ICFTU Conference for African trade unionists:

international solidarity or paternalism?

Drawing together more than 100 experienced African and European trade unionists, the recent ICFTU conference in Gaberone Botswana provided valuable insights into the priority issues of democracy and development facing African trade unionists. DOT KEET, who was at the conference, reports and analyses some significant trends evident in this conference.

A fundamental economic crisis and human tragedy of appalling proportions is wracking Africa. Popular uprisings against economic austerity and oppressive rule have been surging up in country after country across the continent for more than a year.

It was in this context that the ICFTU's recent conference on 'Democracy, Development and the Defence of Human and Trade Union Rights in Africa' took place. The ICFTU representatives, and other visitors, were meeting with scores of African trade union leaders, many of whose organisations have played an active, and sometimes leading role in the historic anti-colonial struggles, as well as in the current democratic uprisings on the continent. It is these African trade unions that must play a central role in the ongoing struggles for the transformation and liberation of the continent.

The conference provided a important opportunity for all concerned to contribute to.

the discussion and active promotion of appropriate strategies to respond to the crisis. The African trade unionists could deepen their exchanges on political and economic strategies within their own countries and for the continent. The ICFTU and other visitors were well placed to draw from the experience the guidelines for their own ongoing solidarity work in support of their African counterparts.

In a substantial document prepared in advance of the conference, the ICFTU laid out its views on trade union and human rights, and democracy and development in Africa. It also proposed actions that trade unions should take in Africa and abroad for the defence and promotion of these rights.

The ICFTU perspectives were presented to the conference through ICFTU African officials and affiliates [see box, p.75] and formed the framework for the Gaborone discussions on Africa's problems and their solutions.

Democracy and basic rights in Africa

The first session started with a strong report by the ICFTU's African Regional Organisation (AFRO) secretary, Kandeh Yilla of Sierra Leone, on failures in Africa in democracy and development, human and trade union rights. Declaring that "in Africa we have had none of these", he criticised African leaders who "have denied us democracy [and] have not been capable of providing the economic development they promised". He went on to list the abuses heaped on their subjects by repressive African leaders, including the banning of elections, arbitrary imprisonment and even torture of opponents, attacks on the institutions and personnel of the judiciary, media and trade unions; and personal financial corruption.

Yilla commended those African trade unions which have played a courageous role in pushing a number of African dictators and one-party dictatorships towards multiparty democracy although, he said, further guarantees are still needed for genuine free democratic elections. He also criticised those African trade unions which have been "unprepared or unwilling" to challenge the "old undemocratic order" in Africa.

Trade union participants at the conference

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) conference was held in Gaberone Botswana, 9-11 July 1991. Some 62 African trade unionists were present from 33 national trade union federations and three regional trade union organisations [see box, p 75] as well as the continental Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU).

Also present were representatives from eleven trade union federations affiliated to the ICFTU, from Europe the USA and Japan, as well as the European continental trade union organisation the ETUC. The ICFTU delegation included representatives from its eight International Trade Secretariats (ITS's) for different industrial sectors, and six representatives from the ICFTU's 'AFRO' structures responsible for different regions/areas of ICFTU work in Africa. v

Multiparty politics...and more

In the following presentations, representatives of African trade unions gave full support to the need for political democracy and human rights in Africa. However, delegates from Niger, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Lesotho and the regional trade union federation of the North African Mahgreb (USTMA) picked up on Yilla's over- emphasis on multiparty elections per se. *

A delegate from the Botswana BFTU pointed out that in his country 'multipartyism' has not been enough to guarantee human and trade union rights. General secretary of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, Morgan Tsvangirai, went further, arguing that multipartyism "is essential but not the panacea". Democracy also requires a free press (and owned by whom?), genuinely democratic political parties and accountable government, and democratic - and political - trade unions. Furthermore, "democracy is not the end but the process towards the end ...the reduction of poverty," without which democracy will fail, he said.

The Botswana delegate stressed that democracy has three other aspects, besides the political. These are : social rights (such as the right to education), economic rights (wealth equally distributed) and industrial rights (workers' rights to

* The ICFTU's fuller position in its background document, p 29-30, did, however, note that "elections alone are not a sufficient condition for improvement", and that a fuller human rights infrastructure is essential.

participate in policy decisions).

Joram Pajobo, general secretary of NUPAWU of Uganda, pointed out that "most political, economic, social and cultural arrangements in Africa are not democratic". In Africa, he said, "democracy should be concerned with establishing resources and services for the common good of the nation and the people" but, he asked, "how can there be [such] when political, social and economic relations between Africa and the North are not democratic...?"

