The Foreign Impact on Lagos Dockworker Unionism

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Introduction

In the mid-1970s, the West African representative of the International Transportworkers Federation (ITF) put down the long-lived and notorious divisions amongst dockworkers in Lagos to factors of personality, of ethnicity and of ideology. This short study enables us to consider to what extent the divisions were rather a result of the work of the ITF and other foreign trade union bodies. The study deals with a period of only one decade, it deals with only one part of even the Lagos cargo-handling industry, and it concentrates on the impact of moderate reformist unions based in Western Europe or the United States. [1] Those who wish to obtain a more complete account and judgement on this issue will have to read elsewhere (Waterman 1972, 1973, 1979a,b,c).

Within the evident limits, I believe this case study does nonetheless reveal much about the **general** nature of 'north-south' union relations during a **whole historical era.**

An understanding of the case, however, evidently first requires a little background.

The Industry

The Lagos dock labour contractors have traditionally carried out either one or both of two porterage tasks - stevedoring and lighterage (shipboard) or wharfage (shorehandling). These are services provided to two different principals - the shipping companies or agencies for stevedoring and lighterage, and the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) for shorehandling. The industry can be said to have been created by the foreign shipping companies and retained as such by the Nigerian state. In colonial times, the porterage task was first organised by the shipping companies themselves. But as early as 1918, it began to be handed over to local entrepreneurs. In the 1950s, the shippers still carried out some 12 per cent of the labour directly, but by the mid-1960s it was all in local capitalist hands. At first the contractors were mere labour suppliers, the organisation of the task being in the hands of the shipping companies or their agencies. When the NPA took over the

quays in 1955, the labour suppliers were supposed to take on responsibility for the work organisation as well. Despite 20 years of complaints about the quality of their work and the conditions of their labourers, the state authorities resisted the nationalisation or restructuring of the industry. The NPA even withdrew from direct labour in Port Harcourt on the grounds of the 'greater efficiency' of private employment. As a result of the bitter competition for labour contracts after independence in the 1960s, there came to be at least 35 officially-registered contractors, with an unknown number of 'corner-corner' contractors alongside. Whilst companies rose and fell with the passing of time, there continued to be a handful of big contractors, such as W.H. Biney and Company, and some dozens of smaller ones.

The labour contractors had very little equipment - even in the 1060s. Most stevedoring equipment was provided by shipping agencies, which used this as the justification for the low share of their charges to shipping companies that they passed on to the stevedores. Since the contractors had virtually no equipment, the only way to increase their profits was to directly squeeze their labour force.

The Labour Force

The dock labour force consists of unskilled manual labourers (general labour, securitymen), semi-skilled winchmen and forklift drivers (mostly trained informally on the job), tally clerks (supposedly numerate and literate, also trained informally) and headmen and gang foremen, usually the more experienced labourers.

Official minimum wage rates for general dock labour have been linked to the official minimum for government-employed unskilled labour. However, even the official figures for registereddock labour in the 1960s show that between 47 and 70 per cent of them were employed for less than 15 days a month. The 30-53 per cent of registered workers employed for over 14 days were said to be averaging more than the government-employed minimum. Furthermore, dockers were deprived of what they were said to earn by(1) having to pay **dash** (a bribe or reward) to obtain and keep work, (2) receipt of less than the published wage for overtime or standby (during enforced idleness). The differential between the rate of the general labourer and the headman is only some 10 per cent, and the differential between the general labourer and the most highly-paid docker is only some 30 per cent.

If wage differentials did not significantly separate dockers, neither did working conditions. Considering the conditions that led up to the 1968 dockers' strike, the Urhobo Report (1971:62-6) gave this detailed catalogue of common traditional troubles:

- working hours exceeding those agreed with the union and contrary to the Factory Act and Labour Code;
- employment of short-gangs of eight men instead of the required 16-20;
- the lack of welfare facilities;
- non-compliance by some employers with the Workmen's Compensation Act, employers failing to compensate those injured;
- non-compliance with the National Provident Fund Act, the NPA admitting 'that even where there were violations of these provisions by an employer, no employer had been penalised for disregarding the provisions, even when the NPA recommend that such an action should be taken against such employer';
- violation of Dock Labour Regulations on safety, health and welfare, employers seizing job cards to make illegal entries on them, charging for free gate passes, depriving workers of wages due;
- short payment by many contractors;
- payment through headmen: despite the fact that the Port Labour Officer (PLO) had warned contractors against a practice that permitted abuse, there was 'no guarantee that the practice has stopped since no effective authority to penalise defaulting employers has been established for this purpose';
- non-payment of wages to stand-by gangs despite the provision for this in the NPA contract;
- unsatisfactory nature of the Dock Labour Registration Scheme: the dependence of registration on contractor recommendation encouraged bribery; and contrary to the purpose of the scheme, contractors were continuing to use unregistered workers with the consent of the PLO.

