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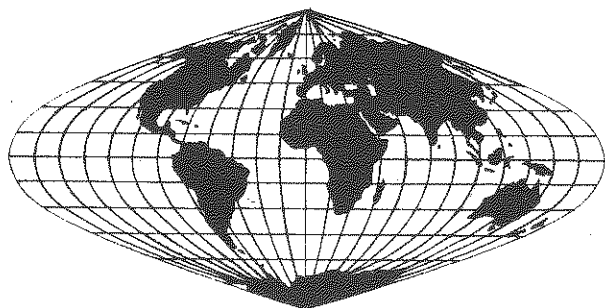
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# CORNELL/INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS STUDY

**BECAK DRIVERS:**

**THE PLIGHT OF A POOR GROUP  
IN URBAN INDONESIA**

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BECAK DRIVERS: THE PLIGHT OF A POOR  
GROUP IN URBAN INDONESIA

by  
Steven Tabor

Becak Drivers: The Plight of a Poor Group in Urban Indonesia<sup>1/</sup>

Steve Tabor

Generalities abound concerning the urban poor in contemporary Indonesia (Panpanek 1975, Lubis 1977). Although the poor as a group may be subjectively categorized in any number of ways, more concrete data is needed to position them in the social universe. The becak<sup>\*</sup> drivers are a poor urban group. Their earnings amount to, on average, Rp. 750 (\$1.20) per day. Spread over a family of five, this amounts to 24 cents per day, barely enough to meet the cash needs of the peri-urban household. To add to the growing body of information concerning the Indonesian poor, and becak drivers in particular, a field survey was conducted in Bogor from July thru October of 1981. The purpose of this study was not to provide an exhaustive description of the life of the becak driver, but to encourage sympathetic reflection of the complex plight of a poor marginal group in a small Indonesian urban center.

Two rounds of driver interviews were conducted, the first with 70 drivers and the second with 40. The first set of interviews, in which questions about social attitudes and political awareness were asked, were fairly lengthy. The second set of interviews were shorter and were more concerned with matters of economic aspirations and village background. The interviewees were randomly selected from several driver-clusters located throughout the city. In addition, open-ended interviews were conducted with several vehicle renters and with city officials.

Information on the plight of the becak drivers may be particularly important because they will probably soon disappear from the streets of Bogor. In an effort to improve urban traffic flows, the government is actively forcing the drivers to find new means of employment. Government officials cite the becak as a major cause of congestion, of hazardous road conditions and further, as a menace to passengers. In the government's eyes, the drivers are

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\* A becak is a three-wheel pedicab. Please see Appendix A for photos of the drivers and the becak.

difficult to control and, above all, are not modern (Marbun 1979, Jellinek 1978). In many aspects, the anti-becak campaign in Bogor is following the lead of the "clean-up Jakarta" model of former governor Ali Sadikin (Dick, 1981). Although Bogor officials may be imitating the Jakarta campaign, the results are at best mixed. For example, while the licensing of new vehicles is prohibited, the population of active becak drivers in Bogor has actually increased. However, unlike in Jakarta, the becak drivers in Bogor have not yet been pushed to the fringes of the city, although this is the aim of the Provincial government.

In spite of the fact that the becak drivers are being actively harassed by the authorities, they were surprisingly receptive to being interviewed. They were far less suspicious, fatalistic or cynical than, for example, many of the government employees who populate Bogor's numerous research institutes. On average, the drivers were fairly gregarious, open to questioning, and surprised that anyone was interested enough in their lot to take the time to study them.<sup>1/</sup>

#### The Research Site

Bogor is the kota madya, or administrative center, for the district of Bogor. In 1980, the population of the city was 240,000, with a district population of approximately two and a half million inhabitants. Bogor has long enjoyed the reputation of being a comfortable summer-home for capital-level politicians and scientific researchers.

At the turn of the 19th century, the Dutch colonial government moved the bulk of its administrative apparatus from Jakarta to Bogor because Bogor, or Buitenzorg as it was called by the Dutch, was a refuge from the disease-ridden atmosphere of Batavia. Following the transfer of the office of the Governor General in 1828, a series of zoning and boundary acts were passed to prohibit indigenous settlement in various parts of the city. The Dutch originally divided the city into four sections. The Chinese were located in the areas surrounding Jl. Suryakencana, and the Arab population was settled in Empang, just south of the center of the city. These areas rapidly became major centers for commerce and related forms of business activity. The Europeans displaced the kampung<sup>\*</sup> population in the northern area of the city near Jl. Gunung Agung,

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\* A kampung is a traditional urban settlement.

and the native population was confined to the lower-land kampungs in the southern portions of the city. Rapidly, the hub of motion became one of south to north and west to east as the native inhabitants and the Chinese moved to service the colonizing elites or to shop in the commercial quarters of the town. Commercialization in Bogor was somewhat decentralized and intensified with the opening of the Preanger line of the national railway in 1872. Markets were dispersed throughout the area from Jl. Suryakencana to Menteng, where the train terminal stopped.

At present, Bogor is still roughly divided according to the colonial design (Pemda Bogor, Vol. 1,2,3, 1972). Besides administrative offices, there is a nationally renowned agricultural college, several small colleges, and scores of State research institutes and foundations in Bogor. The largest industrial complex is owned by Goodyear, and the main shopping areas stretch from Jl. Mawar, to Pasar Baru on the northern side of the famous botanical gardens, Kebun Raya.

Bogor still serves as a cool, suburban retreat for powerful urban bureaucrats, and recently the sale and construction of new homes for their use has increased rapidly. Other minor bureaucrats are also moving to the suburbs. According to a recent estimate, nearly 20 percent of metropolitan Bogor's population commutes on a daily basis to Jakarta (Temple, 1975). However, the bulk of Bogor's populace makes their living from petty services, commerce and construction that serve the needs of the Bogor civil service/intelligentsia, the surrounding rural areas, and the various spillovers from Jakarta. The becak driver primarily earns his living servicing this sector.

#### Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Drivers

At present, there are 1,500 becaks registered in the city of Bogor. Another 500 are registered for use in rural areas throughout the district but are concentrated in the ever-expanding fringes of the city. There are roughly two drivers for each registered vehicle, one for the day shift and another for the night. Therefore, the becak industry probably provides employment for about three to four thousand drivers. There are many different patterns of becak operation but, in general, the vehicles are rented out by owners, repair centers or sub-contractors to drivers on a

day-to-day basis. The day is divided into two shifts, from 6:30 A.M. to 6:30 P.M. and from 6:30 P.M. to the following morning. An average rent of 400 Rp. (65¢ at 1981 U.S. prices) is paid for the day shift and a rent of 300 Rp. (48¢) for the night shift. The driver is expected to perform repairs, while the distributor is responsible for more substantial maintenance.

