

# **SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN**

## **FOCUS ON INTERNATIONAL LABOUR**

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**FRÖBEL, HEINRICH  
& KREYE**

**NEW INTERNATIONAL DIVISION  
OF LABOUR**

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**PETER WATERMAN**

**LAGOS DOCKWORKER UNIONISM**

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**LCG DOUWES DEKKER**

**INTERNATIONAL LABOUR BODIES &  
THEIR RELEVANCE TO SA**

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**INTERVIEW**

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**DISPUTE AT ALLIED PUBLISHING**

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# **SOUTH AFRICAN LABOUR BULLETIN**

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**The views expressed in the articles are not necessarily those of the editorial board.  
All contributions, comments and correspondence should be addressed to:**

**The South African Labour Bulletin  
4 Central Court P.O. Box 18109  
125 Gale Street Dalbridge  
Durban 4001 Durban 4000**

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## **Apology**

The Editors wish to draw to the attention of readers that various acknowledgements were not made to an article written by L. Douwes Dekker ('Improving Social Services') in **Labour Perspective on South Africa**, edited by W.H. Thomas, David Philip, 1974 in the article by D. Cooper in Vol. 4 Nos. 9 and 10 of the **South African Labour Bulletin**. The missing acknowledgements are as follows:

1. The last paragraph on page 86; the first three paragraphs on page 87; the first, second and third paragraphs on page 92; the first paragraph on page 94; the first paragraph on page 96.
2. Table 1 on pages 90 and 91; the Table on page 96.
3. The statistical information referred to in the footnotes No. 3 on page 92 and No. 4 on page 95.

## **Comment - International Worker Solidarity?**

This edition of the SALB focusses on international labour for two separate but related reasons.

Firstly, a spate of academic articles and pamphlets have appeared overseas recently, using such concepts as 'trade union imperialism' and 'syndicalist internationalism' which might be unfamiliar to our readers.

**Syndicalist internationalism** - the notion that the multi-national corporation provides a structural base for the development of international working class solidarity - flows out of the changing international division of labour described by the German trio in this edition. In essence, they demonstrate that, over the last two decades, manufacturing has increasingly been relocated in areas such as South East Asia and Southern Africa, where large reserves of cheap and controlled labour exist. This relocation has been facilitated by technological developments that make it possible to decompose complex production processes and become less dependent on skilled manpower. However, the argument that a new objective basis exists for working class solidarity can become a superficial attempt to find an economic basis for international trade union politics if it ignores the persistent social and political differences between countries. A very real danger exists of certain kinds of mass production industries such as textiles and assembly line work being shifted to the 'third world' while the 'advanced' countries reserve for themselves those processes which require some know-how, some technological knowledge and a skilled labour force. This perpetuates dependency and reproduces the inequalities between 'third world' and 'advanced' countries. In addition, there is an increasing tendency for multi-nationals, instead of developing substitutes, to transfer dangerous or controversial production processes from metropolitan countries, where trade union pressure and stricter safety regulations make them unprofitable to 'third world' countries. A recent example is the transfer of an entire asbestos textile factory from West Germany to Philippi in the Cape.

The German trio avoid this trap of syndicalist internationalism and emphasise the crucial link between the changing division of labour and political questions.

Our second reason for focussing on international labour is the growing involvement of the ICFTU and the AFL-CIO in Southern Africa. Douwes Dekker describes in detail the background and nature of their activities. Waterman and Harrod, in their case studies of West Africa and the West Indies, provide us with a warning of what could happen if the independent

labour movement does not avoid the pitfalls of trade union imperialism.

For the democratic labour movement in South Africa, there is no choice between involvement with the international movement or not. The nature of the situation is such that international support, both material and moral, is of immense importance. However, trade union imperialism can be avoided if alliances are democratically discussed, carefully audited and openly accounted for. A part of this process is the forging of sound international contact between workers which, as the interview with Bob Ashworth shows, can best be done on a factory-to-factory basis.