Common conditions and limited wage differentials, however, were no guarantee of a united labour force. Different places of origin, different periods of urbanisation and different languages kept them apart. One-time or cyclical migrants have long been a major - even the major - element in the dock labour force. Whilst today they are coming either from the Hausa north or from outside Nigeria altogether, in the 1950s and 60s, they were mostly **Araoke** (a contemptuous Yoruba word for the 'bush' Yoruba of the Ilorin area), often brought in by contractors' own labour recruiters. At the other extreme of the dock labour industry could be found the 'pool workers'. These were a significantly more urbanised group, including second-generation workers and native Lagosians, many with some schooling. These traditionally provided the base for dockworker unionism.

Trade Unions

The historical development of Nigerian trade unionism can be divided into three main periods. The first (1930-50) was dominated by state-sector unionism and by an increasingly closer alliance between the unions and the nationalist movement. The second period (1950-60) saw the increasing impact of multi-national corporation based unions, as well as a division into a clear Left and Right at national level.

The Left was morally and financially supported by the Prague-based and Communist-dominated World Federation of Trade Unions. The Right was even more heavily dependent on the moderate reformist International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (Brussels) and its associated International Trade Secretariats, as well as by the African-American Labour Center (New York). The latter is run by the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO), but has always been dependent for virtually all its finance on American capital. The third period of Nigerian *unionism (from 1970) has seen the declining relevance of both the traditional* Left and Right, an increase in the relative weight of industrial unionism and the attempt of industrial union leaders to create a single national centre.

Given the fractured nature of the docklabour industry and the casual nature of dockwork, it is not surprising that the creation of stable organisations has been even more difficult than with other workers. Rather than trace here the complex historical development of dockworker unionism, we may consider briefly the types of organisation that appear to have existed before 1966. The basic units were either -

1. classical company unions like the Biney Workers Union (BWU) or the Bakare Dockworkers Union (BDWU); or
2. 'craft' unions like the Union of Tally Clerks (UTC), the Customs Casual Shipping Labour Union (CCSLU), the Nigerian Boardship Ports Security Workers Union (NBSPSWU); or
3. multi- enterprise unions like the Asajoquan Dockworkers Union (ADWU) combining workers of ASSAF, Johnson, Quayside and others.

In 1966-67 there came into existence (with the financial aid of the ITF and the AALC) the Amalgamated Dockworkers Transport and General Workers Union (ADWT&GWU). This lasted but a year or so before it visibly fell to pieces during a major dock strike in 1968. From its ashes, the militants within it created a virtually new organisation, with the same name, affiliated nationally with the radical Nigerian Trade Union Congress (NTUC - itself affiliated internationally with the WFTU). In 1973 the moderates, aided by

their foreign friends, the moderate ULC and the Ministry of Labour, 'reconstituted' the Amalgamation, also under the same name. Given their national affiliations, these will be referred to, respectively, as the ADWT&GWU(N) and the ADWT&GWU(U).

The rise and fall of industry-level amalgamations is more difficult to follow than the careers of the major dockworker leaders. At the level of the Port there arose in the 1950s a number of resilient trade union leaders still active even in the mid-1970s. The first was A.E.Okon. He set up a tally clerks union around 1950 and two successive amalgamations of dockers' unions in 1950 and 1961. He was the first Secretary of the NMTUF in 1955, and visited the British unions, the British Dock Labour Board and the headquarters of Elder Dempster in Liverpool in 1956. In 1959, he was elected to the Central Working Committee of the newly-created and moderate-reformist TUC of Nigeria. In 1961-62 Okon was the Nigerian representative to the Congress of the ITF, where he was elected as one of two Africans to its Executive Board. Okon was always a moderate reformist, as his national and international affiliations might suggest. He was a convinced believer in the industrial relations ideology of the British government, management and unions. Unfortunately for him, however, he could convince neither the Nigerian government, nor the contractors, of his ideology. Moreover, he was unable to translate his successes at national and international level into solid organisation or undisputed leadership at the industrial level. He was challenged not only by certain radicals, but also by men who shared his ideology yet disputed his position.

