria, four percent in Trinidad and Tobago, one percent in Iran (according to Halliday), and much less in Saudi Arabia and Libya – they are strategically located for militant action. This has been demonstrated in the cases of Iran and Trinidad and Tobago.³

Like other workers, covert forms of protest are common amongst the petroleum proletariat in Nigeria. The companies are, of course, aware of the frequent use of these strategies by oil workers. Hence, the heavy and stringent supervision on oil rigs in particular. For instance, in the Collective Agreement between Keydrill Nigeria Limited and NUPENG [National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers] the company listed some of these methods of protest as including theft or fraud, sleeping on duty, possessing, using or being under the influence of intoxicants or narcotics, and malicious damage of company property. Any worker found guilty of any of the above offences would be summarily dismissed without advance notice. This policy is common to all oil companies.⁴

In the course of my field work I discovered that workers in the oil service companies rely heavily on these covert means of resistance. The involvement of those workers, who are generally not highly educated (usually a level of primary education, but trained on the job), in such forms of protest was confirmed by all the companies at which I conducted interviews. The companies agreed that incidents of theft, absenteeism, damage to property, wastage of materials, sabotage and use of “dirty language” to expatriate and indigenous officials have been frequent. The persistence of these forms of protest, of course, is not peculiar to the oil industry. Other than the fact that practically all the service companies complained of destruction and wastage of company property by “ghost workers,” leading to the loss of thousands of naira [the Nigerian currency], a pattern is easily observable. Incidents of wastage, sabotage, abuses, “lateness” and “sickness” were frequent in periods preceding industrial conflicts between the various local unions and management.⁵ In these periods, the workers express their “discontent and preparedness for a showdown with management,” by “inventing all forms of illness, stealing company materials, composing abusive songs about management and

calling the expatriate staff all sorts of racial names.”⁶ These forms of resistance were of course intensified with the formal declaration of an industrial dispute. The actual or anticipated intensification of such acts of sabotage and often compels management to seek assistance from the law enforcement agents:

It is difficult to provide accurate statistics. But, even in this service company, we have had several experiences of workers deliberately destroying our property. Most of them are heartless people who can set rigs on fire. Hence, we don't take chances. At the slightest indication of discontent, we move to nip such actions by “unknown” workers in the bud. But definitely, wastage of food and raw materials on the rig, deliberate pollution in order to place oil-producing communities and the company at logger-heads, and damaging of company property have been employed in the past to put pressure on the company.⁷

To the management of the companies, these forms of protest are manifestations of “wickedness, heartlessness, lack of sympathy and sometimes of immaturity”; they can “hardly be seen as pressure tactics and strategies to win demands because the companies are not foolish.”⁸ But the workers often have a contrary view. Some of those I interviewed at Warri and Ughelli [two cities in southeastern Nigeria on the Niger delta, centers of the oil industry], who claimed to have been involved in some acts of sabotage on the oil rigs even theft of company materials on the rigs, saw their actions as a way of “getting part of the big profit made by the ogas every day.”⁹

As one of the senior fitters put it:

We know that to management such acts are heartless and costly. But that is exactly the point we wish to make. We do not destroy company goods on a daily basis, but as situation dictates. We don't enjoy them either, but our union leaders will never support these actions since they like to pursue laid down procedures for settling industrial disputes. But no matter what people say or think, our acts of sabotage have always drawn the immediate attention of management. (Translation from pidgin.)¹⁰

To be sure, such acts of resistance send signals to management that “someone is angry or that some people are angry about something.”¹¹ In the case of theft, workers might consider what they steal and whatever they get from its sale as a supplement to their wages. It is only in this context that we can see them as a way of getting part of what “the ogas” enjoy.

Of course, we know we can lose our jobs or end up in prison. But the companies will also lose their properties and workers, as well as their contracts; or they can be in deep trouble with local chiefs and communities. Actions which affect the power and profits of these foreign companies are our only way of showing our own power. We certainly cannot afford an open confrontation. (Translation from pidgin.)¹²

The workers rely on sabotage to draw the attention of management to disaffection or "to fire warning shots" before collective bargaining begins with union representatives. Company vehicles are set on fire, cranes turned over, graffiti painted on the walls, keys to the premises get lost, or radios on the rigs get damaged. Sometimes the sole purpose of acts of sabotage is to slow down operations, especially when companies give notice that some oil wells would soon be abandoned. In this case the goal is to prevent redundancies. New machines which would save labor are also frequently damaged in order to prevent retrenchment.