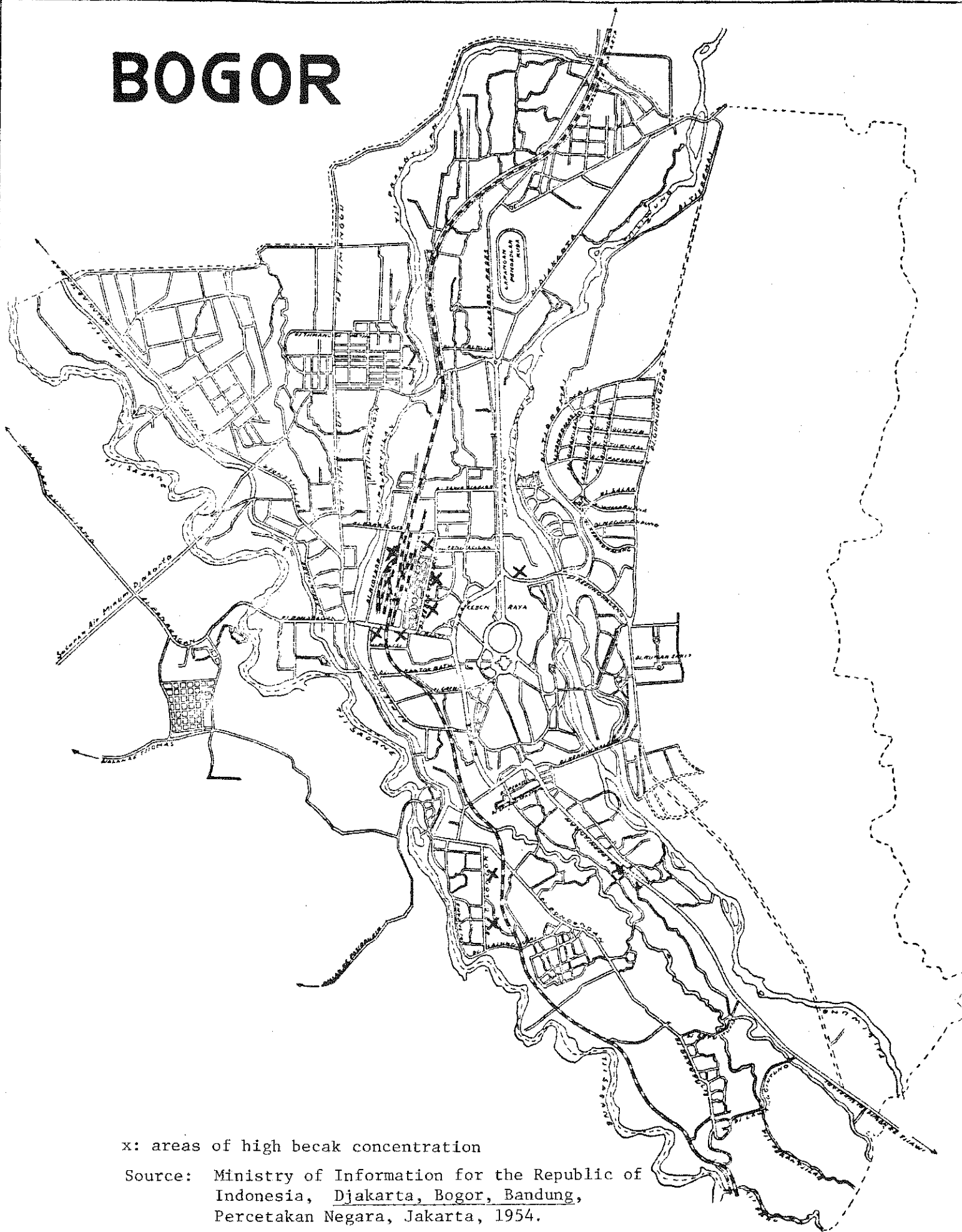
In a material sense, the becak drivers of Bogor are poor. Their average net income ranges from 500 to about 2000 Rp. per day (.80¢ to \$3.20). The drivers work an average of six to seven days a week. Many of them work for periods of several months at a time before making a return trip to their native villages. While driving a becak is physically demanding labor, the monetary rewards are above those offered for many agricultural tasks. For example, the average wage rate for a worker paid to hoe the rice fields in the rural areas of Bogor was 400 Rp. or less during the months in which the field survey was conducted. Although the daily income of the becak driver appears to be higher than the daily wage of a landless laborer, there was considerable variation in the earnings reported by the drivers.

Some of the variation in earnings reported by the drivers may have been caused by individual exaggeration. In nearly all cases, the daily expenditures reported by the drivers exceeded their incomes by 50 percent or more. The same drivers claimed, however, that they were rarely in debt. Even though income is far more freely discussed in urban Indonesia than, for example, in most urban American centers, there is a tendency to pose rather than report when it comes to questions of earnings in a recent period.

Another factor that may account for differences in earnings among drivers is age. Several drivers claimed that they were too old and could no longer attract customers because it was difficult to appear fit and sound. This theory was supported, to a certain degree, by the survey results, which indicate older drivers have a smaller income. For three groups daily earnings, the average age and level of education of the drivers were as follows:

<u>Daily Earnings (Rp.)</u>	<u>Average Age (Years)</u>	<u>Average Education (Years)</u>
0 to 500 (N=8)	40	3.6
501 to 1500 (N=38)	31	4.0
more than 1500 (N=22)	31	4.6

# BOGOR



x: areas of high becak concentration

Source: Ministry of Information for the Republic of  
Indonesia, Djakarta, Bogor, Bandung,  
Percetakan Negara, Jakarta, 1954.



In addition to differences in average age, there is also a slight positive association between earnings and years of education. Out of the 68 respondents, five had some education past the primary level, while eight respondents had no formal education at all. Although there is an apparent relationship between years of schooling and reported earnings, the average difference across earning groups was merely one year. It is highly unlikely that one additional year of schooling would significantly increase earning potential.