The radical opposition that existed for three or four years in the 1960s was in the hands of Jonas Abam and Sidi Khayam. Abam went to Britain in 1949, working in engineering and training as a printer. Whilst in Britain, he came in contact with Sidi Khayam. With Abam, Khayam seems to have been associated first with the Young Communist League and then with the Trotskyist Socialist Labour League. Khayam and Abam returned to Nigeria at tne end of the 1950s. Whilst still in Britain, Khayam had become General Secretary of the Nigerian Union of Seamen. He was a leader of the Leftwing Independent United Labour Congress in 1961 and of the communist-linked Nigerian Trade Union Congress (NTUC) in 1963. Around 1960, Abam became the leader of the Nigerian Stevedores and Dockworkers Union (NS&DWU). Khayam and Abam worked together in a Committee to create the basis for a major dock strike in 1963. Considering that the Left had failed to support the 1963 dock strike and to fully exploit the 1964 General Strike (Kiomenesekenegha 1966:182) they abandoned it and began to seek for leadership of the dockers within the Rightwing United Labour Congress of Nigeria (ULC). They achieved their aims through the ADWT&GWU, with

Khayam as General Secretary and Abam as National Organising Secretary. However, in the 18 months preceding the 1968 dock strike they were unable to turn the warring factions and money-seeking officers into a viable organisation. Abam disappeared from dockworker unionism and even from Lagos itself. Only with the renewed support of his external patrons was he able to return to lead the moderate ADWT&GWU(U) on its 'reconstitution' in 1973.

The revived ADWT&GWU(N) of 1968 was led by a militant illiterate docker Endeley Olagboshe, along with a group of other dockworker unionists who had served their apprenticeship in previous organisations. Failing to get backing from the ULC after the 1968 strike, Olagboshe turned to the NTUC, which was happy to provide him with one of its young trained 'cadres', Bernard Odulana. Odulana was a professional trade union secretary who had some previous experience of dock unionism. By effective leadership of a series of strikes, this group managed to impose itself on contractors and state alike and to dominate Lagos dockworker unionism in the following decade.

Having looked briefly at the background, let us first consider explanations for division amongst Lagos dockworkers. This examination will be followed by one of the national and international affiliations of the radicals and the moderates respectively. And the conclusion will consider once again the explanations offered for division.

Explanations for Division

Although public action or printed accusations of tribalism are rarely to be found during the 1970s, they are made privately and they do play a role in tensions between or within dockworker unions. The original ADWT&CWU of 1966 was troubled with ethnic conflict and the Urhobo Report (1971) on the amalgamation did consider as a reason for its collapse the fact that 'tribal sentiments were freely exploited within it'. More recently, it has been possible to find a prominent radical (himself an easterner) saying of the moderate leadership 'They are mostly eastern and they organise on a tribal basis' (Interview Notes, December 1976). And Roxy Udogwo of the ITF not only accuses Bernard Odulana (leader of the radicals) of being a Yoruba tribalist, but explains the lack of success of the moderates in Lagos as partly due to the 'ethnic question, that the leadership is mostly non-Yoruba' (Interview Notes, July 1975).

Now, it is true that the prominent moderate leaders were predominantly non-Yoruba, and that the prominent radical leaders were predominantly Yoruba. But one needs to ask oneself whether this was a reason for the success of the one group and the failure of the other. It is, after all, well known

to students of Nigerian labour that ethnic strangers have provided trusted and successful leadership to the young working class in Port Harcourt, in Zaria and in Kano. Udogwu also puts down the weakness of the moderates to their persistent individualism and personality conflicts (Interview Notes, September 1976). Yet one needs again to ask oneself whether this was the reason for their failure. Even short acquaintance with the radicals revealed to me just as much individualism and just as many personality conflicts amongst them.

Differences between the three main types of union in the industry - the enterprise-based, the moderate amalgamation and the radical one - are more commonly understood and expressed by union leaders and dockers in terms of membership base, organisational structure and leadership strategy. Accusations are to the effect that a union is a company union, or dominated by headmen, or that it follows a strategy not in the interests of the dockers. Interpretations in these terms are far more common and significant than those in ethnic or personality terms. Thus, the moderates, and their national and international patrons, accuse the radicals of being subversives or communists. Said the moderate-reformist United Labour Congress following the 1968 strike:

> The docks are vulnerable to subversive activities for various reasons. The Congress role has been 'to build and develop a strong democratic and responsible union in the docks...because of the strategic position which the docks occupy in the economic life of the nation'. The present impasse is the handwork of a handful of disgruntled elements aided and abetted by an ambitious clique outside the docks. (Urhobo Report 1971:25).

