

Chapter 6

EMPLOYERS IN THE RACING LABOUR PROCESS

Introduction

Racehorse trainers contract with racehorse owners to train and produce horses for the daily programme of race meetings around the United Kingdom, and some international meetings such as the Melbourne Cup in Australia and the Breeders Cup in the United States. The production of racehorses is an unusual process, not allowing for automation or mass production. However, there is a production process and the trainer could be likened to an intermediary between the bloodstock and betting industries. Horses may only race once, never race at all, or be highly exposed and developed as champions, ultimately as the progenitors of future champions. On race day, there is the repetitive pattern of horses arriving, being prepared for a race, racing, returning home – once every 40 minutes, a race rolls off the ‘production line’.

Trainers do not actually own all the means of production since they do not (generally) own the raw material, ie racehorse; nevertheless, they behave as if they do. While it could be said that the racing labour process has remained frozen in time, the ‘market imperative’ does exist and compels trainers to seek out efficiencies in production. However, the ability to seek efficiency through tighter forms of control is constrained by the product itself, which produces a labour intensive production process. The only area where trainers can increase direct exploitation is through extending the working week, which has in fact happened in the case of Flat racing during the summer season as noted in Chapter 5.

Trainers engage stable staff to carry out the day to day functions of care and exercise and the transportation of racehorses to racecourses. The process of training of racehorses brings with it a distinct labour process within which trainers must be in a position to control and direct their labour for, as argued by Littler (1990) the function of

management in the labour process is to convert labour power into actual work effort. It has already been established that racing stables are small organisations with a simple management hierarchy which might suggest that trainers only adopt, or need to adopt, a relatively simple approach to management. In the small firms literature studies have uncovered the use of despotic control (Scott et al 1989) and simple, direct control (Marlow and Patton 2002). Small firms have long been associated with paternalism (Wray 1996) and particularistic employment relations (Lockwood 1958). However, Sosteric (1996) has found that small firms are capable of successfully using Friedman's (1997) approach of responsible autonomy.

In the specific setting of horseracing, Gallier (1988) held that control is part of the social organisation of work stemming from peer pressure and sporting competition between stables and individual horses, while Cassidy (2002) finds that control stems from 'ownership' of the horse, and 'parental pride'. This is important to the current research since it is already apparent that the horse dominates the labour process and is potentially a key means for employers to control their staff through the manufacture of consent (Burawoy 1979) in the racing labour process. Cassidy's findings suggest that Burawoy's emphasis (1979) on the production and reproduction of workers' attitudes and consciousness within the labour process is as important for these small firms as it was in the large firm setting of the factory.

In his study of Newmarket racing stables Filby (1983) identified that simple direct control was most often in use. However, at a distance of more than 30 years from Filby's original fieldwork, it was noted throughout the current research that trainers use a wider range of controls such as visibility in the workplace, ideological incorporation to racing's cultural values and norms, paternalism, conflict neutralisation, particularistic employment relations and consent. This chapter therefore examines the control mechanisms used in racing's small workplaces at the level of individual stables,

drawing on data gathered in Phases A, B, D and E. The chapter finds that training stables are small firms that adopt an approach of traditional paternalism. This encompasses simple direct control for day-to-day management of staff at racing stables, consistent with the findings on small firms in the literature. However, they also employ Responsible Autonomy in the 'going racing' part of the labour process, a control mechanism which has not generally been demonstrated in the literature on small firms. Amongst small firms, trainers are particularly able to manufacture consent through the relationship between stable staff and the racehorse. This is reinforced by ideological incorporation of staff and remains unchallenged through the industrial relations machinery, which is controlled by the employers.

Drawing on a labour process analysis, the chapter is structured into five sections, reflecting a discussion of the control methods of paternalism; simple direct control; Responsible Autonomy; consent; and control through the collective bargaining machinery. It concludes that trainers use a range of management controls and have a particularly strong opportunity to secure consent through the needs of the racehorse and the devotion of stable staff to racehorses.

Paternalism

Paternalism has long been associated with employment relations in the small firm, embracing a framework of familial relationships between workers and the stern but kind father figure of the proprietor. Wray (1996) discussed three types of paternalism, namely traditional, welfare and sophisticated paternalism. Citing Warde (1989:103), Wray suggested that the traditional model 'entails face-to-face relationships, personal obligation, indulgence and situational deference'. It will be seen in the section on direct control below that face-to-face relationships are very much part of the daily routine.

Personal obligation on the part of employers is particularly evidenced by the provision of on-site accommodation. As established in Chapter 5, it is often the case that some

staff members will live on site, especially younger members of staff as in the case of Respondents A1¹, A11², A12³ and A13⁴. These trainers saw this as part of their responsibility towards younger, more vulnerable workers. Respondents A8 and D4 also provided on-site accommodation to some, older staff members, particularly Head Lads and Girls; both stables were located in remote rural locations where transport was more difficult. A slightly different approach, but still a close personal one, was evidenced during a visit to Respondent A11. He had to break off his discussions with the author in order to deal with one of his young women workers who knocked on the kitchen door, visibly upset. It turned out that a row with her boyfriend had left her with nowhere to live, a problem which he immediately addressed by squeezing her into the on-site accommodation.