Democracy and development

This broader interpretation of democracy was picked up by other African - and some of the European - delegates in later observations on the relationship of democracy and development. ICFTU general secretary Jean Claude Vanderveken had summarised the ICFTU's position, in his opening speech to the conference, when he concluded that "the facts are that democracy promotes development and lack of democracy stops development."

This somewhat simple formulation was later contradicted by the CFDT delegate from France, Denis Jacquot. He pointed out that development *has* taken place without democracy – under conditions of extreme repression, in fact, as in various of the Newly Industrialised Countries(NIC's) of South-East Asia! The question is, he said, what *sort* of development are we talking about? Conversely, Tsvangirai of Zimbabwe pointed out that political democracy allows for individual and collective initiatives and creativity but does not in itself necessarily lead to development.

Other African delegates picked up the ICFTU's simplistic 'democracy : development' equation in other ways. OATUU general secretary Hassan Sunmonu argued that there is a dynamic **interdependence** of democracy and development, in which "there can be no development without democracy; neither can there be democracy without development."

Pajoba of Uganda expressed this more concretely when he noted that "people cannot be involved in decision making unless they are organised and informed about the organisational and developmental tasks in society." The 60% illiteracy rates in Africa – a direct reflection of individual poverty and national underdevelopment - enable both internal African leaders and international forces to manipulate the people and, he asked, "how can there be development in Africa in an atmosphere of manipulations?" In short : *democracy requires development as much as – and at the same time as – development requires democracy.*

African and Eurocentric approaches

Such interventions show a more subtle understanding of the problems of democracy and development than the ICFTU's approach suggests. Many African organisations are involved in profound and developed discussions on true democratic *participation*, popular *empowerment*, and leadership *accountability*. For example, hundreds of trade union, civic and other non-governmental organisations gathered for this purpose in Arusha, Tanzania, in February 1990. The proposals in the Arusha Declaration, on how to develop more than formal democracy, go further than the ICFTU's overly institutional/ constitutional – and Eurocentric – approach.

A legal and constitutional framework for democracy is essential, but it is not enough to secure more than formal political 'equality', and abstract rights. In many democratic countries it is actually elected parliaments, and even the courts, that are undermining trade union and civic rights. The continuing necessity for trade union and political struggles against this danger was clearly underlined when the British TUC's Tony Shaw reported on such recent events in his country. The Rengo trade union representative from highly developed and 'democratic' Japan added his own critical report on the legal restrictions on trade union and other rights in his country.

Limitations and abuses of trade union and human rights elsewhere in the world were noted by other European representatives - such as the Danish Labour Organisation and

the French CFDT - as well as African delegates. OATUU's general secretary observed that "examples abound" around the world where formal democracy has been turned into government "on behalf of the people". He also noted that struggles for the rights of workers continue in Latin America. And "in industrialised countries, neo-liberal politicians are rolling back the gains workers have won through their trade unions, either through the amendment of industrial relations acts, or through industrial restructuring by the Transnational Corporations".

The representative from the Nigerian Labour Congress, Armstrong Ogbonna, struggling in one of the most corruption-ridden and dictator-bound countries in Africa, stated bluntly that "Dictatorship and corruption don't exist only in Africa!"

Negative picture of Africa

Such reactions by African trade unionists could be expected in response to the catalogue of failure and overwhelmingly negative picture of Africa painted by the ICFTU. However, it is not defensiveness or apologetics to point out that the slide of most of independent Africa into repressive rule and pervasive governmental corruption has been part of a process. It has not always been so everywhere, and it has not applied and does not apply equally to all African states. The ICFTU's Kandeh Yilla's sweeping generalisations prompted a response from Zimbabwe's Tsvangirai that a case by case study is necessary as "even in our own region not all are the same".

The failure by the ICFTU at their Gaberone conference to record and commend any of the positive in Africa's post-colonial history ignores earlier efforts and some real achievements. For example, in many African *countries, economic growth and the extension* of health and education services after independence resulted in improving infant mortality rates and literacy rates (some better than those of the black population in 'developed' South Africa). Presenting only a gloomy panorama of political oppression,

abuse, and failure - as if it is endemic in Africa - reflects, and plays to, dangerous stereotypes about Africa and Africans. This is evident in the way the South African *Business Day* picked up on the ICFTU's image of African failure and fed it to their fearful and prejudiced readers.