Said Roxy Udogwu several years later:

> The attempt to reconstitute the ADWT&GWU in April 1973 was broken up by the Communists...Maybe they are not **real** Communists, but they make trouble. (Interview Notes)

Since both the accusations of communism have been from national or international patrons of the moderate ADWT&GWU(U), the question here arises of whether such terminology is not **stimulated by** or **addressed to** such *quarters rather than issuing from dockers or rank-and-file leaders themselves.*

It is true that the radicals do not object to the communist tag and persistently address each other and their followers as 'comrade'. But **their** accu-

sations against their moderate opponents are less for tribalism or following some exotic foreign ideology than for dependence on the contractors, on the Ministry of Labour, on foreign finance, and for their cowardice, corruption and inefficiency. Did they, perhaps, have no need to appeal to national or international patrons?

National & International Affiliation: The Radical ADWT&GWU[N]

As far as the radicals are concerned, national and international affiliation have been of peripheral - and possibly decreasing - importance. The radical NTUC was evidently important at the time of the 1968 strike, providing a source of both technical expertise and of a radical ideology to legitimise the militancy of the Olagboshe group. As the 1970s progressed, the NTUC suffered from internal conflicts and its previous 'class' analysis of Nigerian society was replaced by an increasing identification with successive governments' developmentalist domestic and pan-African foreign policies (Waterman 1973:298-9). What was left was a central national leadership with a certain tradition, a certain terminology, and links with the international communist movement. Through these foreign contracts, the radical ADWT&GWU(N) of Olagboshe and Odulana was able to send some activists to courses in Eastern Europe. Such courses were of a general ideological nature. having little to do with the practical realities of trade union struggle in a country such as Nigeria, even less to do with dockworkers as such. Few of the radical leaders seem to have attended such courses. Their benefit seems to have been the provision of confirmation of the general communist worldview of those who did attend. For the rest, the radical leadership devised its strategy, tactics and organisational principles and practices from its experience within the dock labour industry itself.

National & International Affiliation: The Moderate ADWT&GWU[U]

The situation with respect to the moderates was very different. Okon's contacts with moderate-reformist European trade unions ran back to the early 1950s. Abam's contacts with the African-American Labour Centre began in the late-1960s after he abandoned the Left. Furthermore, both the ITF and the AALC had had representatives sitting in Lagos or Accra (ITF) or permanently in Lagos (AALC), in each case paying special attention to dockworkers. National affiliation was of much greater importance to the moderates than it was to the radicals. Whilst in the mid-1970s the influence of the ULC dropped off, the ULC had been a determining influence before 1968, and in the reconstitution in the 1970s. The moderate ADWT&GWU(U) was largely

made by these three organisations. Let us, therefore, examine each in more detail.

We may limit our consideration of the ULC to its role with respect to the original 1966 Amalgamation. Evidence to the Urhobo Inquiry revealed that the role of this organisation had been far greater than that of the NTUC. Although it was stated at the time of the Report to have had only one dock affiliate, the Union of Tally Clerks, it claimed to have had in 1964 six of the eight dock unions as members. It admitted that it considered foreign financial aid necessary, declared that it has sought this from American sources, and claimed that 'such aid has never been put into any use inimical to the interests of the Congress or the Nation'. Despite these patriotic claims, the ULC came in for severe criticism from the Inquiry. Not only was there specific criticism of the role played by Acting General Secretary, Odeyemi[2] , in attempting to settle the rift within the amalgamation, but the ULC in general was considered to have played a major disruptive and divisory role. It had negotiated the loan with the AALC, originally estimating for £2 090, with only the General Secretary and Executive Secretary to be paid. It had then drastically increased the sum upwards, to pay for a large list of officials. Secondly, it had supplied the Amalgamation with a defective constitution. Thirdly, it had interfered unconstitutionally in the running of the Amalgamation, appointing a caretaker committee, issuing notices for the Annual Conferences and instructing the AALC to cease paying salaries after September 1968. In sum,