Further evidence of paternalistic concern and personal obligation on the employer sprang from visits to stables in Phase A. In one of the Newmarket stables⁵ and the Didcot stables⁶, jobs such as stableman (*sic*) were reserved for older stable staff, who had become unable to ride horses. These involved non-riding duties such as leading horses on and off the horse walker, taking them for swimming therapy, and helping to load recalcitrant animals on to the horse lorry. This is consistent with Harris' (undated:12) study of American industrial paternalism in which he found that US steel employers:

Found bench work for old men...who have gotten so old that they are not very active.

This was seen as a benevolent act, which workers came to anticipate from 'better' employers in the United States. There was no evidence that stable staff had any general expectation that such arrangements would be offered on a regular basis.

¹ Trainer interviewed at his Newmarket stables May 2000

² Trainer interviewed at his Didcot stables May 2000

³ Trainer interviewed at his Thirsk stables June 2000

⁴ Trainer interviewed at his Tamworth stables May 2000

⁵ Trainer Respondent A2

⁶ Trainer Respondent A9

At Respondent A14's stables⁷ also visited in Phase A, the trainer tried to keep stables jobs for workers with learning difficulties. In Phase E, the author encountered Respondent E34⁸, an ex-jockey, now stable lad, whose sole job was to take horses racing. He had developed arthritis which rendered him unable to continue to ride.

With regard to indulgence, there was some evidence from Phases A and E to suggest that trainers did indulge individual staff in certain ways. In Phase A, Respondent A51⁹ said that she had been allowed to keep her hunter at her current yard and in Phase E, Respondent E6¹⁰ revealed that her trainer allowed one stable girl to keep her own horse at the yard, to use the horse box and gave her time off to go hunting.

Finally, observation of the trainer/stable staff relationship at stables and at racecourses showed a degree of deference, particularly when under the public gaze. Stable staff still employed the language of deference, referring to 'the guv'nor' when talking about their trainer. This accords with Wray's (1996) findings and gives evidence of traditional paternalism which brings 'real and lasting subordination of the workforce' (ibid:702). It also accords with Harris's (undated) findings that paternalism is used as a means of securing control in the workplace.

With regard to welfare paternalism, Wray (1996) cites the provision of employer benefits and the institutionalisation of paternalism through the operation of the employment contract. There was scant evidence of this in either Phase A or E, although Respondent E19¹¹ did say that his trainer had tennis courts and a swimming pool at his stables which staff were free to use. With regard to more 'normal' employer benefits, such as pension, Respondent A18¹² insisted that there were stories of 80 year old men still riding on Newmarket's gallops for want of an occupational pension. Whether these

⁷ Trainer Respondent A14, Rugeley

⁸ Interviewed at Goodwood racecourse May 2000

⁹ Travelling Head Lass interviewed at Thirsk stables May 2000

¹⁰ Stable girl interviewed at Taunton January 2004

¹¹ Travelling Head Las interviewed at Uttoxeter March 2004

¹² Head lad interviewed in Newmarket June 2000

ancients were myth or real could not be confirmed during the fieldwork phase, although it is true to say that men aged 60+ would not have access to an occupational pension since these were only introduced in the late 1990s. Figure 5.2 (on page 147) lends some support to this, showing that in 2006 some 300 staff worked on beyond the age of 65 and that this number had continued to grow from 2002.

Sophisticated paternalism brings with it the creation of personnel departments and the provision of schemes such as profit sharing. This was not found to be present in racing, although it might be said that the National Trainers Federation did offer personnel services to the extent that it advised trainers on employment matters. However, this stopped short of intervening to assist employers and workers to resolve employment disputes. Equally there was little evidence of personnel expertise available at the level of individual stables, apart from Respondent A12 who was seeking Investors in People (IiP) status for his stables and trying to develop more staff training. This trainer saw IiP as a way of incentivising the labour process by setting targets.

Wray (1996) went on to explore the association between paternalism and small firms, enumerating four prime factors that define this particular model, the first of which is day-to-day personal contact with workforce through direct managerial involvement of the proprietor. It has already been established that, as with many small firms, trainers not only have close daily interactions with their workers at a managerial level but also are frequently to be found working alongside them. They will be living alongside some of them also.

The second factor is simple management techniques and it will be obvious from the discussion in this chapter that trainers are not 'professional' managers, exposed to a range of sophisticated techniques gleaned from pursuing management education. New and aspiring trainers are obliged to undertake a Human Resource Management module on the induction training that is part of the Jockey Club's requirements for granting a

licence to train. This course was only introduced ten years ago, having been insisted on by the Respondent D3¹³ during the late 1990s, which means that a great many longer serving trainers have been excluded from an opportunity to explore modern management approaches. A further common problem is a lack of resources to allow the owner/manager to take time away from the workplace to undertake training – even for employment law, a crucial area for small firms that make up a disproportionate percentage of respondent companies in the proceedings of the Employment Tribunal.

Research in Phase A revealed that many trainers saw staff management as an unappealing and difficult problem (Winters 2000b). This was further reinforced in Phase E, where Respondent E13 said that some trainers were ‘complete arses’ in their dealings with staff, failing to recognise the professionalism with which staff conducted their work with valuable racehorses. While all the tasks staff undertook at the racecourse were ‘very basic tasks’ they were ‘crucial to running the horse’ successfully, again underlining the fact that the trainer has a high dependency on his staff at race meetings. They are representing not only the trainer’s interests but those of the owner(s) also and may be literally representing the trainer when s/he was not in attendance.