Aside from the variation in earnings, there are two additional factors that are important to note about the educational levels of the drivers: The first is that the average educational level is approximately four years of formal schooling. This means that, on average, the becak drivers have attained a higher educational level than that of most rural inhabitants of Bogor. However, this education does not allow them to compete for jobs in the white collar branch of the service sector. Second, and perhaps even more important, there were several drivers with middle-level formal education (SMP/middle-school) in the sample. Although the opportunities in rural areas to gain admission to middle-level schools are still highly limited, these findings suggest that middle-level schooling does not guarantee automatic access to high-status forms of employment.

Neither the income nor the education figures reveal very much about the socio-economic conditions of the drivers. While they can be regarded as middle-class relative to beggars, scavengers, and other homeless city dwellers, they are certainly not enjoying the Puncak-style\* fruits of development.

Most of the drivers maintain a home in a rural area of West Java. Many of the drivers cook with wood and draw their drinking water from wells. Some have electricity, a radio, and enough ability, time, earnings and interest to read a newspaper or a magazine occasionally. As can be seen from the tabulation of housing and asset conditions, most of the drivers live under spartan, but tolerable, conditions.

<u>Housing Materials</u>	<u>Percent in Each Category (N=70)<sup>3/</sup></u>
Paper	4.4
Wood/Bamboo	55.5
Plaster/Brick	28.6
Cement	7.4
Other	4.3

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\* Puncak is the name of a wealthy community near Bogor.

<u>Housing Materials</u>	<u>Percent in Each Category (N=70)</u>
<u>Lighting</u>	
Oil Lamps	89.4
Electric Lights	10.6
<u>Water Supply</u>	
River	4.7
Community Spout/Purchased	32.2
Well	56.9
Other	6.2
<u>Cooking Fuel</u>	
Wood	55.6
Kerosene	44.4
<u>Owns a Radio</u>	
Yes	30.6
No	69.7
<u>Reads Newspapers or Magazines (more than twice weekly)</u>	
Yes	30.3
No	61.9
No Reply	8.8

In most cases, the meager income of the becak driver is spread over a large number of dependents. The number of dependents may vary considerably depending on the age of the driver. A tabulation of the number of household dependents by percentage of drivers is as follows:

<u>Number of Dependents</u>	<u>Percent of Drivers (N=70)</u>
0 to 2	28.5
3 to 5	48.5
6 to 13	23.0

Out of the 70 respondents, six were unmarried and reported no dependents. In eight cases, the wife earned a cash income, and in nine cases, a child living in the household earned a cash income. In most cases, the driver is expected to provide the bulk of the cash income needed by the family. With an average number of four to five dependents each, 750 Rp. per day barely provides for

the day-to-day subsistence needs of the family. The salaries, living conditions, and minimal educational levels of the drivers are common to the entire strata of middle-level poor in Indonesia today.

Another attribute, ascribed to both becak drivers and the middle-strata poor in general, is the tendency to operate outside the government programs of economic assistance, in particular, the network of State credit facilities. This is also the case with the drivers in Bogor. When asked, "Who would you borrow from in a time of need?" roughly one third of the drivers replied that they had never been forced to borrow and had no plans to do so in the near future. Out of those who replied affirmatively, 14 said that they would borrow from a neighbor; 13 from a friend; eight from their parents; six from the becak owner; seven from a brother and four from a store. Only one driver replied that he would ask for a loan from a government-sponsored credit agency, and that was from BIMAS, an agricultural lending body.

The tendency to operate outside institutionalized channels of credit extends to repayment practices as well. Nineteen of the drivers replied that they would pay back their loans gradually as finances permitted; seven replied that they would return the loans in the form of cash; and nine drivers insisted that they would only pay the money back as long as there was no interest charge.

Although the becak drivers were generally operating outside the channels of State service, their clientele, judging from their appearance, probably were not. Most of the becak drivers replied that they would take anyone who wished to ride, but that their most frequent patrons were from the middle class (yang sedang) and the wealthy (yang kaya). Men were more likely than women to use their services, younger schoolchildren more frequently than university students, housewives far more than traders, and office workers more than anyone else. Unlike the situation in other cities (Forbes, 1978), the Bogor becak drivers did not have regular customers. They tended to circulate from area to area, sometimes for several weeks at a time, testing the rider load in different parts of the city. On average, the becak drivers have a good sense for who is rich, above average, and so forth. Most of them have worked at other jobs in the city before becoming becak drivers. Previous to their employment as drivers, the respondents held a variety of jobs as shown on the following page:

<u>Previous Occupation</u>	<u>Number</u>
Farmer/Fisherman	16
Trader/Merchant	24
Manual Laborer	8
Industry Worker	4
Craftsman	5
Passenger Attractor	5
Guard/Food Preparer	4
First Job	2

When the respondents were asked why they became becak drivers they replied that:

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Number</u>
No other work/better than unemployment	34
Lost his capital or his firm went broke	17
This is work for the off-season	6
Can set your own hours	2
Because of fate	2
It is enjoyable, satisfying work	5
Other	2

The results are somewhat at odds with the traditional proposition that the becak driver is a recent migrant to the city from the rural areas or a circular migrant with little urban experience (Forbes 1978, Temple 1975, Hidayat 1978, and Hugo 1977). In fact, as we have seen, many of the drivers in our sample had held other forms of urban employment before becoming becak drivers. Frequently, becak driving was chosen as profession because trade ventures went bankrupt, public works project finished, or other experiences led to a downward climb on the urban occupation ladder. It is true, however, that most of the drivers are circular migrants, in the sense that they maintain a home outside of the city proper.

Out of 69 respondents, 34 came from the kabupaten of Bogor, 24 came from from other areas of West Java, eight from other parts of Java, one from Sumatera, and only two from the city of Bogor. Surprisingly, few of the drivers had worked in Jakarta before coming to Bogor -- most couldn't conceive of working under the competitive conditions of the nation's capital.

Nearly half of the drivers worked at some other job on a seasonal or occasional basis. Most were part-time farmers, a few were builders, two were night watchmen, and two assisted their wives in preparing food in a warung.<sup>\*</sup> The wages earned from supplementary work opportunities tended to exceed wages from becak driving by a factor of two to three times. Clearly the drivers were not only tied to rural areas by supplementary employment opportunities.