African delegates at the conference
Photo: Maurice Pitso/Botswana

Understanding the causes

An a-historical approach to the current economic, social and political crises in Africa is unjust and does not assist to an understanding of the causes - in order to find the appropriate solutions. The ICFTU argues that Africa's problems are caused by the adoption of one-party and other forms of dictatorship, accompanied by the suppression of political, civic and trade unions rights. This is correct as far as it goes, but this kind of explanation ignores the fact that dictatorships and oppression are invariably **symptoms** as well as causes of crises. There are also more complex underlying political, economic and social causes.

In so far as the ICFTU's analysis for this important conference on democracy in Africa goes beyond the evident political factors and manifestations of the crisis in Africa, it is to blame other factors in Africa, such as "natural catastrophe" and "protracted civil war" (Is *this how the ICFTU sees the devastating wars* of destabilisation promoted against Mozambique and Angola by South Africa and the US?). The ICFTU also refers to African governments' "squandering of precious resources, including development assistance from the industrialised countries, on

establishing a luxurious way of life for a priveleged few". But there is only one brief introductory reference, in the ICFTU's Gaberone documentation, to the responsibility of the "industrialised countries of East and West" in giving economic and military aid to such regimes.

Huge responsibility of the West

This inadequate reference to the huge responsibility of western governments and multinational corporations (MNC's), in colluding with, and even promoting, massive corruption and authoritarian rule in Africa, was picked up by Mcebisi Msizi of South Africa's COSATU. He remarked that "there has been no mention at this conference of the role of MNC's in promoting these detestable governments .... and in denying the rights of workers to be unionised". He also criticised "Western European and North American governments which have promoted, and in some cases still promote, these detestable and corrupt governments - as in Zaire to this very day."

This response was clearly in reaction to the ICFTU's conspicuous failure in this conference to make these external forces and influences an integral and central part of their analysis of the problems of democracy in Africa. For such is what they have been on the ground : in colluding with and actively promoting the development of the new priveleged political and economic elites who have so much to answer for in the current crises in so many African states.

One or two European trade union representatives at Gaberone did note the West's contribution to political deterioration in Africa. Angelo Gennari of the Italian CISL pointed to the responsibility of Western donors "whose development projects and methods [in Africa] helped to disenfranchise the masses". Tony Shaw of the British TUC reminded the delegates that the role of western multinational and transnational corporations "must not escape our vigilance, while we're focussing on governments". The European representative of the IFBWW recalled that, during the 1970's and even the 1980's, human and trade unions rights in Africa "had been ignored or only talked about".

This theme of the West's guilt by commission *and* ommission was raised by various African delegates. A woman trade unionist from the Tunisian UGTT pointed out that "the developed countries are very keen on democratic and trade union rights, but they supported regimes which were the enemies of trade union freedom and democracy". Elias Mbonini of the Botswana BFTU observed, in his concluding contribution, that "for a long time the international community had closed its eyes on a number of violations of human and trade union rights in Africa".

For itself, the ICFTU proclaims a proud record in exposing abuses of trade union rights in Africa. And, indeed, it seems to have played a very helpful (hitherto clandestine) financial role in the development of independent South African trade unions, and a high- profile political role in opposing apartheid.

Much praise and many thanks for the role of the ICFTU were expressed, during the Gaberone conference, by its affiliates and non-affiliated African trade unions alike. But it would have been helpful and correct for the ICFTU to have included at least some reference to its *own* failings or mistakes (for there have been those), and also the failings and culpabilities of other international agents and agencies - including their own governments - in the crisis in Africa.

Trade union rights in action

Neither of these aspects is an integral part of the ICFTU's documentation on abuses of trade union rights in Africa. A resume of the ICFTU's analysis in this respect was presented at the start of the second session of the Gaberone conference by the President of the ICFTU's African Regional Organisation, Kheredine Bouslah of Tunisia.

He presented a comprehensive report on the "great hypocrisy" of African governments in the field of trade union rights. African governments pay lip service to the UN

(United Nations) Declaration of Human Rights and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) African Charter for Popular Participation in Development, both of which enshrine trade union rights. Only 38 of Africa's 54 governments have signed the ILO (International Labour Organisation) Convention 98 on the Right to Collective Bargaining, and only 29 have ratified ILO Convention 87 on Freedom of Association for trade unions. [See this *Labour Bulletin*'s Legal Notes on ILO, p.83-85 – *editor*]

Furthermore, Bouslah went on, within their own countries, both in legal provisions and in their own, often repressive, practice, the record of African governments must be criticised . The following abuses are common: restrictions on the right of trade unions to organise in certain sectors; the subordination of collective bargaining to considerations of "national interest" or, conversely, imposition by government; and the right to strike being directly forbidden or hedged around with impossibly restrictive regulations.