The Berkshire Consultancy Study (2002) on work-life balance found a lack of management training amongst first line supervisors (the head lad/girl). The Phase B questionnaire revealed that uptake of the Head Lads course at the training college was low with 41 trainers saying that they did not use the course and 22 saying that they did.

Trainers who sent their first line supervisors on advanced training were therefore in the minority, citing staff shortage as the reason for not releasing staff, as shown in Table 6.2

¹³ Former Chief Executive of NTF interviewed September 2003

below. Forty one respondents said that they had problems releasing staff, as opposed to 19 who said this was not a problem.

These results were further reinforced by the findings of the Stable and Stud Staff Commission in 2003 (see Chapter 4) which revealed a culture of bullying amongst these first line supervisors (BHB 2004) and it was certainly the author's experience in Phase A that the 'old school' head lads could use such tactics. When attending the stables of Respondent A6¹⁴ to interview stable staff, they anticipated that their Head Lad would be angry at them for participating in interviews; this indeed turned out to be the case.

Wray's third factor in the association between small firms and paternalism is the absence of procedural formality, about which the evidence suggested that trainers rely on informal methods, rather than a detailed set of procedures published in a staff handbook. Respondent A1¹⁵ said that he had no formal discipline or grievance mechanisms in place, matters were dealt with on an ad hoc basis. He had dealt with poor timekeeping and attendance thus:

Pay has been used as disciplinary measure where one or two staff were unreliable. I put them on a lower wage rate plus an attendance allowance to bring them back up to a normal level.

However, it appeared that this had been implemented unilaterally and potentially in breach of employment law which specifically protects employers against arbitrary cuts in pay under the unlawful deductions from wages provisions. He had not taken advice from the NTF on this issue.

Respondent A2¹⁶ said:

Staff are the most important asset to a yard but I am hard on them. Trainers and workers need to keep standards up.

For him discipline was a problem and he also believed that trainers should 'sack the rubbish' and that generally the standards of workers had dropped since he had come

¹⁴ Stables in Epsom, June 2000

¹⁵ Trainer interviewed at his Newmarket stables May 2000

¹⁶ Trainer interviewed at his Newmarket stables May 2000

into racing twenty years earlier. Again, he had no formal procedures in place. Respondent D4, with regard to resolving individual disputes and disagreements, it was a matter of avoiding the problem being created in the first place. He said:

You have to be firm on staffing issues. Too often things are ignored until it's too late and then everyone gets a shock.

This very much reflected the small firms research conducted by Marlow and Patton (2002) who found that while a form of control was derived from owner/managers working alongside their labour force, this could fail when disciplinary action had to be taken. Respondent D4 said that he used the normal daily dialogue with his workforce, from which he believed he 'picked up on problems' and dealt with them (Scott et al 1989). For him, a manager needed to be on top of staffing issues without being overbearing or hostile, there should be discussion and some give and take on both sides. He did not rely on formal procedures to achieve this.

While formal procedures are in place in the Memorandum of Agreement between the NTF and the SLA on dispute resolution (NTF 2004), these do not seem to be valued by employers or workers at the local level. If an individual dispute could not be resolved, workers were inclined to vote with their feet and employers were inclined to let them. Again, this is evidence of old habits dying hard since a similar situation was recorded by Filby (1983) during his fieldwork in the late 1970s. There was no clear evidence that trainers followed what Marlow and Patton (2002) term the 'friendly approach' of co-opting workers by appealing to their better nature.

Finally, Wray's fourth factor with regard to small firms and paternalism is the regulation of the employment relationship by the employer on behalf of employees. It has been noted that the NJCSS and the SLA are dominated by the employers who have been able to control the Stable Lads' Association by providing income and (limited) resources to its National Secretary and by setting the terms of the constitution of the National Joint Council for Stable Staff. Collective bargaining has not become a means

of formalising the battle for control of the labour process. Ostensibly, the employers won that battle when the TGWU was derecognised in 1975.

Wray (1996) also refers to the wider involvement of paternalist employers in the local community; it is certainly true that trainers are closely involved in their local community of racing. Apart from the local Trainers' Federations in racing towns such as Newmarket and Lambourn, there was evidence that trainers will work alongside the charitable organisation, Racing Welfare, particularly on affordable housing. As Respondent A6¹⁷ revealed, trainers round Epsom were working with Racing Welfare and the local authority to secure some housing provision for stable staff.

Ackers (1998:177) points out the necessary relationship between paternalism and a workforce which springs from:

Large kinship networks, which are embedded in a surrounding occupational community, isolated from major metropolitan industrial centres.

Cassidy (2002) points to kinship systems in and around Newmarket, and in the author's experience, it is possible to extrapolate this to other racing centres, such as Lambourn and Middleham. Filby (1983) finds that stable staff are an occupational community; this aspect of the labour process is discussed fully in Chapter 7. However, it can be said here that Acker's other criterion is also met since racing is a rural activity and isolated from industrial districts.

The use of paternalism in racing is an important means of securing control since it has the effect of legitimating a fundamentally unequal system (Newby et al 1978) by obscuring the commodity status of labour. However, while it forms a common approach in racing, it is but one method of control being deployed by trainers.