Most drivers regularly returned to the rural areas to be with their families. Sixty percent of the drivers replied that they return home at least once a week to visit their families. Another 15 percent said that they go home once every two weeks, while the rest said that they either work continuously or go home as needs arise. For these drivers, returning home is an opportunity to remit a portion of their earnings to their family, to visit their children, and to maintain community ties. It is a fairly expensive journey to make on a weekly basis. On average, a driver would spend 550 Rp. (.88¢) weekly on colt, bus, or bemo fares to return home for a day or two. This amounts to nearly 15 percent of the weekly earnings of the becak driver, but is considered as essential an expenditure as food or a daily smoke.

Most drivers rent the becak that they use each day. Not surprisingly, drivers are somewhat divided over the merits and demerits of renting versus owning and operating. Exactly half of the drivers interviewed stated that they preferred to rent the becak while the other half felt that ownership would be far more preferable. Those who preferred the rental arrangement said that they were not accountable for the repair cost, didn't have to attend to administrative matters, could switch jobs easily and, as several drivers stated, "one works harder if you have to pay rent on a daily basis." On the other side, those who preferred ownership pointed out that one would not have to pay daily rent, could work whenever and wherever one wished, and would have a better chance of earning a decent living.

The becak drivers were united on one point. None of them wished their children to grow up and become becak drivers or small merchants (pedagang kaki lima). A third of the drivers questioned hoped that their children would eventually find office work; 10 percent hoped that their children would become big traders; 15 percent simply wished their offspring to find an easy source of money; 15 percent wanted their children to find work that

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\* A small food stall.

was halal (Islamically proper) and 10 percent replied that any work is alright --as long as it is better than that of their parents. Only one driver explicitly stated that he wished his child to become a government worker. Apparently there was little hope that their children would be able to enter government service.

Considering the occupation and living conditions of drivers, and the lack of opportunity for advancement, even for their children, one would expect the drivers to be bitter about national development trends. This is not the case. With respect to patterns of national development, the group is not fatalistic in the culture of poverty sense, or angered, in the mass-line case, by the obvious disparities in wealth and privilege in the society around them. When asked if any of the signs of national development, such as new buildings, projects, or social services, were of any personal benefit to them, all of the drivers that responded, responded affirmatively.<sup>4/</sup> The changes in Bogor over the past ten years that the drivers reported as having direct, immediate use were:

	<u>Number</u>
Roads are better/working conditions improved	18
Don't know/no answer	17
More job opportunities	7
New public schools for the children	6
Everything looks nicer/more orderly	5
Customers for the new traders	2

In addition, one driver answered that development was advantageous, "because of all the new shiny cars on the streets," while another replied that, "there is a certain amount of financial security now because, if you lose everything else, you can always sell rocks to the government for their public works project." Becak drivers are only interested in "development" to the extent that it directly affects personal material concerns.

Many of the drivers consider national matters such as price stabilization, oil revenue and so forth, to be something for official chatter only. While many drivers are certainly streetwise, they are also politically provincial. From a survey of 70 drivers, 35 percent did not know the date of Indonesia's

independence or the name of the vice-president, and 70 percent were unable to name any of the cabinet ministers. To one of the questions, "Who is the President (Siapa Presiden Kita?)," nearly a third of the drivers replied, "Bung Karno" (Sukarno). After being questioned again with, "No, the one who is still living (Yang masih hidup)," all the drivers were able to name the President. The becak drivers seemed to be politically uninformed and only marginally interested in the affairs of the nation-state.

This lack of "political" interest is at odds with the oft-portrayed image of the becak drivers as possible violent enemies of the present political regime (Papanek 1975 and Kompas 1981). It is true that the drivers occasionally resort to violence as a means of problem solving, but the causes are likely to be independent of national-level political objectives. On the basis of the material presented so far, it is difficult to imagine why becak drivers would risk violence as a means of conflict resolution. Anti-authoritarian violence is rare and dangerous in present day Indonesia. The risks associated with rioting include job loss, endangerment of family members, or more severe punishment. There are, however, several factors that tend to promote rioting as a method of problem solving. These are: recognition that the job is a low status position, long hours and economic nervousness associated with waiting for customers, and a desire to maintain group solidarity. None of these factors necessitate violence, but they tend to contribute to an atmosphere in which it sometimes appears to be the most rational solution.

An example of an unpublicized, anti-authority, becak incident took place in Bogor in November of 1981. On a Thursday evening, a driver who was only on his second day of work, picked up a young male passenger near a mosque on Jl. Merdeka. After driving the passenger to the outskirts of the city, the rider demanded that the driver stop the vehicle and turn over all of his money. The driver refused, whereupon the passenger beat the driver over the head, took his money and ran off. After attending to his injuries, the driver returned to the repair shop and told the becak owner what had transpired. The owner sent another driver to get the police who came and took a statement. That night, while the police were searching for the mugger, the injured driver relayed his story to the other drivers in the neighborhood. Coincidentally, the mugger was apprehended that same night, having earlier

been betrayed by a friend. When the drivers heard that the mugger was in the local jail, a small group decided to investigate to see if this was actually the guilty party. By now it was after midnight, and the police station was operating with only a small crew of officers and station workers. When the police refused to show the suspect to the drivers, an argument broke out. By two a.m. nearly 200 drivers were gathered at the police station, some demanding that the prisoner be turned over to them for justice. A shouting match between drivers and officials ensued until, by 2:30, additional military police reinforcements were called in to disperse the crowds. Only a few minutes after the troops arrived, the drivers had vanished -- as quickly and mysteriously as when they had first gathered.

What is interesting about this incident, is that it typifies the ability of the drivers to rally and disperse a crowd through informal communication channels and to defend what they perceive as their collective right to dignity and a safe and fair working environment. Riots of this kind are not uncommon in Bogor but they are not considered newsworthy and are handled quietly and cautiously by the local police. What this implies is that, only in a very local sense, are the drivers politically motivated. From discussions with drivers and renters\* it appears that riots in recent years occurred because drivers were forced to leave a certain territory, were attacked by muggers, were the "victims" of a car crash, or were hauled in "unjustly" by the local police. Interestingly enough, the drivers did not report or had not heard of any actions taken against the owners of the becaks.

Many drivers feel that operating a becak is an insulting profession. Twenty one of the 70 drivers replied that they had been looked down upon, and openly insulted or angrily shouted at by prospective passengers. Drivers complained that their query, "Want a becak (mau becak)?," was ignored or answered with stares in the opposite direction. The drivers realize that they are easily singled out by their wardrobe -- short-pants and make-shift rain gear, and that this is a source of great amusement to school children. Furthermore, in the mass media, or more importantly, the mass media that reaches the warungs, it is fashionable to laugh at the becak drivers.<sup>5/</sup>

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\* In this text, the term renter is defined as the distributor of the vehicle.