There is a case of a service company at Warri, for example, which imported a machine estimated by a union official to cost about 1.8 million naira. This machine would have rendered a lot of service men, welders, supervisors, fitters, etc., jobless. Within a week workers practically dismantled the machine. They stole the parts and dumped them into the sea. Till this day, the machine lies idle in the company's premises.

Though data on the incidence of "sickness" and even "lateness" at particular periods were not released by the companies, I found out that only very few workers did not use up their medical entitlements for the month.¹³ Coming late to work can mean missing the company bus from the town or the estate. This could mean missing the boat or helicopter to the rig and consequently the day's pay. Thus, according to a rig supervisor, "most of the 'late coming' is during break periods. They go to the toilet ten times in one hour, scratch their backs, noses and legs instead of working."¹⁴ Once a worker reports to work and complains of an illness, he is allowed to go to the company's doctor. He would still collect his day's pay. At one level, the persistence of "sickness" could be an attempt to dodge work or to slow down the pace of work. At another level, it might be that the illness was contracted in the process of work. However, I gathered from company doctors, supervisors and Industrial Relations Officers that the workers often bring their families and relations to use up their entitlements. There have in fact been cases where "workers complain about illness in order to obtain drugs which they in turn pass on to relations and friends."¹⁵ Workers interviewed in the course of field research did not deny this. As a fitter put it:

Drugs are so expensive in town that we cannot afford them. Moreso, the company should in reality be responsible for the treatment of *all* our dependents, distant and close relations, because it is these people who keep us alive, happy and well so that we can work for the companies. If we are unhappy or unwell, then we cannot work and the companies cannot make profit.¹⁶

In the case above, there appears to be an unconscious reaction to a perceived inequity in the provision of medical benefits, as generous as it looks. The benefits usually cover the worker, his wife and children, but most workers have their fathers, mothers and other older relations living with them. I should point out, however, that according to company officials, Categories Two and Three workers are more guilty of this act of protest.¹⁷ Ironically, these categories of workers were also the most bitter against the companies and the social system. I did not meet a single Category Two or Three worker who had no complaint against the government or the company. On the other hand, Category One workers, who are better paid, indulged less in this form of protest and were often cautious in their criticism of the companies, even while not condemning the other Categories.

According to company officials, the simple reason for the "nature" of Category Three workers is that they are largely uneducated and therefore are "impatient, rash and do not understand the fine and gentlemanly processes of collective bargaining and resolution of conflicts through peaceful means."¹⁸ The temporary workers know they have little or no future with the companies. "Having tasted wage employment in the oil sector, they either want to leave with a token (theft) or show resentment at not being retained (abuses, sabotage, etc.)."¹⁹ Thus, workers in Category Three do not have much respect for the established grievance procedure as laid out in collective agreements. This requires that the worker report to the immediate supervisor, who then attempts to resolve the problems or directs them to other officers. However, "where the immediate supervisor is expatriate, viewed as harsh or arrogant, the workers do not waste much time; they take the laws into their hands and do something to express their anger."²⁰ This is usually in the form of sabotage, abuse or anything which they think the company would notice without knowing who was/were responsible. There have been cases where workers shat in front of the manager's office and in front of the company's gate.

The workers, of course, claim to act on the basis of past experience:

Dem think say we be foolish people. If you go report, dem go write your name down and say you be wahala person. If you tell oyinbo, e go say

you be lazy person. That na if e no call you monkey. Efenself, how person go work for company well well, den dem go just sack am like that becos na temporary dem call am? So we self de take style style show we power for oga back.²¹

They think we are foolish people. If you make a report (on a grievance), your name will be noted and you will be branded a troublesome worker. If you make a report to an expatriate supervisor, he will say you are lazy that is, if he does not call you a monkey. Come to think of it, how can the company lay off someone who has been efficient at his job just because he is a temporary worker? In the light of these, we also try to demonstrate our power behind our bosses' backs. (Translation from pidgin.)