Simple direct control

At the level of the stables, it has already been established in Chapter 5 that the day is structured into 'morning stables', involving the feeding, mucking out and exercising of

¹⁷ Trainer interviewed at his stables Epsom June 2000

each horse, then ‘evening stables’ where horses are bedded down for the night. While it is unlikely that the trainer will be able to follow the mucking out routine adopted for each horse, the head lad/girl certainly will keep a close eye on what is happening in each stable to check that tasks are performed satisfactorily. The trainer does devise the feeding regime, how each horse will be ‘campaigned’ across the racing calendar and is in sole charge of the training programme for each horse. The trainer is very closely involved in directing each day’s training routine, in particular expecting groups of horses to be paraded in front of her/him in the stable stables, before proceeding to the gallops to be put through their paces, again under the watchful eye of the trainer. It can be seen from the foregoing that what happens at the stables requires simple instructions to be given for the trainer to maintain control either through direct supervision in smaller stables or through the head lad/girl in larger enterprises. At this stage of the labour process, Friedman’s (1977) strategy of direct control is evident, a control method also listed by Edwards (1982) as the most basic one available to employers. On the evidence offered by Respondent E13¹⁸, who had detailed daily experience of trainer/stable staff interactions, the old ‘command and obey’ attitude was still pervasive. This was also borne out by the work of the Stable and Stud Staff Commission (BHB 2004:57), which found that:

Although many yards have good practices, the approach of others can only be considered antediluvian.

Some evidence of this was found in Phase A, when Trainer A5¹⁹ expressed a very dim view of staff saying that:

Staff are feckless. They lack education in how to manage money and therefore cannot manage.

¹⁸ Member of Jockey Club Security staff interviewed at Chepstow January 2004

¹⁹ Trainer interviewed at his Newmarket stables May 2000

He believed that the British Racing School should tackle this through the induction process. He had no obvious perception that perhaps one of the problems was that wage rates were very low and it was this that made it difficult to manage money.

A particularly striking example of old-fashioned command and control was witnessed at the premises of Trainer A6²⁰, who mainly secured control through the despotic regime of his Head Lad, a man in his sixties who bemoaned the ‘rubbish’ coming into the industry to work as stable staff. During the interviews, he appeared at the door of the staff room, obviously enraged that his workers were being diverted from the tasks he wished them to undertake. Staff were clear that it was entirely normal for them to be subjected to verbal abuse and anger as part of day-to-day management of the yard.

Respondent A12²¹ said that exit interviews had revealed that the firm and disciplined atmosphere at his yard was one of the reasons why staff were leaving since they found it ‘not as much fun as at other yards’. His approach was autocratic and controlling.

In smaller stables, the trainer will not only direct and control individual labour but is more than likely to work alongside stable staff as the need arises. This certainly fits with a specific small firm control strategy observed by Ram (1991) and Marlow and Patten (1993), namely that of ‘visibility’, where the boss has experience as a worker in the industry also. Very few trainers come from other than a racing background – in their parent’s training stables or as a jockey being the two prime sources – and pride themselves in their abilities as a complete horse(wo)man. At two of the smaller stables visited in Phase A (Winters 2000a) Trainer A5²² and Trainer A14²³ were regularly to be found mucking out stables, grooming horses and even in the larger establishments, the trainer’s equestrian capabilities were often made visible by his/her supervision of morning exercise from horseback.

²⁰ Trainer interviewed at his stables in Epsom July 2000

²¹ Trainer interviewed at his Middleham stables May 2000

²² Observed at his stables in Newmarket May 2000

²³ Observed at her father’s stables in Rugeley August 2000

A further important element in the visibility aspect of the control relationship is the fact that trainers typically live adjacent to their stables. This fits with MacMahon's (1994) findings that managerial influence is particularly important in small firms, because of the daily proximity of employers to their labour force. Trainers, like the majority of farmers observed by Newby et al (1978), live at their place of work, with no separation between home and workplace, or leisure and workplace; Respondents A1-14²⁴ and D4²⁵ lived alongside their racing stables. Racehorse training therefore occupies the same space as farming, namely it is a way of life where the working week of trainers (as is the case for farmers) 'will therefore constitute virtually his entire waking hours' (Newby et al 1978:147). In racing the working year is also arranged around the seasons, although racehorse training and racing happen throughout the year, only being abandoned in the foulest weather.

All fourteen of the trainer respondents in Phase A provided some form of accommodation on site and it is likely that this is the situation for all trainers, providing a further important factor in the ability of the trainer to control. That this is likely to be the case was shown in Chapter 5 (Table 5.1, page 149); 64% of trainers responding to the Phase B questionnaire provided on site accommodation. Accommodation may range from the provision of purpose built, modern on-site housing (Respondent A9²⁶), to a flat in the trainer's house (Respondent D4), through living as part of the family for younger workers (Respondent A1 and Respondent A14)²⁷, to the 'grotty' caravan parked well out of the public gaze.

Where workers did not live on site, it was likely that they lived amongst the local racing community, particularly in racing centres such as Lambourn, Newmarket and Middleham. The separation of work and home which is the experience of most workers

²⁴ All trainers interviewed in 2000

²⁵ NTF Council member interviewed at his stables 16 October 2003

²⁶ Accommodation viewed at Didcot stables May 2000

²⁷ Interviewed June 2000

in the UK was less likely for this group of workers, again adding to the ability of trainers to control.