> Although, from the evidence available, the role of the ULC was intended to be helpful in promoting unity, it had in fact the opposite effect... The role played by the ULC therefore tended to widen the rift in the Amalgamation. (Urhobo Report 1971-68-9)

The African-American Labour Centre

The major source of income for the original ADWT&GWU was money from the AALC, variously estimated at £6 050 to £10 500. The AALC claimed to have contributed £8 828 and to have believed even after the 1968 debacle, that it had been used 'constructively'. Constructively or not, it was certainly all used in the six month period following January 1967 (Urhobo Report 1971:49,55). The 'reconstitution' of the ADWT&GWU(U) was also largely dependent on US finance, the AALC making in 1973 payments amounting to £1 067 (Adebiyi Report 1977;20-21).

The crucial and continuing role of the AALC in subsidising the moderate dockworker union leadership is clear. But we need to consider its motives and activities in more detail. In his written submission to Urhobo, AALC Nigerian representative, George McCray, declared that the general aim of the AALC was:

> to concentrate on the role of trade unions as a positive constructive factor in the great effort to establish a free and democratic society, to deal with the total complex of economic problems. (Urhobo Report 1971:21).

He declared further that it was intended to 'encourage the expansion of American capital investment in the African nations', and to create a nation 'unsurpassed in commerce and industry'. He stated that the AALC's main emphasis was on development projects run by unions and 'that direct assistance to unions was not one of the Centre's major activities'. In his oral evidence McCray became more specific. He regretted the failure to achieve a strong union and denied that he had interfered in the internal running of the Amalgamation. However, a number of unionists, right-affiliated as well as left, attacked the AALC bitterly for its role. One of the former was Patrick Onyewe, who stated that:

> While the Capitalist Americans have succeeded with the Award of a substantial sum of money as Aid to the ADWT&GWU to win the Amalgamation's Affiliation with the ULC whose officials organised and supervised the Merger Conference in 1966, in fact the American influence centred only in the Secretariat as the dockers did not feel the benefit of their foreign aid and their (American) biased influence in the Secretariat was one of the major issues that caused divisions among the officers....

The Report followed this line of criticism, concluding that the aid had undermined the organisation, had kept unpopular leaders in power and killed the incentive to rely on the rank and file. It also stated in relation to McCray, that there was 'ample evidence that he did more than giving aid and advice', giving instructions to officers, and possibly taking part in the proceedings of the Amalgamation. (Urhobo Report 1971:40-61).

Despite the evident failure of the AALC's efforts, criticism of the AALC by ULC President Adebola in 1969[3] and Urhobo in 1971, and the total disappearance of the moderate leadership amongst Lagos dockworkers, the Americans did not abandon their efforts. Possibly having learned from their

bad experience of 'direct assistance to unions', they now decided on a welfare project, evidently meant to make a direct appeal to the dockers themselves. In 1970, it was announced that "**AFL-CIO and AALC aid Lagos dockworkers**' (AALC Reporter, September 1970). Under a 'crash programme'. the AALC was to finance the construction of toilet facilities. This project was, however, evidently not one negotiated with the non-existent trade union. It was agreed upon between the Port Commandant and Teddy Gleason, a Vice-President of the AFL-CIO. Nonetheless, the project was described as 'another example of how trade unions make significant contributions to social welfare and development'.

The US $55 000 project was, indeed, completed in record time, with the six buildings, each containing showers, toilets, sinks and drinking fountains, being opened on December 15, 1971. The handing-over ceremony took place in the presence of Irving Brown, Executive Director of the AALC[4], the Ports Manager, and a representative of the ULC. Despite the absence of any dockworker or representative of the dockworkers, the plaque commemorating the gift declares that it had been installed by the AALC 'in co-operation with the ULC for the advancement of the welfare of the dock workers and the productivity of Lagos Port'. Once installed, the six buildings then 'disappeared'. Questioned about them in 1975-76, neither moderate nor radical leaders, neither NPA workers or officers, could say anything about them. One story was that a certain ULC officer had been given the contract and misappropriated the money. A more common one was that reproduced by the Adebiyi Report (1977:21). This allowed for the existence of the toilets but stated that they 'had not been put into use because of lack of water'. It was only after some two months in the Port that I 'discovered' the buildings, including the one with the plaque. They were functioning, but they were locked so as to prevent their use by any but key holders - presumably higher-level NPA personnel. Although this effort may have improved relations between the AALC and the Nigerian government, NPA and the ULC, it can evidently have had little positive impact on either the welfare of the dockers or the productivity of the Port.