While it is quite possible to argue that covert forms of resistance in the oil industry do not immediately challenge the overall relations of production in Nigeria, the impacts, uncoordinated and irregular as they are, are felt by the companies. They complain that cases of excessive drinking often increase by at least 10 percent after a new shift returns from the rig or after pay day. The use of this as a conscious or unconscious form of covert protest is similar to the effect which drug abuse has on the worker and his efficiency at his job. As Robin Cohen notes in both cases:

(Drug use) almost invariably . . . represents a form of psychological resistance but social acquiescence by workers. Drugs tended to be used as a means of ironing out emotional peaks and troughs. Some stimulants, for example, the widely used West African Cola nut, are taken as food substitutes and simply to keep going, but more often "downers" like alcohol and cannabis are simply used as a means of relaxation and enjoyment – a form of compensation for an unrewarding work experience.²²

In addition, the use of cannabis ("Indian hemp") proposes a sort of distance between workers and supervisors. Those who use it always have blood-shot eyes and are feared by supervisors who regard them as "hot heads."²³ As in the case of drinking, drug abuse does not end with its effects on the worker. It promotes lateness to work, inefficiency, mistakes, rudeness, waste and industrial accidents. All these in turn generate their own costs and problems which affect production and can cause severe strains in relations between labor and management. In fact, the problem of excessive drinking is a major one in the oil industry.

The workers, however, argue that the companies themselves encourage some form of drinking. It is "the only real form of relaxation on the rigs when (you) are away from your wife, girlfriends, even prostitutes."²⁴

The sudden return to "civilization" after being "marooned on the rigs," and the big holiday which workers enjoy on such a return promotes heavy drinking.

The interesting part in this issue of drinking is the sort of solidarity it promotes among workers. Warri, as an oil city, with expatriates and hordes of people seeking one form of opportunity in the oil or steel industries, has hundreds of drinking bars and hotels. Oil workers have special drinking places famous for cheap beer and goat-meat or fresh fish "pepper soup."²⁵ For some workers, except when they are off to the rigs, gathering at the drinking bars is a daily ritual. It is at these bars that stories of covert forms of protest undertaken or witnessed, experiences with management, new names coined to describe management and songs which describe the world of oil workers or depict the "harsh and intensive nature of management, especially of the expatriate staff," are recounted.

One of the songs goes like this:

Oyel work no good. Dem no dey take oyel cook soup. Na who de drink oyel, who sai? Oyimbo palava plenty pass oyel. Dem want big work but dem no wan give money. Baboon dey chop, monkey dey work".

Oil job is not good. Who can make soup with oil? Who can drink oil? Impossible! The white man's trouble is more than oil. They want us to work hard but don't want to pay us well. The rich consume while the poor works. (Note: Sometimes, in translating from pidgin to English, the power and flavor of the words are lost.)

Though the isolation of oil rigs "forcibly" unites the workers along lines of authority, income and job performed, the drinking places on land "voluntarily" unite them to the extent that the workers are not forced to report there daily whereabouts while not on the rigs.²⁶ But as indicated earlier, the drinking places, scattered all over Warri, just like in other oil producing towns, are spots for gossip, exchange of ideas, information and experiences. At these places, the workers inform new employees on the nature of the job, particularly its hazards, and attempt to explain the nature of work and the labor control approach of each supervisor. They equally "inform" the new employee, or those on the next shift to the rigs, of covert methods of delaying on the job, resisting pressures from supervisors, dodging responsibility, and "protecting one's sanity and safety in that isolated place." A typical lecture goes like this:

The rig has three oyinbos and two black supervisors. The two black ones are yeye people, one of them is always drinking and the other is always doing yes sir to the oyinbo. If you want excuse for anything, give or

promise the black one a beer, he will not give you wahala. The oyinbos are bad and wicked. They don't speak too much English, all they tell you even if you are eating during break is work, work, work. But just say yes sir, and they will be happy.²⁷