Feelings of public ridicule are given ample time to fester. The average driver will carry four to ten loads of passengers in the course of a day. As the average two kilometer ride lasts for about 15 minutes, this amounts to about an hour to two and a half hours daily of actual mobile labor. The remainder of the day is spent scouting for passengers, waiting in hopefully popular spots, talking with other drivers, or simply staring off into space. During the hottest periods of the day, if there are no passengers in sight, the drivers will wait in the shade or in a foodstall. After sunset, when most of the residents of Bogor have already retired for the day, a swarm of drivers pass up and down the main streets of town trying to find one last passenger so that they can earn enough to pay the day's rent. The nature of the work is such that there are several periods of the day when the driver must sit, conserve his energy, wait, and hope that there will be enough demand for his service to earn enough to provide for the days needs. Day-to-day insecurity, in combination with poor living conditions, encourages resentment towards those who have steady jobs and look down on the drivers.

In contrast to the wild, free-for-all competition among the other types of urban public transport, the becak drivers operate with far more of a visible degree of group solidarity. At the markets and on the major streets, they form lines and wait for customers to select a driver. When a driver is struck by a car, or any other form of motorized vehicle, a group of drivers will rally to his support, often demanding that the driver of the motorized vehicle pay reparations immediately, regardless of who was at fault. In these cases, peer assistance saves the drivers from energy-wasting forms of competition and from what they perceive as inevitable losses to motorized vehicles.

#### Industry Relations: Capital/Labor on a Small Scale

The relationship between the vehicle owners and drivers is fairly unique and provides an interesting glimpse into the capital/labor relationships in a small-scale industry. As other studies have suggested, the becak industry is primarily under the control of native (pribumi) owners, not the Chinese (Dick, 1981). In Bogor, there was only one well-known Chinese Becak owner, and he rented out nearly 50 vehicles a day. Secondly, there is a high degree of competition among becak owners. From an interview with 70 drivers, 37 different owners and renters were named. The median number of becaks rented out per proprietor was 25, with a range from one to 60 vehicles. The most

common system of organization is for an owner to rent his vehicle to a repairman (bengkel) who then rents the becak out to the drivers. In certain cases, individuals with many vehicles will hire a repairman and rent them out themselves.

Because of the insecurity of becak operations, the turnover on fixed-investment is astonishingly fast. At present, a one to two year old becak sells for an average of 110,000 Rp. (\$176). Renting his vehicle to a repairman/collector, the owner can expect to earn between seven and nine thousand rupiah per month. In less than two years, the fixed costs of the vehicles are recovered and the remainder, less licensing fees, is profit. Bengkel are responsible for the vehicle upkeep and variable expenses resulting from negotiations with local authorities. Even so, they still do fairly well. At a 75 percent usage rate, a 6,000 Rp. annual repair cost, and a daily rent received of 500 Rp., a bengkel can gross 10,750 Rp. (\$17.20) per month. After rent and administrative fees, the repairer can generally net two to four thousand Rp. per month on each vehicle. Generally, the repairman/collector also rents out vehicles of his own, so that the total returns are increased by the rental of his own vehicles.

As mentioned above, the frustrations of the drivers are rarely vented at the owners or the distributors of the vehicles. On occasion, a driver will abandon a vehicle on the outskirts of the city or a group of drivers will demand an extension on their rent because work has been slow. These are mainly isolated incidents, demonstrating very little of the collective solidarity displayed by the drivers in the face of more public forms of humiliation. One reason that the drivers do vent their frustrations against the owners is that such actions would jeopardize their jobs. There are, however, other reasons besides worker conservatism. These are best illustrated by a description of driver relationships.

In many cases, the relationship between the bengkel and the driver are quite special and can be divided into two basic types. The first type of becak renter is typified by Pak Salim. Pak Salim came to Bogor from rural Sukabumi when he was in his teens and found a job driving a becak. After two years, he was lucky enough to obtain a job on a State road-building project. He worked on the road building project for several months and then realized

that the local officials were withholding the bulk of his wages for no apparent reason. He quit that job, began to work making a snack food (emping) but was judged to be too weak for physical labor and was fired. He returned home to his village, worked on his father's farm and found construction jobs in the off-season. After three years, he decided to sell some of his land and his house and move to Bogor. With the proceeds from the sale, he bought three becaks and began to drive and rent out the two others. After a few years, he managed to save enough money to buy two more becaks and, through the contacts he made while driving a becak years ago, was able to open a repair shop and rent out both his vehicles and those of his new found associates. In mid-1981, Pak Salim was renting out a fleet of 45 becaks, nine of which were his own. He was, by kampung standards, fairly affluent.

Pak Salim allowed anyone who seemed honest to rent his vehicles. His drivers were from various places in West Java, with very few coming from the same village. His cardinal rule was that if a driver failed to pay rent three times, he was no longer allowed to use the vehicles. He provided the drivers with a form of makeshift shelter in his yard and directed them to a neighbor's warung for food. He frequently lent small sums of money to the drivers for important holidays and, if a driver died while working for him, would contribute 1,000 Rp. to the deceased driver's family. Past that, Pak Salim's relations with the drivers were quite business-like. If a driver met with trouble with the local authorities because of problems with a population card or other administrative transgressions, Pak Salim would go to the police station to recover the vehicle, while the driver would be left to fend for himself. Even so, Pak Salim was regarded as a fair and honest renter -- a man who hardly ever complained when one of his vehicles was damaged by a driver.

An interesting contrast to Pak Salim is Pak Sidik. Pak Sidik is in his early forties and operates a small rental/repair operation on the outskirts of the city. Pak Sidik is from Central Java, and was educated in a Taman Siswa school. When he found that there was no employment available in his village, he prepared to move to Jakarta. He made it as far as Bogor where he was able to contact a friend from a neighboring village. This friend introduced him to another neighboring villager operating a becak business. He worked as a becak driver for nearly nine years until he developed a severe eye infection.

Pak Sidik's ailment forced him to give up driving, visit several doctors and wear very heavy glasses. When his medical disability occurred, Pak Sidik's kampung neighbors lent him money for medical expenses and Rp. 13,500 (in 1970 Rp.) to buy a becak. Realizing that he would be unable to drive the vehicle himself, Pak Sidik made contacts with a retired civil servant, a madrasah<sup>\*</sup> teacher, and a retired army officer and arranged to have them rent their vehicles through him. Through contacts in his village, he invited 12 young men to come to Bogor and work as drivers. Ten years later, he still rents the 12 becaks to 12 young men from his village.