One can only speculate as to whether it was recognition of the impossibility of influencing the dockers in the absence of a moderate leadership that caused the AALC to abandon its 'development projects' stress in favour of once again financing the creation of such a leadership in the Port. We know, in any case, that it did feel it worthwhile investing in the reconstitution of a leadership which had demonstrated its incapacity but five years earlier. Its willingness to do so is, no doubt, to be explained by the links of the AFL-CIO with the US state and multi-national companies, and its fana-

tical opposition to socialism. Issue after issue of the **AALC Reporter** makes evident in word and picture that the interest of the AALC is as much in good relations with African governments as with trade unions.

The AALC was even prepared to propagate the fanciful notion that 'the roots of the trade union lie deep in African Society', and to 'compare the ancient African art of negotiation and compromise to the modern trade union techniques of collective bargaining and arbitration'. In a film scripted by Nate Gould, who was to succeed McCray in Lagos, a model of trade unionism is propounded that would seem to be closer to the company union within W.H. Biney's that to anything else to be found in the Port of Lagos. This is how the film was presented by the AALC Reporter (May 1971):

> In a city marketplace and a remote village, on a timber plantation and in an Accra office building, the viewer sees that collective bargaining is but an extension of the type of negotiating that two villages would undertake, for example, in agreeing to jointly build and maintain a road linking the villages; that grievance handling is not basically different from the same two villages settling a disagreement over subsequent maintenance of the road; and that the role of the arbitrator between labor and management is the same as that of a paramount chief whose ruling on disputes is accepted by both parties.

The comparison between contemporary worker-capitalist or worker-state relations in contemporary Africa and those between two classless village communities might seem somewhat strained to the reader of this study - or to the Lagos dock or portworker. What it may suggest is that the ideology of W.H. Biney, of the Nigerian state, of the moderate dockworker leadership and the AFL-CIO represent variations on the same theme: that the relationship of worker and employer is one of **equals or potential equals with overriding common interests.** Such a notion was acceptable to the Nigerian state and the AALC was evidently more interested in promoting good relations with a pro-capitalist state open to US investment than in developing unions that could protect workers against these. In this, at least, it has booked some success.

The International Transport Workers Federation

The International Transportworkers Federation seems to have been the most constant friend of the moderate dockworker leadership in Nigeria. It has had connections with the dockworkers since the 1950s, and A.E. Okon was a member of its Executive Board from 1962 to 1968. It had a representative

in Nigeria during the 1960s. And, since 1970, its Accra-based African representative has been Roxy Udogwu a Nigerian who makes frequent visits to Lagos. For the nature, motives and activities of the ITF, we can turn to his evidence to the Adebiyi Tribunal (ITF 1976). The ITF presents itself as an international organisation for all transport workers, set up for co-operation, exchange of information and 'the practice of authentic working class solidarity'. It aims to embrace all transport unions regardless of colour, nationality, race or creed. It claims to stand

> for the defence of democracy and freedom and is opposed to colonialism, totalitarianism, aggression and discrimination in all their forms.

Membership is open to all transport unions, 'provided that such unions subscribe to democratic principles and are independent of any outside control'. Within Nigeria it claims 17 affiliates, including the ADWT&GWU(U). According to Udogwu, ITF activities in Nigeria

> have been strictly restricted to practical trade unionism....The ITF is not a political organisation and has never indulged in any political acvtivities in Nigeria...At no time did the ITF offer any aid....with strings or on political or ideological considerations...

Udogwu admitted to past financial contributions to Nigerian unions, but declared that

> Once it became certain that those aids had been well utilised by the recipients to achieve self-reliance, they were quickly discontinued.

What it had rather been involved in, he claimed, was practical advice and assistance, particularly in the area of education. The ITF had in the past few years conducted 15 seminars in Nigeria, always in co-operation with, and with the participation of, the government, particularly the Ministry of Labour. Referring to the matter of trade union division in Nigeria, Udogwu gave the example of the dockworkers:

> It is no secret that the ITF has never been happy with the proliferation of mushroom unions....Equally the ITF has frowned upon the disunity which had characterised the labour movement of Nigeria for decades. Thus, one of the aims of all ITF's seminars in Nigeria has been to engender mutual understanding and trust so as to unite the mushroom unions on industrial lines as a prelude to unity on the Central Labour

> level. For example, it was the initiative of the ITF that resulted in the amalgamation in 1966 of the mushroom unions in the Nigerian dock industry into the present body....