Trade union freedom of association has been interfered with by the formal subordination of trade unions to the single ruling party, the imposition of single national trade union centres, and the prohibition or interference in their right to international affiliation. In this last respect, OATUU's own Article 8, requiring that no OATUU member shall be affiliated to any other international trade union organisation was also noted.

Call to join the ICFTU

This was followed by what the chairman called an "impassioned" speech by the ICFTU's assistant general secretary, Enzo Friso, calling on African trade unions to opt for freedom of association and join the ICFTU. He declared that the Cold War had been a confrontation between pluralist democracy - including free trade unionism - on the one hand, and dictatorship on the other. How could Africa be 'non-aligned' in this divide, he asked. The decision of African states to be non-aligned was often simply a facade behind which to hide their own dictatorships. In parallel, they opposed

African trade union participants at ICFTU conference

Benin	UNSTB
Botswana	BFTU (*)
Burkina Fasso	ONSL (*)
Cameroon	OSTC
Côte d'Ivoire	UGTCI
Egypt	ETUF
Gabon	COSYGA
Gambia	GWU (*)
Ghana	GTUC
Guinea-Bissau	UNTG
Kenya	COTU
Lesotho	LCFTU (*)
	LFTU (*)
Malawi	TUCM (*)
Mali	UNTM
Mauritius	MLC (*)
Morocco	UMT (*)
Namibia	NUNW
Niger	USTN
Nigeria	NLC
Rwanda	CESTRAR
Saõ Tomé/Príncipe	ONSTP
Senegal	CNTS
Sierra Leone	SLLC (*)
South Africa	COSATU
	NACTU
Swaziland	SFTU (*)
Tanzania	JUWATA
Togo	CNTT
Tunisia	UGTT (*)
Uganda	NOTU (*)
Zambia	ZCTU
Zimbabwe	ZCTU

(*) **ICFTU affiliates**

African trade unions joining the ICFTU "because it represented authentic free independent trade unionism". However, he said, the ICFTU continued cooperating with and assisting African trade unions despite their limitations and despite violations of democracy.

But, "recent events and developments in Africa", Friso continued, "are forcing us to make a choice in the ICFTU and in African trade unions." The choice of the ICFTU, he

said, is that "we will in future work only and exclusively with trade unions committed to democracy". Furthermore, he stressed more than once, "it would be difficult in future to cooperate with organisations who discriminate against affiliates of the ICFTU ... [and] ... confine them to some sort of ghetto ... as if international affiliation were some sort of plague". This last was a reference to OATUU restrictions on voting rights and leadership positions for trade unions affiliated to other international organisations.

Mr Friso called on African trade unions to join the ICFTU which, he said, is "your only opportunity to put your case on the international stage". He proudly declared that "no-one has fought like us" and "if everyone demands their autonomy we would not be here today". He reminded them that "all the organisations here have benefited" from ICFTU assistance in the past, regardless, but that, henceforth, this is going to change, and "these are not empty words!"

Challenges to OATUU

Hassan Sunmonu's measured response was to remind the ICFTU of past mistakes of "trade union imperialism". As for OATUU's Article 8, he said, "no condition is permanent" and it is already under review by a special task force which is due to report in September this year. However, he went on to stress that the unity of all of Africa's national trade union federations in OATUU is essential, and that Africa's own continental organisation will "reinforce and complement other trade union groupings. That is the true meaning of trade union internationalism". As for the ICFTU's threat not to cooperate with OATUU, Sunmonu responded that "we will continue to cooperate with ICFTU and other trade unions all over the world for the rights of workers, democracy, peace, and social and economic justice"

Various opinions were expressed on the rescinding of OATUU's restrictive Article 8. Zimbabwe's Tsvangirai had earlier proposed that it should be revised if the majority within OATUU agree. Botswana's Mbonini, whose BFTU is already an ICFTU affiliate,

Hassan Sunmonu, OATUU's general-secretary

Photo: Abdul Shariff

welcomed Sunmonu's position, as did Newstead Zimba of Zambia's TUC, which is intending to join the ICFTU. Mahjoub Benseddik of Morocco's UMT, an ICFTU affiliate and not a member of OATUU, called for African trade unions to "be free of the grip of OATUU." He made a strong criticism of OATUU, saying that, although it was not itself guilty of abuses of human rights, it is "historically accountable". OATUU, he said, is too close to the OAU organisation of African governments, many of which "are still trying to place trade unions under administrative controls."