All of Pak Sidik's drivers eat the food that his wife prepares. He charges the drivers a fee for the food but insists that there is no profit involved and that the workers eat the same food that he does. The drivers work for three out of every four weeks, returning to the villages for their off-week. During their period in Bogor, five or six of the drivers will sleep with Pak Sidik, his wife and their two children in their three-room house. Rather apologetically, Pak Sidik explained that only the nice drivers could share his crowded quarters, the rest were housed in his yard or in neighbor's homes. The housing service was provided for free. Frequently, Pak Sidik would lend money to the drivers for village-related expenses, although he complained that his wife opposed his policy of no-interest loans. Since she held all of the family's funds, it would be difficult to lend too much more money. Pak Sidik's drivers were generally fearful enough of the Bogor city authorities to stay out of trouble, yet when there were problems with the police, Pak Sidik would go to the station and intercede on their behalf. He felt that being nearly blind gave him an advantage in dealing with the authorities. While Pak Sidik was not overly wealthy by kampung standards, he was able to repay the loan to his neighbors, send his children to a State school, purchase a cassette player and a television, and reinforce the structure of his house with bricks. Pak Sidik accredited most of this affluence to the frugality of his wife, a small, but timely inheritance, and fate.

These two brief descriptions are interesting because they serve to highlight some of the more important linkages between the driver and the renter.

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\* A madrasah is an Islamic school.

In both cases, the renter had only a limited amount of control over his operation because he was required to make a monthly rental payment to owners. The criss-crossing of the channels of ownership and control, from the original owner to the bengkel (distributor) to the driver acted to diffuse the profitability of the venture. Secondly, in both cases the renters had had some previous experience driving a becak and had been fortunate enough to build their own small empires. Both bengkels said that they could understand the frustrations of the drivers, since driving a becak was an insulting profession. The ability to empathize with the drivers, based on past experience, undoubtedly helped maintain the legitimacy of the bengkel to the drivers.<sup>7/</sup> Third, in both cases, the bengkels were able to accumulate enough to make several major purchases. These purchases were not hidden from drivers, but were kept in prominent places in the home, as if to invite a certain amount of respect for the "fate" of the owner.

Where these two cases clearly diverge, is in the maintenance of village ties and the practices of driver selection and protection. In general, it seemed that, where a premium was attached to the maintenance of village ties by bengkel, loans would come easier, working conditions were slightly more stable, and, most importantly, the bengkel would act as a mediator between the drivers and the civil authorities.<sup>8/</sup> When bengkels and drivers from the same village disagreed, it was difficult for the drivers to produce complaints that would not be equated with an assault on a fellow villager. As expected, where village ties had weakened to the point of becoming irrelevant with regards to laborer-renter relations, the protective alliance of the bengkel shifted to the local government (Rt-neighborhood, Kota Madya-city, and Kabupaten-district) and the police force at the expense of the drivers.

#### The Extinction of the Becak Driver

One factor that makes the becak industry an appealing area for anthropological investigation, is that it allows a view of the process of occupational extinction. The macroeconomic aspects of the official phasing-out campaign have been discussed elsewhere (Dick 1981, and Hidayat 1978). Suffice it to say, the banning of the drivers will have a severe negative impact on employment opportunities in the informal sector and may harm those who depend primarily on becak drivers as a means of transport. On paper, the phasing out

of the drivers seems to be rather clear cut. No new licenses are to be issued, and the drivers are to be encouraged to accept alternative employment or training (Hidayat, 1978, and Pemda Bogor 1972). This is not exactly the way the process is working out on the streets.

Active State campaigning to outlaw the becaks has been ongoing since 1977 and hails back to decisions made in early 1972 (Pemda Bogor, 1972). The most noticeable feature of the campaign is the designation of off-limits areas by the mayor's office and a Rencana Pembatasan Becak (Becak Limiting Plan). Actually, there are two types of banned areas; those that are formally posted and those that are simply understood to be risky areas. For example, the area north of Kebun Raya to the entrance of the toll road on Jl. Gunung Agung is posted as prohibited to becak traffic, while the stretch of road in front of the military compound on Jl. Merdeka is only informally off-limits. The difference here is primarily one of semantics. In both regions, the drivers realize that they are in danger of police harassment. The difference between the posted and unposted restricted zones is that the new drivers will generally not have enough "street sense" to avoid the latter areas.

Other forms of informal harassment also exist. Frequently, a police officer will come to a crowded market street, demand that the drivers line up neatly away from the main traffic flow and then, if there are more than a handful of drivers present, wave away any new drivers that wish to take a place in line. In this way, the police act to keep the shopping areas relatively becak-free and minimize the opportunities of the drivers to obtain fares from population-dense areas.

Another means of marginalizing the drivers is through direct personal intimidation. An estimated 50 percent of the becaks in Bogor are becak gelap, or non-licensed vehicles. Any driver can potentially be stopped by the police, asked for his population card (K.P.), his permit to operate a becak, and the vehicle's registration form (S.N.K.). The odds that the driver does not have one or more of the above in order is very high. Generally, this harassment ends in a small payoff and nothing more. However, when the driver and the police are unable to negotiate an agreement, the driver can be taken into custody, the vehicle impounded, and a messenger sent to retrieve the vehicle's owner. When the driver is in police custody, he is in danger of losing his population card, being accused of committing any of Bogor's unsolved petty crimes, and being expelled from the city.

A related form of direct confrontation is the impoundment of vehicles that lack lamps or permits. Since 1979, all becaks that operate in the evening are required to have some form of lighting. Perhaps only one in 20 of the operating vehicles actually do have lights. The others are "technically" subject to impoundment with mandatory fines if they are found to be without lights. Several owners complained that city officials try to show that they are serious about the phasing out of the industry by conducting periodic campaigns and impounding vehicles that do not have lights.

A more serious problem for the drivers and the owners is that many do not have registration papers (surat estengka), kabupaten operating papers (S.N.K.), or a city operating permit (ijin usaha) for their vehicles. Since 1979, the kabupaten office has refused to issue any new permits for operation of the becaks within the kabupaten bounds. They have also changed permit renewal procedures so that each permit must be updated every year rather than every five years as was previously the case. Registration papers for the becak, which are of the utmost importance if the owner wishes to recover an impounded vehicle, are only obtainable on the Jakarta black market for an estimated fee of, in mid-1981, 50,000 Rp. Thus, to obtain title, or to transfer the title to the vehicle costs half as much as the original outlay for the vehicle.