We know of the contribution of the ITF to the original Amalgamation, as well as to the reconstitution of the same body in 1973. From syllabi we can see the kind of courses it was organising in West Africa at this period. One, attended by J.N. Aggo of the ADWT&GWU(U), was on 'Workers Participation in Nation Building', this being understood as 'the noblest undertaking in which every worker should strive to participate'. A less-ideological and more dock-related seminar was organised in 1975. This was called specifically to consider questions of recruitment and engagement, job security and the impact of technological change, particularly in relation to a relevant ILO Convention. Its resolutions called for governments to ratify the convention, to permit dockers the right to organise and 'withdraw their labour where the need arises', to ensure new methods did not destroy jobs, and to encourage further contacts amongst participating organisations (ITF Seminar Documents 1975). So much for ITF claims and activities. What of its achievements?

In the docks of Lagos the ITF has been for a quarter of a century supporting leaders who were incapable of obtaining a popular following. Not once but twice it put its efforts into the creation of an amalgamation and it continually poured in moral support, education and advice which its supporters were unable to use to the benefit of the dockers. Throughout the years, the base of the moderates has been not so much the dockers themselves as the Ministry, the ULC, at least one friendly contractor and - of course- the AALC and the ITF itself. When the moderates finally gained control of the single legal national dockworkers' union in 1978, this was due to an act of the state, and it was followed by widespread unrest amongst the Lagos dockers.

It is evident that the ITF has been propagating in West Africa the brand of trade unionism and pattern of labour relations believed in or practised by the moderate-reformist trade unions that dominate it. Hostile to the notion of class struggle, and desirous for pragmatic reasons (as well as through ideological conviction) of access to the young transport workers' unions in Africa, it was always prepared to convince colonial or post-colonial governments of its 'a-politicism', whilst in practice actively identifying with and reinforcing the development policies of corrupt and reactionary colonial or military regimes.

The ITF problem is that it has contradictory aims. In Udogwu's statement to Adebiyi we find both a declaration of liberal-democratic and develop-

mentalist faith, and a programme of practical and non-partisan organisational assistance. The two are contradictory in word and practice. There is a contradiction in word between the denial of 'ideological considerations' for assistance, and the use of such terms as 'free', 'democratic' and 'totalitarian' (which belong to the traditional terminology of middle class liberal ideologues). There is a contradiction in practice because the ideological conditions were used to support one faction against the other, thus creating the major obstacle to the uniting of unions on industrial lines in the docks. The rejection of the effective, popularly-supported, autonomous leadership in the docks *meant the denial to it of practical training and advice that it could have used.* The long-standing opposition to the radicals was evidently due to a traditional hostility to communism that apparently continued in Africa at a time when the ITF was willing - for pragmatic reasons - to improve its relations with communist unions in both Eastern and Western Europe.

Although the ITF would no doubt like to differentiate itself from the AFL-CIO, its impact on the Lagos dockworkers has been little different. Does this mean that the ITF has been a tool of the CIA in Nigeria? The ITF has been named as an instrument of the CIA in Latin America. Former CIA agent Philip Agee declares that the various International Trade Secretariats (ITSs) are often more effective and appropriate for CIA influence than the ICFTU structure in Latin America. He declares that Jack Otero, a US transport union leader and ITF representative in Latin America, was a CIA 'contract labour agent' there at one time. He gives examples of efforts made to control Latin American transport unions in the interests of the US state (Agee 1975:76,306,358,384). In 1978 Otero was a Vice-President of the ITF. In respect to the Nigerian dock unions, evidently the US trade unions can operate either directly, through the AALC, or indirectly, through the ITF. In fact, the same individual has played a leading role in both bodies. Teddy Gleason, who in 1970 made the toilet deal with the Nigerian government on behalf of the AALC, was in 1974 elected a Vice-President of the ITF.