They also inform new employees of those particular workers who are in charge of smuggling drugs, particularly Indian hemp to the rigs, and that prices are fixed depending on the quantity which is arbitrarily determined. The price ranges from 50 kobo a wrap to one naira.²⁸ The drinking places are also areas where "nick names" used for supervisory staff are exchanged. Thus it is possible to find a common nick name used for different supervisors in different parts of the country. For instance, Wolfgang is often interpreted into "gang nkita" (gang of dogs – dogs being the closest to wolves). This is obviously an Ibo translation meant to distort the meaning of the name. But the workers use these nick names, even in the presence of the expatriates, without the latter being able to comprehend anything. In addition to these, workers are advised to use their dialects or at least pidgin English if they wish to communicate messages they do not wish the expatriates to understand. This does not always work out as some of the supervisors are Nigerian, but an argument between indigenous supervisors and workers can go on for minutes in pidgin or a native dialect without the expatriates knowing what it is about.

Interestingly, it is the Categories Two and Three workers who frequent the drinking places more. The more experienced workers, who are usually relatively better paid, often have no fixed places other than the staff clubs. While gossip also takes place among senior and intermediate staff, they are devoid of the loud and free manner in which the junior workers in Categories Two and Three exchange ideas, gossip and sometimes break into work songs, prisoners' songs or union songs. There have been instances of course when other categories of workers have visited these drinking places, but they have often been treated as strangers or spies:

When we talk with dem finish, dem go go tell oyinbo people so that oyinbo go like them. That is why we no dey like to talk for them presences. Them want promotion and big money, so dem dey do boy boy follow oyinbo. Dem no get sense for head.²⁹

When we talk with them, they usually disclose the content of discussions to the expatriates. They do this in order to win the goodwill or favor of management. Hence, we do not like discussing anything in their presence. They want to be promoted so as to earn higher salaries, hence their subservient attitudes to the expatriates. They are very foolish. (Translation from pidgin.)

To a large extent, the responses of labor are made in the light of strict and sometimes insensitive attitude of management. For instance, there were several stories recounted on how expatriate staff called oil workers on the rig niggers, black dogs, black monkeys, or referred to adult workers as "boy."³⁰ These descriptions often offended the workers who coined names in reverse: "white dog," "white monkey," "oyinbo canda," "obobo canda," "ayanyan," and so on. These in reality only emphasize the color of the expatriates, though used in a somewhat derogatory manner. Indigenous staff of course are often referred to as "white slaves," "traitors," "black sheep," "servants," all in an effort to demonstrate resentment at the way and extent to which they often cooperated with management, behaved like expatriates or tried to be stricter than the expatriates.

Experiences exchanged on forms of covert resistance have been known to encourage workers in other companies to attempt the same, but taking into account the earlier mistakes and the factors which might have delayed the impact. A worker related the following experience to me:

It was at the drinking bar on Warri-Sapale road that a friend told me how he had tampered with the food supplies and refrigerator on his rig. He did it because the food was bad and the company initially was fond of serving a lot of non-African food. He is a cook, so I spoke to a friend of mine in our company who is a cook and we planned our own. Almost everyone on the rig became sick. We added some sweet tasting native leaves to the food which caused some mild diarrhoea and stomach ache. Everyone complained of the food. It almost cost the cook his job, but since we had complained before, this provided a chance for renewing the complaints with evidence. It worked. We started getting fresh supplies flown in daily, no more salads and bread but genuine Nigerian foods. If we had relied on writing letters, we would still be far from our goals today.³¹

Drivers in oil companies also related several experiences which can be grouped as covert forms of protest. According to one, "it was just my own small contribution to the preparations for the strike. I wanted us to strike . . ."³² Such drivers remove car plugs, deflate tires or claim that cars intended to take manager's representatives to collective bargaining places could not start. In fact, they can take longer routes or just take routes known to "have frequent go-slow." The end result is that management's representatives arrive late or fail to get there and the union declares them unserious and calls a strike. Petrol tanker drivers I interviewed at the loading depot at Ore equally told me of how they can delay on the way to delivery or even sell petrol along the way to roadside dealers. Though

this can be interpreted as simple dishonesty or cheating, one of them saw it this way:

To many people, petrol tanker drivers are thieves who sell petrol to illegal dealers. They constitute a threat to other road users with their monster tankers. But none of them has ever driven a tanker, over long distances, night and day without rest. In any case, whatever we do is in aid of survival, which the companies and government (are) not interested in. The bigmen want petrol to drive their big long cars but do not care what happens to we *mekunu* (the poor). If I have the chance to sell the petrol and the tanker, I will do it any day. That will be my share of the oil boom.³³ (Translation from pidgin.)