While there are many channels for bureaucratic intimidation that can be applied against the bengkel, these appear to be used sparingly and are most often directed against newcomers to the business. Furthermore, because of the frequent passing of uang rokok (smoke money) from the owners to the lower rank police officers, a happy minimum of vehicle incarceration is maintained.

Another form of harassment is public admonishments by the mayor at periodic meetings. The mayor (wali kota) frequently calls a group of owners and bengkels to his office. According to owners that have attended these meetings, the general format is a discussion of the safety and social hazards of becak operation, a discussion of the importance of proper registration of the vehicles, and a questioning of owners about their knowledge of any reported "evil-people" that may be working for them. Invariably, the mayor states that it is his desire to free the streets of Bogor from the becaks and encourages the owners to seek other forms of employment for

themselves and their drivers. Since these public proclamations have been going on for years, the owners tend to interpret them as hollow threats. After this rather elaborate and boring discussion of transport policy and public safety, the conversation is shifted to other topics.

Starting as early as November of 1981, in these semi-public meetings the owners were asked to give their opinions of the government political party (GOLKAR) and were instructed to see that their drivers did not participate in any riots or other actions that would disrupt the upcoming election. The owners were told they would be held responsible for any political disruptions initiated by their drivers.

What is interesting about this marginalization process is that the rate of extinction among drivers, bengkel, owners and government officials is so noticeably negotiated. Reintegration of the drivers into other forms of employment, as national planning documents call for (Hidayat, 1978), is hardly ever mentioned. Instead, the marginalization process seems to be a time of high profits for the lower level officials and police officers who carry out the phasing out policies. Furthermore, in spite of overt government efforts, there has been a steady (albeit unrecorded) growth of becaks in Bogor over the last five years; even though there is more competition from the less expensive forms of motorized public transport, such as the small motorized Bemos, the Dihatsus (Dick, 1981). In this sense, phasing out activities merely entail a transfer of profit from the industry (owners, renters, drivers) to the state (local bureaucrats and police).

#### Conclusions and Categorizations

We have found that the becak drivers put in long hours, earn low returns, and live in a day-to-day existence that provides them with enough income to support their families, barring extraordinary financial needs. For many of the drivers, becak driving is not their preferred form of occupation. Many of them came to be drivers because of the loss of a previous urban job. The becak sector serves as a relatively easy access form of employment and as a cushion for those who have lost more lucrative urban jobs.

The drivers have a confounding, and sometimes confusing patronage relationship with the bengkels that can, depending on the degree of traditional village ties, serve to diffuse the hostilities that can arise because of the separation of the worker from control over his productive means. By spreading



ownership, control, possession, and risk throughout the industry, class-based hostilities are diffused. Feelings of public humiliation, of being taken advantage of by local authorities, and of unfair competition from motorized vehicles may occasionally be met with collective violence. For these reasons, state officials consider them a public menace. The drivers are a "politically" volatile and dangerous group -- in a fashion that is very difficult for the central Indonesian government to control. In Bogor, nearly all of the drivers interviewed felt that national development was "good" and was personally of use to them. They were impressed by what they saw, but did not really understand who, in Jakarta, was making it possible. In Bogor, and perhaps in other urban areas of the nation, the marginalization of the becak industry involves trade-offs between industry income, the web of phase-out mechanisms, and the collective temperment of drivers whose reactions are dangerously difficult to gauge.

In order to generalize from this situation, it is best not to assume that other urban situations are identical to the Bogor case. Instead, the driver's experiences can be transferred to a broader context by placing them within a societal framework. Four popular categorizations include: members of the rural floating mass (Papanck, 1975), bazaar-economy style movers (Geertz, 1976), little men or non-productive surplus consumers in a petty commodity mode of production (Kahn, 1980), and proto-proletariats operating in the informal sector of the economy (McGhee, 1977). Each of these categorizations hinges upon a subjective organization of the primary elements of the Indonesian economy and of the position and role of the urban poor within that structure.

Probably the Becak drivers of Bogor could be squeezed into any of the aforementioned theoretical constructs. The bulk of the drivers do hail from rural areas, engage in personalized driver-customer transactions, subsist off the productive surplus of the sector of the economy dominated by petty-commodity production, and, because of the structural roots of Indonesian impoverishment, are unable to enter into the more preferred, wage labor exploitation process in the advanced capitalist sector. However, there are several other features that could be used to define the social position of the drivers that are excluded or, at best, neglected in these theoretical schemes.

In terms of social location, it should be emphasized that the becak drivers are a prime example of a group subject to joint, negotiated exploitation by elements of the local ruling class. Vehicle owners, distributor/repair shops and agents of the State all profit from becak driver remittances, which are constrained by the limits of industry profitability, administrative feasibility and social order. Each of these agents can control a portion of the production process. The owner of the vehicles has the first and final proprietary rights regarding the allocation of the becak; the distributor/renter defines the entry and exit requirements of the industry and the essential usage contract or set of driver obligations, while the officials of the state can reduce the profitability of specific segments of the industry. This diffusion of control does more than simply spread profits. From the perspective of owner-laborer relations, this diffusion serves to dilute class-based hostilities. To state it more simply, from the vantage point of the drivers, no clearly identifiable group appears to control the production process.

While the economic structure does act to diffuse class-directed hostility, at the level of the group, violent demonstrations of displeasure, still occur. It is probably easier to eliminate reasons for becak drivers riots, than to isolate a clear set of proximate causes. To begin with, the drivers are not acting on behalf of any larger organized political force. Most of them are, in fact, unaware of who their national leaders are and would be hard-pressed to blame them for their misfortunes. Secondly, as mentioned above, the drivers do not seem to direct violence against the more immediate controllers of the means of production.