One should beward of conspiracy theories: neither the CIA nor the US trade unions control the ITF. But the ITF is open to such influences because it shares the false belief of the AFL-CIO that workers in the third world 'face similar problems today to those which confronted workers half a century ago in the more industrialised nations'. and that the appropriate model is that of 'countries where there is a long established tradition of democratic trade unionism and industrial relations'. (ITF 1975:4)

The problem with this notion is that as a result of policies emanating from the dominant states and multi-nationals, there are less and less liberal regimes in the third world. The ITF may help trade union struggle against illiberal regimes in Portugal, Chile or South Africa. But liberal regimes remain

in existence only as long as the trade unions are 'reasonable'. If the working class and other parts of the poor become 'dangerous' then we get coups or states of emergency, as in Tunisia, Chile, or Thailand. The ITF favours the 'reasonable' unions, and - in Latin America - opposes movements with revolutionary 'ideologies which do not answer the continent's needs' (ITF Activities Report 1977:65). So does the CIA. If the ITF was to effectively separate itself from such influences, it would have to be open to those trade unions that are taking appropriate and effective action against capitalist exploitation and state repression, whether their ideologies and methods were 'reasonable' or not. For the meantime one is forced to recognise that in Nigeria ITF principles and practices have also been more in the interests of national and international capital and of the Nigerian state than in those of the Lagos dockworkers.

Conclusion

It is time to return to the various explanations for weakness and division amongst the dockworker unions in Lagos. Udogwu, as the man on the spot, was acutely aware of the ineffectiveness of the moderates. We have seen him explaining this in terms of the tribalism and communist trouble-making of their opponents, of their own disadvantageous ethnic composition, of their personality weaknesses and conflicts. Doubt has already been thrown on such explanations. But the question remains of why such an analysis was made by the ITF. The obvious answer is that this made it possible for the ITF to conceal **from itself** its own erroneous strategy and its own heavy responsibility for the divisions. The ITF was, thus not only unable to support the **effective** radical leadership, but also to give its **ineffective** clients the quite simple advice which would have enabled them to begin appealing to ordinary Lagos dockworkers.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that whatever the benefits of national and international relations in terms of the provision of moral, financial, technical and educational support, such contacts gave personal, ethnic or strategic difference an organisational form and an irrelevant ideological justification. It appears that the **less** the contact with such external bodies the **more** a dockwide union was able to respond to dockworker needs. The same lesson seems to have been drawn by H.P. Adebola. Although he had once been deeply involved with the ICFTU and the AALC, and had himself approved the financial assistance to the dockworkers in 1966-8, he eventually came to the following conclusion:

> I am sorry I have to say it, we have to be truthful here. When the Dockers

were getting money from George McCray, every month they will get money, you don't find them on the quays. That was why Endeley Olagboshe was able to drive all of them away. Because when he was holding meeting at the Dock, the people who were being paid by George McCray were sitting on big tables in the officers...Those who where being paid could not face the workers, and Olagboshe who was not being paid was addressing the workers at Apapa (Adebiyi Proceedings 1976:27:21).

Footnotes

1. The source of this material is my draft Ph.D. Entitled 'Wage Labour Relations in Nigeria: State, Capitalists, Unions and Workers in the Lagos Cargo-Handling Industry' (Waterman 1979a), this deals with the relationship between the casual dockworker and the regularly-employed portworker.
2. Chief E.A.O. Odeyemi was later to be even more severely criticised by a tribunal. In addition to his ULC post, he was General Secretary of the Nigerian Motor Drivers and Allied Transport Workers Union. With the aid of the ITF this had in 1962 set up a Motor Drivers Training School. From 1965, both finance and technical expertise for the school were provided by the AALC. In 1974, the Training School was still receiving aid of US $6 000 from the AALC and an additional N15 000 from the Nigerian Industrial Training Fund. By this time the operation was formally in the hands of the Motor Union, but in practice in those of Odeyemi. In 1974 the school and the land it stood on were transferred to Chief Odeyemi and his heirs. The Adbeyi Tribunal declared that such dealings 'raise grave doubts about the integrity of Chief Odeyemi', and recommended he be banned from further union office. (Adebiyi Report 1977:24-5).
3. Adebola's attack on the AALC seems to have sprung directly out of its disastrous support to the Amalgamation. Although, as ULC President, Adebola admits to having approved this programme, he claims never to have been shown any accounts relating to it. Apparently, it was the NTUC attacks on the AALC at the Urhobo Inquiry that stimulated Adebola to write directly to the AALC, citing American exposures of CIA links with US unions and demanding AALC accounts. (Adebiyi Proceedings 1976:25, 103-13).
4. Irving Brown has been frequently named as the key CIA linkman within the international trade union movement. Philip Agee (1975:603) describes him during an earlier period as 'representative of the American Federation of Labour and principal CIA agent for control of the ICFTU'.

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