There is a secondary and contrasting issue with regard to accommodation, which was discussed more fully in Chapter 5 as a source of employee grievance, but it seems appropriate to mention it at this point also. This is the provision of staff overnight accommodation at UK racecourses. Respondent D4 stated that he rarely sent staff away overnight, since many racecourse hostels were 'not fit to be seen, let alone used'. It seemed that the needs of staff had dropped out of sight between the interest of trainers in their horses and the lack of will on the part of racecourses to provide a decent standard of accommodation for visiting staff. Respondent D4 expressed surprise that this had only recently been raised by the SLA as a bargaining issue. He commented that it would be costly for racecourses to provide decent staff accommodation which is used infrequently, although he did agree that this did not excuse courses from maintaining cleanliness and heating, nor from protecting staff from sexual harassment which was often a problem in mixed gender accommodation. Nor was it acceptable for staff to be accommodated in dormitories, with nowhere to be private or to safely store their belongings.

Suffice it to say that those trainers who displayed a concern for the comfort of their staff while travelling to races were quite clear that they would book alternative commercial accommodation (Respondents A11²⁸ and A14²⁹), rather than use the likes of Warwick racecourse hostel. However, this paternalistic concern had never extended to making representations to the employer's federation, the NTF, to use its influence to persuade racecourse owners to improve staff accommodation.

²⁸ Trainer interviewed at his Thirsk stables May 2000

²⁹ Trainer interviewed at his Rugeley stables May 2000

Responsible Autonomy

The second potential management strategy offered by Friedman (1977) is that of Responsible Autonomy (RA), where employers concede some power to individual workers or work groups but ensure that they remain accountable to the employer for their actions. Here it is argued that workers internalise the management control and thus deliver control over the labour process from their own efforts.

The use of an RA approach in the small firms sector has been noted by Sosteric (1997) in his research on a small nightclub. He found that the management consciously allowed workers a high level of personal autonomy when dealing with customers; this approach contributed to the club's 'quirky' reputation and high level of popularity and success. Workers in the club enjoyed their jobs, were loyal to the organisation and were almost never subject to direct forms of control. While some evidence of an RA approach was found in racing's small firms, RA has sprung from the practical reality of resourcing the racing 'campaign' for each horse. Apart from the example of Respondent A12 discussed below, this was not as part of a thought-out strategic approach by their manager(s), aimed at engaging work loyalty as argued by Friedman (1977).

It was noted in Chapter 5 that the racing labour process extends over two workplaces, namely the stables discussed above, and also the activity of 'going racing'. It has also been established that a trainer cannot attend every race meeting at which s/he has horses competing and will decide which is the most important event to attend, in terms of personal profile, the competing needs of racehorse owners for his/her time and attention (both at racecourses and at the stables), and potential prize money. Trainers must therefore adopt an RA strategy in delegating some of this activity to their travelling head lads and head girls and other members of stable staff. Stable staff will have

complete control of transportation and responsibility for the safety of the horse at all times. They will remain answerable to the trainer but only when back at the stables.

Only one trainer, Respondent A12³⁰ had consciously adopted an approach akin to Responsible Autonomy at the level of the daily stables routine. He had restructured his staff into self-managed teams with the express intention of bringing about greater management control (see also Burawoy 1979). He said that:

I expect head lads/girls to be responsible for every aspect of the horses they and their staff deal with.

He believed that there would be ‘nowhere left for people to hide’ and that they would thus have to take responsibility for their actions. However, there was no evidence to suggest that he was attempting to secure loyalty to his organisation, which he still ran in an autocratic manner. He regarded his approach as another direct control mechanism, intended to expose individuals to close scrutiny.

Inquiries of the National Trainers’ Federation in Phase E did not reveal that the self-managed team model had been taken up across racing stables. Indeed the work-life balance study carried out for the NTF (Berkshire Consultancy Limited 2002) revealed a great deal of resistance to new working methods, such as a rolling shift system or the introduction of task specific posts, citing trainers’ concerns that such changes would disturb long-standing and traditional ways of working to the detriment of the racehorse and the trainers’ businesses.

Consent

The racing labour process brings with it long hours and low wages for stable staff and these have been long standing problems in the industry as evidenced in Chapter 5 and confirmed more recently by the Stable and Stud Staff Commission (BHB 2004). Since the 1975 Newmarket strike, there has been no effective challenge to the status quo on these matters. It is evident that there are ways in which workers are incorporated to the

³⁰ Interviewed at his stables in Middleham May 2000

employers' dominant ideology. Newby et al (1978) suggest that this is particularly an issue in rural employment where inequality is accepted as in some way 'natural', while Scott et al (1989) suggest that small firms will deploy a unitarist approach in which the employer's ideology is not open to challenge. The evidence from racing fits with Miliband's assertion (1969:181) that:

Members of the dominant classes are able, by virtue of their position, for instance as employers, to dissuade members of the subordinate classes, if not from holding, at least from voicing unorthodox views.

Burawoy (1981:90) points to the 'psychological and other factors' that cause workers to be compliant in their own exploitation. It was found in Phase B that the ideological incorporation of workers begins as they enter the racing industry as very young workers at the age of 16 and spend some 12 weeks at one of the training establishments³¹. Both are managed and run by staff who have long experience in the racing industry, thus making it likely that the prevailing culture is carried forward by each group of new workers. It was observed³² that the British Racing School was run with almost military precision, imparting to trainees the 'right' way to conduct themselves, as well as the basics of stable management and riding. The messages being delivered at the BRS were: 'not in it to make money; don't get into this game if you want big wages'; 'racing's a way of life'; 'eat, live, breathe, sleep horses'. These were regularly reiterated by respondents throughout the interviews conducted with stable staff in Phases A and E.