Of course, oil tanker drivers informed me on how easily they can disrupt the national economy through collective action. On the rigs, the workers made it clear that if they stopped working everything would grind to a halt. The common man, i.e., the car user may not know of it immediately because the refineries and oil depots have some reserves, but it definitely will affect the revenues to the government and profits to the companies: "The worst thing the oil companies dislike is the idea that they are paying salaries to idle workers. If it is in a strike situation, they can raise issues about not paying wages, but if it is the result of damage to equipment, they just have to pay."³⁴ The tanker drivers on the other hand will easily inform that they are the invaluable link between the refineries and oil depots and the petrol stations.

Just like the tanker drivers, petrol station attendants, who are highly exploited and not yet unionized, have devised several covert modes of resistance and protest. Since they lack a union, the only mode of resistance they can rely on to "get a fair share" or to "get even" with their managers is through covert resistance. This position is clearly articulated by one of them interviewed at a Mobil station in Lagos:

We do not have a trade union to protect us. We are alone, so we have to struggle and fight in secret. Even if we are four in a station, we are not united. For example, my other two senior attendants are closely related to our boss, the only lady here is the boss' third wife. I am Igbo, not Yoruba like the other three. The oga's wife had continued to warn me against having anything to do with NUPENG. So, if I have a deep grievance, I cannot go on strike, I have to put it very mildly to the supervisor or act on my own.³⁵

It is this sort of work place condition, where the supervisor thinks he has every cause to defend the interests of the station owner, and in which

the workers operate under an exploitative paternalistic environment, that promotes cheating, "inefficiency" and other methods to reduce returns to the station owner. The station attendants interviewed, while generally denying personal involvement, agreed that incidents of pumping less petrol into car tanks, tampering with meters, deliberately being slow at attending to customers, even declaring that there was no petrol for sale are commonly used as methods of expressing dissatisfaction against the "terrible working conditions and the bad attitude of the station owners."³⁶ To be sure, cheating, over-pumping petrol into the tanks of friends, and so on, can mean financial "rewards" to the worker who sees it as a way of "topping his meagre salary," but cases of closing down the station or deliberate delay in attending to customers affect the sales of the day, the profits of the station owners, and usually arouses accusations and sanctions from the supervisors or owners:

I do not see an alternative(s). We cannot report to the police. There are case(s) I believe when thieving and those other thing(s) cannot be seen as crime(s). We poor people must survive too. But in so far as the owners (say they) don't care for us, we shall not care for them. Many of us want the union, but what can we do? These problems, I mean how we react to the owners, (are) bound to go on, until we have (a) union and standard salary and conditions (of work).³⁷

In other cases, workers have been known to use graffiti, write anonymous letters to local managers, even to directors in Europe and America or other parts of the world, and sometimes "lose" the keys to the offices of the senior staff, even the key to the company's main gate or official car. These sort of activities, said workers, were more often than not deliberate. Others write threatening letters against local indigenous and expatriate supervisors.³⁸ Electricians tamper with electric cables and transformers, "just to make small trouble for the ogas." These forms of protest are sometimes very expensive, dangerous and at great cost to the worker. In other cases they may be quite ineffective and thus fail to move management. Even in such circumstances, they provide satisfaction to the worker(s) directly involved and to all those who had been contemplating such acts on a higher or lower level. The company officials I interviewed showed clearly that they were quite aware of these forms of protest but confessed that they were "very difficult to control or eliminate. Stringent provisions for discipline and threats cannot eliminate such actions against the company, particularly as they are often not collectively executed, but they do give us an insight into the fact that something somewhere requires urgent attention."³⁹