One possible cause of the becak drivers protest activities, is a desire to maintain some semblance of mutual respect in a social atmosphere that is otherwise dominated by signs of humiliation. The drivers are laughed at by schoolchildren, joked about by humorists, snarled at by high-class pedestrians, and knocked about by thieves, police and motorized vehicles. The becak driver work role is, because of its connection with feudal forms of subjugation, popularly considered to be an embarrassing, or laughable form of economic activity. The drivers expect (or even more importantly, are prepared to defend) the amount of respect that a civil, urban Bapak (father/patron) would bestow upon his anak buah (children/social clients). Instead, those that they hold in some esteem, such as civic officials, religious leaders, government workers, and almost anyone with a higher education, may ignore their cries of "mau becak?" (ride

a becak?) or even more derogatory, may yell at them in a public place. For a becak driver, a hard days work will be much the same as an easy day -- long hours, waiting in the sun and a few moments of relaxation after the driver has made enough to pay the days rent. With such limited material horizons, the maintenance of pride takes on a pronounced importance to the drivers. For those who live between the country and the city, the pride of the worker is defended at the level of the immediate group and is, in the case of the becak driver, mediated through the preservation of the sector itself.

#### Postscript: Assumptions and Methodology

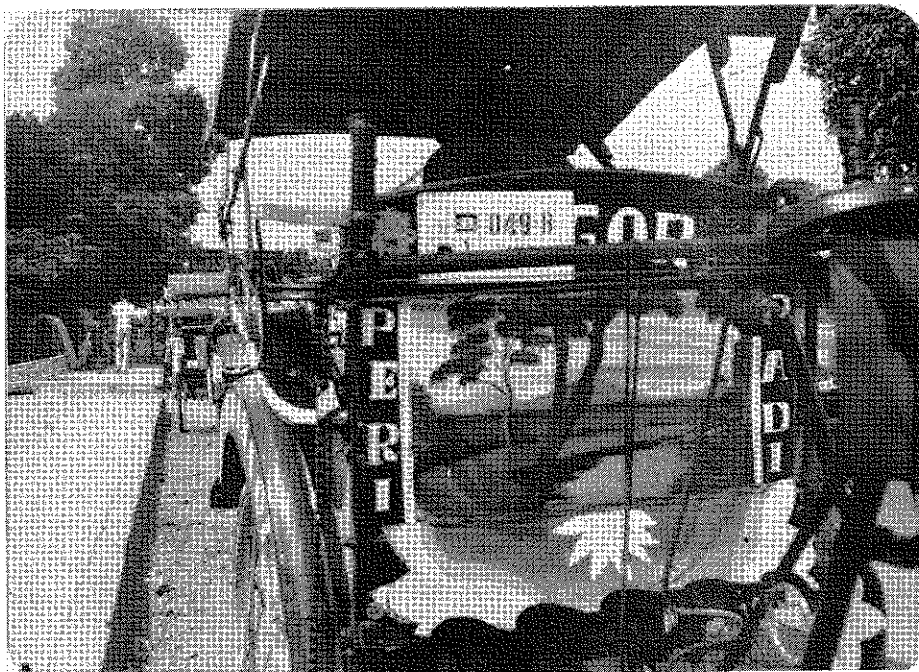
The conclusions that are offered and the data used to support those conclusions are, as was previously stated, drawn from a series of structured interviews conducted in Bogor in mid-1981. The nature of the research methodology is such that, apriori, a number of important limitations or research biases, are built into the project.

This study has focused on the becak industry in a small provincial city of Java. One of the clear assumptions of this project is that the participants in this sector are what they appear to be; in other words, drivers are drivers, owners are owners and so on. Furthermore, we are assuming that attitudinal variables are strongly conditioned by the respondents experience in the becak sector. What we have excluded is, in many cases, the cultural staff of categorical determination. Because of the limitations of the research design, we are unable to determine the role of kinship ties, the importance of ethnic divisions within the ranks of drivers, and the perceptions on the part of the drivers as to the permanency of this occupation. Most importantly, we saw the becak drivers as if they were drivers, whether or not they perceived themselves as such. In one sense, we are committing the same error that many neoclassical economists make when they go out to the field, interview a set of third-world peasants with a survey designed for capitalist profit-maximizers, return to the laboratory, and conclude that, yes, the farmers are capitalist profit-maximizers. Many becak drivers may see themselves as small-farmers, petty traders, as villagers out for a taste of the city life, an extension of the kin-groups economic unit or, for those with more of a taste for the fantastic in their Indonesian ethnography, as some sort of personification of a Wayang<sup>\*</sup> hero. This being the case, addressing

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\* A traditional Javanese chronicle.

these individuals as becak drivers or, assuming that their responses may be grouped together because of their shared experiences as drivers is flatly incorrect. The author's own subjective reaction is that the becak experience did provide the drivers with a common experience, but that many elements of the research are still missing. This means that the conclusions we have offered are tentative and are based on an incomplete set of data. Nonetheless, if actual banning efforts do take place at a more rapid pace, this may be the last glimpse into the lives of the Bogor becak drivers. While their lives are undoubtedly more varied and complex than we can hope to depict, part of the story is perhaps better than none at all.



A Sundanese becak driver waiting for passengers. Note the distinctive graphics on the back of the becak.

The fruits of waiting--becak drivers and their passengers. In this mid-day photo, all of the passengers are rather fashionably dressed women and their families.



A becak driver competing for traffic space with bimos, colts, dihatsus, and motor-cycles near Pasar Mawar.

## FOOTNOTES

1. See page one for explanation of footnote 1.
2. This does have to be qualified somewhat. The bulk of the interviews were conducted by a Mr. S., an exceedingly polite Central Javanese researcher who was able to develop a good rapport with the drivers. The interviews were conducted during low work periods of the day and the drivers were offered a nominal compensation for the time they spent being interviewed. Although the drivers were told that this was merely a research exercise, several drivers felt that something sinister was afloat because the only other time they had ever been interviewed was during the anti-communist purges of the 1960s.
3. These figures pertain to the drivers permanent residence, which is generally a peri-urban area. In most cases, this is not where they reside during the prolonged times of driving in Bogor.
4. Development is a fairly nebulous term. While it is commonly used by national political elites, it is rarely appreciated by the becak drivers.
5. The comic artist Djodjon is very popular in the warung. One of his humor cassettes that was popular during the fall of 1981 was Djodjon belajar Sekolah (Djodjon studies schooling). In it, a reference was made to a student becoming a becak driver. This drew a loud canned laugh from the audience on the tape.
6. The legitimacy of the renter in the eyes of the drivers is important because the drivers are not operating out of a position of complete dependency. Experienced drivers are able to obtain driver-positions with other renters, although the competition for these jobs is considered to be fierce.
7. These conclusions derive from informal/relatively unstructured interviews with several renters, owners and drivers in October and November 1981.

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