The Phase B questionnaire survey of trainers showed that nearly 80% of respondents accepted trainees from the racing schools, suggesting that they were receiving workers who had already been inculcated with the 'right' attitude to work. Workers were prepared to accept a low wage, low status and long hours culture. From Phase E,

³¹ British Racing School at Newmarket or Northern Racing College near Doncaster

³² Visit to BRS September 2000

Respondent E1³³ held that although she would like more pay ‘it isn’t about the money, it’s about getting winners’, her expressed motivation being the success of the horses she dealt with in a small yard (6 horses) in the South West. Respondent E5³⁴ said that she had always lived on site; she generally worked seven days a week but that ‘if you want to work with horses, you just have to accept this’. It was held by Respondent E13³⁵ that racing was ‘an incestuous world and highly feudal’ which only served to reinforce the prevailing message of low wage, low status.

There is a further significant way, in which the content of the labour process in racing stables affords employers the opportunity to secure the consent of their labour process by exploiting the horse-human relationship. There is immense scope for managerial control through the product, for a racehorse cannot be ignored and dominates daily working life for trainer and staff as discussed above. As already discussed, stable staff must necessarily have a close bond with the animal(s) in their charge since the essence of successful horse(wo)manship lies in the ability to understand and control the animal being ridden. Flaherty (1985) argued that employer strategies of control in part relied on product and it is certainly the case here that the product of racing stable’s lends its support to the management strategy of consent.

This puts the employers in a position of hegemonic control through which they legitimise their dominant ideology, that of individualism, for although there is one common labour process, it is operated at the level of each individual horse. There emerges a real sense in which an important element of control in this group of small firms is very specifically invested in the object of the labour process, when coupled with the fact, as observed by one keen racegoer, Respondent E3³⁶, that:

Horses get in the blood and the vast majority of the staff would put up with much simply to be near them.

³³ Travelling Head Girl interviewed at Warwick November 2003

³⁴ Stable girl interviewed at Cheltenham December 2003

³⁵ Jockey Club Security Officer interviewed at Chepstow January 2004

³⁶ Box driver interviewed at Warwick, November 2003

Thus there is unlikely to be a strike because of the demands of horse management and the fact that stable staff can never get away from their work, it has become a way of life as found by Newby (1977) in his study of farming workers. As observed by Respondent E15³⁷:

Employers play on the fact that the workers love horses. *Your* horse is going racing therefore *you* must work on your day off in order to take *your* horse racing.

The evidence was that this ‘ownership’ was internalised by staff who equally routinely referred to ‘my horses’; going as deep as mourning the loss of ‘my horse’ and leaving racing as a result. The illusion is created that workers ‘own’ the product of their labours. Trainers exploit this by way of emotional blackmail ‘you must do as I say because your horse needs this’ or outright threat ‘I will take your horse away if you not do what I want’. Emotion is therefore used as a point of control to secure consent to long hours, low pay, low status and lack of consultation on key employment changes. It ill behoves the employers to allow resistance on the part of stable staff which would risk ‘exposing the true nature of the employment relationship’ (Marlow and Patton 2002:535).

However, the fact that stable staff generally love ‘their’ horses affords their employers the further opportunity to manage them through their emotional involvement with the subject of their labours. In that sense, stable staffs’ emotional labour fits with Hochschild’s (1983) thesis that it is an exploitative and subordinating form of labour. Payne (2009) argues that emotional labour may also constitute skilled labour in what are otherwise regarded as low skilled jobs, for example in retail, hotels and hospitality. Interestingly, Respondent A6³⁸ held that stable staff were ‘at best semi-skilled’ while Respondent D4 regarded staff as skilled but acknowledged that this was a skill without

³⁷ Stable Lass interviewed at Haydock Park, February 2004

³⁸ Trainer interviewed at his stables in Epsom May 2000

formal recognition which allowed it to go un(der)valued. Payne (2009) defines emotion work as ‘feeling the right feeling for the job’ for example politeness to customers or displaying enthusiasm for a sales product. For stable staff, the ‘right feeling’ is not only to love horses but also to regard them as belonging to the individual member of staff, thus employers’ referring to ‘your horse’ that ‘you’ have to deal with in all situations, including giving up days off when required. This message is swallowed by stable staff who routinely referred to ‘my horse(s)’ [quotes], reflecting their predisposition to ‘love’ horses.

Control through the industrial relations machinery

The training of racehorses remains highly labour intensive, with staff costs a significant element in the costs of each trainer. In his submission to the Stable and Stud Staff Commission, Metcalf (2004) points out that trainers have an incentive to contain wage costs which comprise around 40% of the training fee paid by racehorse owners. However, they cannot address this by, for example, seeking lower paid staff from overseas since the NJC wage agreement is one of the Rules of Racing enforced by the BHA. Paying less than racing’s minimum wage agreement, if detected, can lead to withdrawal of the trainer’s license to train by the BHA.

Strinati (1982:10) supported the view that small capitals would encourage a unitarist orientation and:

The familial acceptance of inequality in tasks and rewards within a closely knit and integrated system that implies the exclusion or the heteronomy of trade unions.