No union can rely exclusively on covert forms of protest if it is to advance or protect the interest of the working class. This means that covert actions can only serve as the "bedrock" of overt activities. It is at this level that unions openly express their desire or preparedness to confront the system or a sector of it. This mode of protest, being collectively undertaken, also constitutes an invitation to other forces in society to sympathize or join hands with the union in the deepening of the struggle to confront management; this means a strike can move from being just a strike into being a political struggle. In addition, the strike presents an occasion for the rank and file to pressure their leaders into militant action as well as to test the organizational capacity of the leaders. The extent to which the leadership keeps open the flow of information between it and the rank and file, or attempts to strike uneasy bargains with management, can hold several implications for future struggles.

Finally, this paper, through a discussion of covert and overt protests in the oil industry, has shown that oil workers are not the comfortable and docile group they are often painted to be. However, while Categories Two and Three workers rely heavily on covert forms of resistance and are extremely critical of state institutions and regulations, Category One workers appear to be more conservative. True, they join in strike actions. But they do to the extent that they concern bread and butter issues. As conflicts between management and workers become prolonged, the tendency among Category One workers is to emphasize respect for the laws of the land and the need to give state institutions a chance. Such disposition would directly prevent conflicts from generating political dimensions within and outside the oil industry. What is more, Category One workers do not deny the fact that they enjoy the power delegated to them by the companies. Given their political orientation, their views on society, politics and the future of the working class, Category One workers can be described as elitist and conservative.

What about the future? Nigeria's oil industry is facing increasingly difficult times. The glut in the world oil market has affected production and exportation levels. This in turn affects rents and profits to the state and companies. The Nigerian state has initiated "austerity measures," retrenchment, foreign exchange controls, etc., to cope with the crisis caused by the decline in oil revenues and dependent capitalist growth without development. The oil companies have begun to retrench workers, close or reduce operations and make fewer concessions to oil workers. Both actions have direct effects on oil workers and the working class in general. The deepening of class contradictions, the sharpening of the

edges of class struggles and the possible generation of conflicts between the state and capital would be inevitable in this circumstance. As workers put pressure on the government and their employers, the state would likely increase its role in the oil sector. The companies can be expected to resist this move given declining production and profits. Whatever role the workers in the oil industry would play in the future would be largely dependant on the extent to which they are able to resolve problems within their union and initiate clear policies for rank and file education and mobilization.⁴⁰

Notes

This is an edited version of a paper presented at the International Conference on "Energy, Self-Reliance and National Development," Organized by the Energy and Social Development Research Group, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Port-Harcourt, October 16-19, 1985. The work is derived from data collected from field work carried out in Lagos, Warri and its environs between May 1983 and April 1985.

¹ Robin Cohen, "Resistance and Hidden Forms of Consciousness Amongst African Workers," *Review of African Political Economy* 19 (September-December 1980), p. 8.

² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³ See Fred Halliday, *Iran: Dictatorship and Development* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979); Peter Nore and Terisa Turner, eds., *Oil and Class Struggle* (London: Zed Press, 1980) and Julius O. Ihonvbere, *Labour, State and Capital in Nigeria's Oil Industry* (Forthcoming).

⁴ I did actually try as much as possible to verify or confirm some of the covert forms of protest discussed in this paper. I have excluded some which I could not verify and others, though more severe in nature, I cannot use without exposing the identity of the culprits. This is because the actions are either under investigation, have generated serious conflicts, or cost companies a lot of money to resolve. I also had to promise absolute anonymity and confidentiality to my informants.

⁵ Field informations from oil majors and minors and service companies in and around Warri, June 1983 to March 1984.

⁶ Interview at an oil minor, Warri, November 1983.

⁷ *Ibid.*, The respondent is a senior supervisor.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Interview with Mr. Chidozie, a worker with a major oil service company, Warri, December 1983. Oga is a boss.

¹⁰ Interview with Mr. P. O. O. Brown, a worker with an oil major, Ughelli, December 1983.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Interview with an oil worker with an oil major, Warri, Shell Depot, December 1983.

¹³ Field information gathered from a hospital which handles the treatment of workers

on behalf of two oil majors in Warri, November and December 1983.

