**‘Artisans can make a living anywhere’: White labour migration and the 1944-46 wildcat strikes on the Zambian Copperbelt**

This paper examines the wildcat strikes by white artisans which shut down mines on the Zambian Copperbelt in 1944 and again in 1946. These disputes show how these workers saw themselves as an international but carefully delineated class, and one able to draw on widespread international support. The fact that they were capable of securing such support indicates that this group of racial and racist mineworkers were not so out of place in the international labour movement as, intuitively, they might appear.

Male artisans possessed industrial skills which enabled them to find work in mining and industrial centres across the British Empire and beyond. Many were extraordinarily mobile and, along with their industrial skills and tools, brought with them labour movement traditions and knowledge of wages and working conditions around the world. This knowledge directly informed the demands of white workers and the response of the mining companies. Indeed, one of the central demands of the 1944 strikes was the removal of wartime restrictions which had made mining a reserved occupation, preventing artisans from heading to better conditions they knew existed elsewhere.

These strikes have attracted no attention from historians, yet were significant at the time as they halted copper production, crucial for Britain’s war effort and post-war recovery. It was especially important that this copper was supplied by the Copperbelt as it was in the sterling area, so saved vital dollars. The existing literature generally presents the high wages and lavish conditions white workers on the Copperbelt came to enjoy as the result of corporate beneficence or short-sightedness. This paper presents an alternate account, whereby these benefits were won through industrial struggle, backed up by powerful allies such as the World Federation of Trade Unions.