African trade unions and governments

In the same vein, African national trade unions came under criticism for their past - and current - involvement with their own governments. Daouda Rabiou of Niger provided a partial political explanation when he recalled the important role of many African trade unions in their countries' anti-colonial struggles. Many trade union leaders became national political leaders after independence. As such, they then "required trade unions to play a role in **national** aims... [rather than] taking up the cause of workers." They failed to understand that "consolidation of national independence and development was not synonymous with the end of trade

unionism." In this way, trade unions were made the "accomplices" (or, in the 'Marxist' version, "transmission belts") of ruling parties.

Looking at more recent times, and a different aspect of the problem, the ICFTU's Kandeh Yilla criticised "some unions which have been extremely unprepared and unwilling to take up the challenge of fighting for the basic democratic rights of their members [preferring] the material benefits from a cosy relationship with government to the hard work of real trade union activities." Such unions face the prospect of rejection by workers once choices are opened up to them, even though many such compromised - and often mere puppet - unions are hastily declaring their independence from the ruling parties now that many of these undemocratic governments are under threat in the democratic struggles unfolding in Africa.

Such opportunistic manouvers, as well as the courageous and principled role of many African trade unions, in the recent waves of protest and democratic uprisings across the continent, are given detailed attention in the ICFTU's background document. It then goes on to give the African trade unions detailed advice on how to now defend human rights and trade union freedoms, and informs them what the ICFTU is doing, and proposes to do, in and for the continent henceforth.

The way forward

The ICFTU's proposals on the way forward, entitled Working Together for Democracy, Development and Rights in Africa, were presented to the third session of the conference by the BFTU, the ICFTU's co-host of the conference. BFTU's Mbonini touched briefly on some of the manifestations of the economic crisis in Africa, dealt with in the 1989 Nairobi Conference on The African Development Challenge, and reiterated the ICFTU position that Africa needs democracy for development.

Within trade unions, Mbonini urged concrete steps to be taken for : the establishment of full internal union democracy, including an equal and active role for women and ethnic minorities; effective education and training and research programmes, and sound financial management to achieve union self-reliance and autonomy.

On the **national** stage, Mbonini recommended : an active role by African trade unions in struggles for multiparty democracy and in setting up Human Rights Liaison Units; pressurising their governments to ratify the ILO conventions, and to reduce military spending in favour of social investments; and unions participating fully in discussions of national policy including those undertaken with the IMF and World Bank, and the EEC on the Lome Convention.

African regional trade union organisations present at Gaberone	
Organisation of Trade Unions of West Africa	OTUWA
United Trade Unions of the Arab Mahgreb	USTMA
Southern African Trade Union Coordinating Council	SATUCC

At the **regional/ continental** level, the ICFTU presenter recommended : the drawing up of Social Charters, as the Southern Africa Trade Unions Coordinating Council (SATUCC) and the Maghreb trade unions (USTMA) are already doing; extending this practice to the Southern Africa Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); and ensuring that the OAU sets up its intended Commission on Human and People's Rights, and amends its Charter to include specific reference to trade union rights.

On the **international** plain, reports on violations of trade union rights should be lodged with the ILO, especially its Committee on Freedom of Association; and human rights violations with the UN Human Rights Committee. They should also be reported to the ICFTU which, with its affiliates and

ITS's, will increase their media and other campaigns on behalf of trade union and human rights in Africa. And, finally, "in order to coordinate, at the international level, the wide range of actions to support human rights, the role of the newly created ICFTU/AFRO 'Committee for the Defence of Human and Trade Union Rights in Africa' will be extremely important"

Organisational and strategic needs

The responses to this programme of action, from African participants, raised other significant organisational and strategic needs on the continent.

OATUU general secretary Sunmonu stressed that African trade unions need international cooperation, especially financial help, to build their own training programmes, and their own organisational capacities and independence. African trade unions also need to develop their national, regional and continental unity. At the same time, African trade unions need to back the African Economic Community proposed by the OAU to unite Africa itself. These aims should be supported by the Gaberone conference and by international trade union solidarity, he urged.

This need for the independence and unity of African trade unions - and of Africa itself - was also expressed by representatives of some of the most experienced, biggest and most powerful independent trade union federations on the continent. Kwasi Adu-Amankwah of Ghana stressed that trade unions must campaign for democratic and trade union rights - and for African unity - in alliance with student and other mass organisations. Zimbabwean Tsvangirai similarly urged alliances with other grass roots mass organisations, and trade union cooperation in Southern Africa.