¹⁴ Field interview, Warri, December 1983. According to this supervisor, the workers do these "just to make sure that we do not finish the work on time. The temporary or daily paid workers are more notorious for this. So, we (the supervisors) do everything possible to make them keep working."

¹⁵ Interview with a company doctor, Warri, November 1983.

¹⁶ Interview with a fitter with an oil major, Warri, November 1983.

¹⁷ The company officials called these acts "cheating." I agree to an extent but prefer to see it as a direct response to the failure to provide universal coverage in terms of taking cognizance of the extended family system.

¹⁸ Field interview with a personnel manager with an oil major, Warri, January 1984.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Interview with Mr. I. Aberare, NUPENG Organizing Secretary, Warri Zone, January 1984.

²¹ Interview with Mr. Usen, a worker with a service company, Warri, December 1983.

²² Cohen, p. 19.

²³ Supervisors often expressed amazement at the rate at which workers used "Indian hemp" on the rigs: "Once it is break time, you find them smoking 'igbo' (Indian hemp or cannabis) all over the place, sometimes openly. You cannot even challenge them because they might attack you." Interview with a rig supervisor with Dresser Nigeria Limited, Warri, November 1983.

²⁴ Field interview, Warri, January 1984. This worker is employed in a service company.

²⁵ "Pepper soup" is a delicacy prepared with spices and either fresh fish or goat meat. Generally it goes well with cold beer and most of the drinking spots frequented by oil workers served pepper soup at one naira per plate.

²⁶ These are some of the indicators which were employed in the categorization.

²⁷ Information collected from "Drinking Haven," Ogunu, Warri, February 1984. "Yeye" means "useless," "wahala" means "troublesome" or "restless".

²⁸ "Indian hemp" is also called "igbo," "we we," "joint," "grass," "NNG" (Nigerian Natural Grass), "leaf," "marijuana," "flem" and "Morocco."

²⁹ Interview with a mechanic employed at an oil service company, Warri, August 1983.

³⁰ One such incident of an expatriate calling a worker "boy" and "slave" precipitated a major strike action at Keydrill Nigeria Limited in 1981.

³¹ Account narrated to me at a drinking bar on Warri-Sapale Road, Warri Township, August 1983.

³² Interview with a driver with an oil major, Sapale, August 1983.

³³ Interview with a petrol tanker driver at Ore, November 1983. Some of the drivers also disclosed that they derive some power and pleasure from harassing rich men in "long expensive cars" on the highways with their tankers.

³⁴ Interview with a senior tanker driver for an oil major, Ore NNPC Depot, November 1983.

³⁵ Interview with "Bob Alabama," Total Petrol Station, Lagos, January 1984. Though this attendant gave me his full name, he insisted that I use his "guy name" in the study. Our discussion on the problems of petrol station attendants, the need for a union, and the attitude of the companies and managers took place between 8-16 February 1984. Bob Alabama later put me in touch with 16 other station attendants around Lagos.

³⁶ Interview with Elijah Okougbo, NUPENG Headquarters, Lagos, January 1984. Mr. Okougbo was in charge of the initial efforts to organize station attendants which failed. Joe Tafa has commented on the conditions of these attendants thus: "The challenge unionization of these workers poses to petrol dealers lies in the fact that for many years petrol sellers have been under obnoxious working conditions. If there was any condition of employment at all . . . their basic salary was less than 60 naira a month . . . no normal leave, transport, night and leave allowances . . ." See Joe Tafa, "Petrol Sellers Yearn For Own Union," *Evening Times* (Lagos), 16 October 1980.

³⁷ Interview with Mr. C. Asukwo, petrol station attendant, Ajamougha, Warri, November 1983.

³⁸ I actually saw some copies of such letters of threat written against local managers and supervisors.

³⁹ Interview with an official at Pan Ocean Nigeria Limited, Koko, November 1983.

⁴⁰ Indications of this deepening crisis are beginning to emerge. The government has passed new decrees prescribing the firing squad for those who sabotage petroleum pipelines or engage in illegal bunkering of oil. The NNPC has extended its efforts to control bunkering in order to bring in more revenues. Oil is now to be prospected for in Lake Chad River Basin.