This is also taken up by Newby (1977) within the context of the rural small firm and labour process. He found that farmers were able to persuade agricultural workers that low wages were part of the reality of working on the land, in a sense out of the control of the farmer.

Nevertheless, in order to maximise the valorisation process, the employer must find alternative ways of containing labour costs. Although it was recognised by Thompson (1983:44), that ‘the real power of capital over labour [tends] to be limited by the means at its disposal to subordinate the worker’ it is argued above that the principal means at the trainer’s disposal is a management ideology of the worker as low cost, unskilled, easily replaced, atomised and powerless. This has effectively been held in place during the last 30 years by the explicit rejection of both independent trade union recognition and strong union organisation, not only by employers but also by the workers themselves.

A comparison can be made here with farming employment where Newby (1975: 169) found that farmers were able to explain low wages away by blaming government cheap food policy and its impact on farming income. This

Performs a useful social function in both providing a plausible explanation to the workers which absolves the farmer of responsibility...by invoking a collective scapegoat which is far removed from the farm and is in no position to answer back.

In Phase A, the comments of trainers were telling and suggested that they did indeed ‘invoke a collective scapegoat’, which was not immediately at hand. For example, on the question of high housing cost in Newmarket, Respondent A2³⁹ argued that ‘Racing Welfare⁴⁰ or the BHB should help out more’.

He did not acknowledge that low wages directly contributed to the problem of affording decent housing. While on poor pay more generally, the expansion of the Racing Calendar was presented as a positive benefit and a way of addressing low pay. As trainer A5⁴¹ said:

Wages are so abysmal so increased racing means overtime thus there is a boost to income.

³⁹ Trainer interviewed at his stables in Newmarket May 2000

⁴⁰ A charitable body

⁴¹ Trainer interviewed at his stables in New market May 2000

Trainers held that someone other than them should be responsible for alleviating the stresses of longer working hours and increased racing. Respondent A11⁴² attributed this to the wider racing industry thus:

Appearance money⁴³ should pay for extra staff when needed.

More generally, Respondent A2⁴⁴ portrayed trainers as put upon by the industry at large. He believed that ‘trainers are propping up the industry’.

As already stated above, the work of training racehorses is very labour intensive and part of the employers’ motivation for control is control of wages. This has been achieved historically by categorically rejecting national collective bargaining, although there was union recognition in Newmarket that endured from the 1930s to the mid-1970s. Thereafter, with the obligation placed on trainers to accept national collective bargaining as an outcome of the 1975 strike, management control was reasserted and maintained by creating the SLA, then recognising the Association and effectively ejecting the TGWU. Oxenbridge et al (2002:270) writing about management control over relationships observe the ability of managers to choose whether or not to deal with certain union officials or to by-pass a more assertive and confident shop steward or full time officer in favour of a more compliant alternative. However, racing’s employers went a stage further by creating an industry-only association, which in 2001 was reinforced by the financial support given from racing revenues to the Association.

Respondent D2⁴⁵ stated that ‘employees are entitled to their “trade body” to represent their workplace needs’. However, she also was of the firm view that the SLA was the appropriate body, having sprung from the bosom of the industry. All trainers interviewed shared this belief, as did the National Trainers’ Federation, with the slightly

⁴² Trainer interviewed at his stables in Thirsk May 2000

⁴³ An industry payment to owners

⁴⁴ Trainer interviewed at his stables in Newmarket May 2000

⁴⁵ BHB Council Member interviewed in March 2003

dissenting voice of Respondent D4⁴⁶ whose view was that trainers ‘were generally not hostile to trade unions’. Whether this is the case, there is no evidence to suggest that the industry is rushing to re-embrace the TGWU which the Donoughue Commission (BHB 2004) suggested as a possible way to secure proper representation for staff. This suggests that trainers have gone beyond Marlow and Patton’s (1993) view that small employers imagine that the good working relationships within the firm obviated the need for third party intervention. Regulation then is to continue to be on the employers’ terms, despite or perhaps as a direct outcome of the (mal)functioning of the national collective bargaining machinery.

As outlined in Chapter 2, it proved difficult to uncover formal records of the proceedings of the NJCSS since its inception in 1975. Respondent D5⁴⁷ was unable to find any material that would be useful but had already referred the author to Respondent D4 who had been involved with bargaining on the employers’ side of the NJC for the 12 years before he was interviewed in October 2003⁴⁸. He revealed that the NJC held formal dual functions of collective bargaining and as an arbitration panel in individual disputes. However, he had no recollection of such disputes ever reaching that level and was doubtful whether staff and trainers were aware that this facility even existed. He also pointed out that the NTF had been criticised in the past for being a ‘closed shop’ and his experience was that it had often proved to be a ‘very secretive organisation’. He was not confident that trainers were fully aware of the functions of the NTF, referring back to the disputes machinery as an example. Nevertheless, he held the belief that ‘newer stables were more democratic places where staff were prepared to raise issues’.