Msizi of South Africa's COSATU also recommended regional trade union cooperation. He reported on his organisation's alliance with NACTU, the other major South African trade union federation, in the campaign for a Workers' Charter, and on the alliance between COSATU and the ANC and other mass organisations in the struggle for

NACTU and COSATU delegates from South Africa

Photo: Maurice Pitso/Botswana

democracy in South Africa.

Nigeria's Ogbonna took the subject further in urging the need for trade unions to move the struggle "from resistance and protest on the political periphery onto the terrain of central political power." To this end, he reported, the 40 year old Nigerian Labour Congress, "the largest on the continent", had tried to form its own Labour Party, but had been thwarted by the current Nigerian military regime. The political question persists, he said, and his message to "our friends not to disarm us by telling us not to be political" reflected a recurrent theme at the Gaberone conference.

Economic impediments to democracy

The continuing failure of the ICFTU's proposals for democracy and development in Africa to take on board the incapacitating effects of deep economic problems in securing real democracy, also received the attention of various of the African spokespersons in this, as in earlier, sessions.

In his opening address to the conference, OATUU's Hassan Sunmonu outlined the most pressing economic problems and burdens being imposed on Africa. Thirty four African states have been "forced or blackmailed" by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) into adopting structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) which have been "unmitigated disasters and failures". The economies of these countries, he reported, have not been positively transformed, nor are they

self-sustaining. Rather, they have been made more dependent, debt-ridden and capital-exporting; aggravating mass unemployment and squeezing the living standard of the population into mass poverty. How can there be real democracy in such a situation? Therefore he said, OATUU as the voice of African trade unionists totally rejects, and calls upon the Gaberone conference to reject IMF SAPs, in favour of Africa's own 'African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation' (known as AAF-SAP).

Delegates from Zimbabwe, South Africa, Gambia and Uganda made cogent comments on the IMF's damaging SAPs being forced onto Africa. Benseddick of Morocco's UMT declared that "the people of Africa were neither the architects nor the beneficiaries" of these programmes. They were designed as "weapons for the liberalisation and deregulation" of African economies, and have had the effect of reducing incomes, employment, and educational and health programmes.

Benseddick argued - like the ICFTU - that the IMF's SAPs must be given an acceptable "social dimension" through "democratic consultation." This echoes the earlier calls by UN agencies, for structural adjustment to be given a "human face", to which Hassan Sumonu's telling response was that "putting a human face on a monkey doesn't change it from being a monkey!"

Accommodations to the IMF

The ICFTU position is very similar to that of the ILO representative at the conference and, indeed, as he reported, to that of the IMF's Director General Camdessus. They argue that, despite the social costs, structural adjustment is necessary, but that "the success of SAPs depends upon the quality of social dialogue and the industrial relations system." The ILO spokesman stressed that his organisation has long advocated this view.

The ICFTU's document for the conference makes a fuller and rather more critical analysis of the impact of IMF SAPs in Africa. But it questions details of their "design" and implementation rather than their purposes.

The fundamental aim of the IMF's SAPs have been to use indebtedness to compel Third World countries to adopt monetarist policies, promote private enterprise, and open up to international 'free trade.' They reinforce African countries' traditional role as exporters of primary raw materials 'in order to earn foreign exchange' to pay off their foreign debts. The ICFTU criticises inadequate consultation in the IMF SAPs rather than what they are designed to achieve.

In fact, the ICFTU's most significant proposals on SAPs are that trade unions should be incorporated "as a responsible partner" to provide the "social dimension" to make SAPs more palatable. Trade unions should be drawn into programmes of "poverty alleviation" to ameliorate the worst effects of SAPs on "the most vulnerable groups in society". This is an **accomodation to the IMF** SAPs rather than the **rejection of their aims** which African trade unionists called for. And this continued to be the position promoted by the ICFTU in the final declaration of the Gaberone conference.

Final declaration

Presented at the last session of the conference, "The Gaberone Declaration on Basic Rights" follows very closely the ICFTU's proposals prepared in advance of the conference. These contain some very useful ideas. They underwent some amendments in the working group set up by the ICFTU - particularly on actions needed to combat discrimination against women*. The declaration was presented to the assembled delegates as "including the gist of all the discussions in this forum for the last two days", and they were urged to endorse it forthwith by acclamation.

Full credit is due to the ICFTU for organising a women unionists workshop before the conference and ensuring that each of their affiliates included a woman in its delegation.

Conspicuous omissions

The declaration had not, however, incorporated some of the important contributions made by delegates during the conference. It sustained many of the conspicuous omissions in the *ICFTU's presentations at the conference*. This was quickly pointed out by COSATU's Msizi. He insisted on the inclusion of the criticisms that had been made of western multinational corporations and foreign governments in the denial of democracy in Africa, with a demand for an immediate end to such self-serving practices.

Similarly, Hassan Sunmonu called for the declaration to endorse coordinated trade union actions to pressurise African governments to work towards closer economic cooperation and integration on the continent, and the speedy implementation of the treaty to set up an African Economic Community. He also noted that the final declaration had ignored OATUU's call to all trade unionists to support Africa's adoption of the African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes (AAF-SAP).

Both these amendments were supported by the conference participants, but other contributions – from African and European delegates – during the conference did not find their way into the declaration. For example, debt cancellation and the revision of the unfair terms of north-south trade had been noted, as were the dangers to Africa of the impending new GATT 'free trade' conditionalities.

One of the most telling contributions on Africa's subordinate position in the international economic order came from Italy's CISL representative. He condemned *"failed western development strategies in Africa based on export-led growth"* in which the benefits of wealth accumulation were supposed to 'trickle down' to the masses, whereas he said, "only poverty has trickled down in Africa!" He pointed out that "Africans produce what they do not consume, and consume what they do not produce," and that they import goods at costs much higher than the value/income from their exports. In fact, Africans have been working harder, exporting **more** and earning constantly **less**

over the past decade.

ICFTU spokespersons responded that these and other matters had been dealt with in the 1989 Nairobi Declaration and that it is "now necessary to go beyond economic policy" in the *Gaberone Declaration. This suggests, once again*, that the ICFTU does not fully appreciate that solutions to these profound economic problems have to be an **integral** part of any plans to secure democracy in Africa. Furthermore, in the two years since Nairobi, these external and economic factors have become more not less significant.

'Recolonisation' of Africa

Much fear is being expressed about the economic marginalisation of Africa. Capital investors are indeed turning away from Africa, and there is a danger that Western government aid will be poured into Eastern Europe to Africa's loss. There is, however, a simultaneous proliferation of foreign government interventions into the government of African countries. There are also more and more international - especially UN, but also even non-governmental (NGO) - agencies supplanting African governments in many of their social and economic functions. This is in addition to the imposition of economic policy on African governments by international financial institutions. So marked is this congruence of external agencies, moving into and 'taking over' in Africa, that it is being dubbed a "recolonisation" of the continent! The Gaberone conference actually supplied more evidence of this extremely serious development, as well as a new and disturbing dimension.

In their contributions to the discussion on The Way Forward, various European participants expressed support for their governments taking an even more interventionist role in Africa. The French CFDT's Jacquot, the Danish LO's Aakjaer Kjeld, and Michel Miller, speaking for the European TUC, all supported forms of "social audit" or "human rights conditionalities" to be attached to European development aid to African countries. This might be highly laudable were all such governments

disinterested aid givers, and exemplary upholders of trade union and human rights*. But these governments already impose their own conditions upon African recipients of their aid. These include : their own priorities in terms of development projects they are willing to support; various 'strings' in the form of equipment and other purchases from the donor country; and - most seriously of all - the acceptance of IMF-structural adjustment as a pre-condition for development aid.

European trade union proposals to pressurise their governments to support human rights in Africa are undoubtedly well-intentioned, but they may be providing their governments with more arguments for using desperately-needed aid as a weapon ....and making the victims of oppressive governments double victims by witholding aid from them. Rather than reinforcing the interventions of their governments in Africa, trade unions in the developed countries should be arguing for development aid to be appropriately directed and immediately *increased*. And the prime, urgent responsibility of trade unions in the developed countries is to campaign vigorously against the international economic order that made -and keeps - Africans dependent upon such aid.

ICFTU's "paternalism"

But possibly the most disturbing feature of all to emerge from the Gaberone conference was what African delegates - some ICFTU affiliates as well as non-affiliates - in the conference corridors, were dubbing the ICFTU's "neocolonial paternalism".

It is quite evident - and Italy's CISL delegate stated as much - that the ICFTU sees 1991 in Africa "what 1989 was to Eastern Europe". The ICFTU sees this as an opportunity to promote itself as well as its own democratic agenda for Africa. This made COSATU's Msizi protest on the conference floor about "people jumping on the bandwagon" of Africa's struggles!