With regard to the annual pay round, the normal practice in negotiations was that the SLA put in an annual pay claim on which the NTF consults its members and formulates

⁴⁶ NTF Council member interviewed in October 2003

⁴⁷ NTF Legal Officer interviewed November 2003

⁴⁸ Interviewed 16 October 2003

its response. An interview with Respondent D2⁴⁹ revealed that he more often than not met the SLA General Secretary ‘in a Little Chef on the A1’ to conduct negotiations. Whether this was entirely true, it was the view of Respondent D4 member that the SLA could have done better for its members over the years and moreover that the NTF had ‘taken advantage of the SLA’. He particularly cited the example of the deal struck on payments for time spent travelling to and from race meetings. This was paid at national minimum wage rates, not actual wage rates and certainly not at overtime rates. He was ‘amazed that he [the SLA National Secretary] accepted this’ and suggested that the National Secretary had been instrumental in suggesting this arrangement in the first place. This trainer believed that all race-associated hours away from the stables should be paid at overtime rate and that staff should get a free lunch at the racecourse. He was also surprised that the SLA had not tackled the issue of weekend working. This had reached epic proportions since 2000 where many stables required staff to work without a break for 14 weekends in a row. He went on to say that the National Secretary of the SLA was very good at giving employment law advice, ‘including to trainers’ though it was not clear whether this was dispensed in the context of individual cases being pursued by the SLA. It certainly did not seem to include advice that stables were regularly breaching the Working Time Regulations with regard to weekend working. Staff had not generally signed any waiver of their rights not to work excessively long hours, although, according to Respondent A18⁵⁰ some head lads at stables in Newmarket had agreed to be removed from WTR protection.

One interview was conducted at Warwick races in November 2003 with a trainer (Respondent E4⁵¹) from a small stables in Somerset that had six horses in training. He said that his was a small family firm that was heavily reliant on family members, although he did directly employ a travelling head girl. This trainer said he had seen

⁴⁹ Former Chief Executive of the NTF interviewed September 2003

⁵⁰ Head Lad interviewed in Newmarket May 2000

⁵¹ Trainer interviewed at Warwick racecourse November 2003

some SLA circulars, which he did pass on to staff but had the impression that staff did not bother to read them. He suggested that the experience for staff in very large stables, offering the example of the largest stables in the South West, was 'like a factory with so many horses' which meant in turn that it had to be more structured, with less of the family atmosphere and the friendships which inevitably build up between the trainer/staff and the owners of horses trained in very small stables. It was certainly the author's experience on visiting stables in 2000 that friendships built up between the trainer and the owners but that the trainer/owner/stable staff relationship remained very formal.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the need for employers to gain and maintain control of the labour process. It has found that trainers are able to resist the collective worker and continue to fragment worker solidarity through a combination of paternalism at the stables, simple direct control at the stables, Responsible Autonomy when going racing, consent through a deep staff attachment to the racehorse and the lack of positive challenge from through the collective bargaining machinery.

Trainers do not actually own all the means of production since they do not (generally) own the raw material, ie the racehorse; nevertheless, they behave as if they do. While it could be said that the racing labour process has remained frozen in time, the 'market imperative' does exist and compels trainers to seek out efficiencies in production. However, the ability to seek efficiency through tighter forms of control is constrained by the product itself, which produces a labour intensive production process. The only area where trainers can increase direct exploitation is through extending the working week, which has in fact happened in the case of Flat racing during the summer season.

Within racing, a paternalist ideology is coupled with a very traditional outlook, embodied in working practices that have remained largely unchanged since the 19th

century, and in vestiges of the master and servant relationship. Racing employers more closely align with the traditional model of paternalism, although it is not an exact alignment. Paternalism is facilitated by the close working relationship between trainer and stable staff and the fact that some staff will live onsite. Traditional paternalism is inextricably linked with simple management techniques and informal procedures which were found to be present at the level of the stables. Use of a paternalist control technique obscured the true nature of the employment relationship and legitimised a fundamentally unequal employment relationship.

At the level of the stables, a simple management structure meant direct management control by the trainer, evidence showing that this was sometimes harsh and overbearing. Direct control was supported by the daily visibility of the trainer, living alongside the stables and at least some of her/his workers. However, even for workers living 'out', there was little separation between work and home since they were most likely to live in racing communities. During the second part of the racing labour process, going racing, the approach of Responsible Autonomy was often to be observed since trainers could not practically expect to attend every race meeting. Stable staff then took over responsibility for particular horses, internalising the control mechanism as part of their racing duties and in the pride with which they handled this aspect of their work.

A particularly important and distinctive feature of control in this labour process is the ability of trainers to manufacture consent through the racehorse. It has already been noted in Chapter 5 that emotional labour is a significant in the racing labour process and that workers come into racing because of their love of horses. This is built on by the induction process which gives the message that workers must be prepared to accept long hours and low wages. The horse is the dominant feature daily working life which again supports trainers in securing consent. Emotion is therefore used as a point of control.

The final point of control is the employer-dominated National Joint Council for Stable Staff which has held sway over the employment relationship since 1975. As stated above, training racehorses is labour intensive and wages represent a substantial element of training fees and thus affect the trainer's ability to attract owners and their horses. Pay is an area where trainers seek particular control and trainers have been able to maintain low wages for want of robust collective bargaining and a challenge to their hegemonic control through strong trade union organisation. Although there were annual wage 'negotiations' with the Stable Lads' Association, the reality was that if the employers' side of the NJCSS decided not to meet these, there was little that the SLA could do to resist. Not only that, but there has been no effective challenge to the status quo since the 1975 strike.

There is no doubt that these employers have access to a range of control mechanisms, and use these in combination to dominate labour, most notably by manufacturing consent through the horse. Chapter 7 now moves on to consider the ways in which workers are able to resist the demands of capital and seek some control over the labour process for themselves.