It seems as if the ICFTU came to Gaberone already convinced as to what Africa needs, and had its programme of action drawn up in advance of the conference. Similarly, it had already set up its own trade union and human rights structures and programmes in and for Africa. This may have been well-intentioned, but it represents a tendancy towards **substitution** for, rather than support to Africa's own organisations, programmes and efforts. This prompted the Nigerian delegate to declare that "no-one else can win our rights for us." From statements outside the conference hall, as well as implicit in statements on the conference floor, African delegates were left with the troubled impression that the ICFTU is trying to supplant "our own continental organisation".

This is not how international trade union solidarity should be, and many of the European trade unionists present were distinctly uncomfortable with the ICFTU's "tactical blunders" and "insensitivity", even for those who declared, also off the record, that OATUU "is a problem." Others, such as the French CFDT and British TUC emphasised on the conference floor that trade union solidarity is a process of mutual support; with the latter declaring that British trade unions have a lot to learn from their South African counterparts.

The Swedish, Norwegian and Danish Labour Organisations all seemed to be distancing themselves from the ICFTU's approach by stressing that African trade unions must be **empowered** to solve their own problems.

The conference contributions showed that - while the ICFTU brought some very useful proposals distilled from the best of trade union experiences in the developed countries - in many ways their proposals are superficial. Genuinely engaged African trade unionists understand much more deeply the conditions and problems they are struggling with.

The ICFTU's perception of the way that trade unions should be consulted for their opinions, and incorporated into the planning

---

* It is rather ironical, for example, for the British government to demand proof of "good governance" from African governments as a condition for material aid!

of governmental and IMF programmes was also questioned. The ICFTU's AFRO President stated that such participation by trade unions is essential in order to prevent discontent being "bottled up" and then "exploding in the type of social unrest which governments most want to avoid." In this view, participation is not democratic empowerment but a safety valve for popular discontent. A number of African trade unionists questioned this role for themselves, saying that workers need to be **mobilised** - not pacified and **demobilised** - in order to change the status quo.

The ICFTU is deeply aware of the need for strong international trade union unity to respond to combined governmental and TNC strategies in today's integrated world economy. Possibly their determination to draw African trade unions into their ambit derives from a missionary zeal to forge one united world trade union organisation. But Africa has had a long experience with missionaries. The ICFTU's crusade to give a lead to African trade unions prompted the passionate reponse from COSATU's Msizi that "You must move with us. Please, we ask you not to undermine us, not to think that we are children! Respect us. Know that we are concerned that there be democracy in Africa, in the African context, the African way. Be with us, do not desert us, do not sabotage us! ...We will have to do the spade work. We need your support."

The "spade work" for African trade unions

The Gaberone conference confirmed that there are serious challenges in Africa, and within their own organisations, facing African trade unionists.

The first is to make their trade unions genuinely democratic organisations in which they themselves are accountable to worker control. It was quite evident at Gaberone that many African 'workers leaders' are prone to imitating the bureaucratic, globe-trotting style of their governmental mentors, and are far removed from the workers they are supposed to be representing.

Many African trade unions - including some present in Gaberone - still need to wrest themselves from all forms of collusion with, as well as controls by, their governments. They need to develop truly independent national trade union federations that form active alliances with other democratic mass organisations. Their main tasks will be to jointly shape appropriate development strategies to convince - or change - their governments ... as well as international agencies.

National trade union federations joining together in regional structures have to consciously guard against the danger of creating mere paper trade union cooperation. This means more than drawing up Social Charters - important as these are. It means entering into practical joint efforts to defend and advance workers' interests in their regions. This is the true test - and basis - for forging wider worker unity and strength in Africa.

Furthermore, to become a continental force, African trade unions will have to make the serious effort - and raise the resources - to make OATUU more than just a useful platform for the periodic exchange of views and issuing of joint declarations. OATUU has to be more than a lobbying instrument and more than just the formal 'voice of African trade unions' at international gatherings. It has to be an independent force to put **workers' content** into the 'alternative framework' for recovery and transformation in Africa - to which OAU governments have given their (largely rhetorical) support.

Finally, whether African trade unions affiliate or do not affiliate to the ICFTU, or other international trade union organisations, they have to campaign for the international adoption of programmes crucial to the progress and very survival of Africa and other Third World countries. An important aspect is to create the South-South solidarity that the Tanzanian delegate at Gaberone called for. This will reinforce the South in taking their case into the international workers' movement for the North-South workers' solidarity and the mutual support that all trade unions should be committed to. ✩