## **The New International Division of Labour**

**Fröbel, Heinrichs, Kreye**

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) expects that the number of registered unemployed in Western Europe will rise from about seven million in 1977 to 7,5 or even eight million during 1978 and 1979. This estimate had just been published when the newspapers announced that production of the Volkswagen beetle in Germany would definitely cease in 1978. Meanwhile, the first beetles 'made in Mexico' were already being shipped to Europe from the Volkswagen works at Puebla.

The reader will find similar reports in the press almost every day. High and rising unemployment figures make headline news in the traditional industrial countries as does, on the other hand, the relocation of ever-increasing proportions of industrial production to developing countries and the export to markets of traditional industrial countries of a considerable part of the output of such relocated production. In most newspaper accounts, however, information about these two processes is given separate coverage.

Trade union discussions in the Federal Republic of Germany tend to draw the same line of separation. The impact of rationalisation and automation on increasing unemployment rates and on the devaluation of acquired professional skills is widely discussed. Recently, attention has centred on the implications of the introduction of electronic equipment and process technology in many sectors of the industry and administration. In contrast, little attention has so far been paid to the implications of the relocation of manufacturing to foreign countries. The question, then of how the current leap forward in rationalisation relates to the world-wide redistribution of industrial sites is scarcely discussed at all.

Yet there can be no doubt that the introduction of electronic equipment and technology is advanced primarily by decomposing the production process, which enables the costs of the production and assembly of electronic components to be reduced through the utilisation of the cheap labour force available in the developing countries, thereby facilitating rationalisation schemes based on the introduction of electronic equipment and technologies. Nor can there be any doubt that the transfer of production to new sites -

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The authors are working at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Living Conditions in the Scientific-Technical Word (Starnberg, Germany). The following article first appeared in the *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte*, the theoretical journal of the German trade union Federation DGB. Our thanks go to Free Labour World, journal of the ICFTU, for allowing us to republish the article.

or even only the imminent possibility of such transfers - enforces accelerated rationalisation of production also in other sectors, as for instance textiles and steel, in the industrial countries in order to keep competitive.

This essay intends to point to the interconnection and interaction of rationalisation, unemployment, and deskilling with the transfer of industrial manufacturing to new production sites. Thus, we will add a new and decisive dimension to the reporting of the press and to the trade union discussion.

In the capitalist world economy, industrial production develops only at sites which guarantee profitability. Consequently, capitalist development has historically manifested itself not only in the emergence of wage-labour as the dominant relation of production and in the intensification of the division of labour in the factory, but also always in the development of a regional and international division of labour

### **World Market for Labour and World Market for Industrial Sites**

In the classical international division of labour which developed over centuries, industrial sites for profitable manufacturing existed almost only in Western Europe and later in the United States of America and in Japan. Except in very rare instances, there were no such sites in the countries of the so-called Third World. These countries were integrated into the developing world-wide economy for the most part as markets for the industrial products of traditional industrial countries and as suppliers of agricultural and mineral raw materials, and sometimes as suppliers of labour (African slaves for the American sugar and cotton plantations, for instance). This old or 'classical' international division of labour is due for replacement. In a number of developing countries a process of world market-oriented (partial) industrialisation was started some ten years ago.

Since the developing countries are increasingly providing sites for the profitable manufacture of industrial products for the world market, we have to ask what changes have occurred in the 'given' preconditions for the world-wide expansion and accumulation of capital. There are three preconditions which have come into existence and which taken together, appear to be decisive for this new development. (We cannot here attempt to show that these preconditions determining present-day capital expansion and accumulation can for the most part, be understood only as the result of the historical development of the capitalist world-economy.)

First, there has come into existence a world-wide reservoir of potential labour. This potential labour has been created primarily through the advancing capitalisation of agriculture in the developing countries (the destruction of small subsistence agriculture and thereby of the modest traditional basis



of survival for large parts of the rural population); in addition many workers in 'socialist' countries can be integrated into the production process of capital under subcontracting arrangements. Thus, capital can count on a pool of several hundred million potential workers in Asia, Africa and Latin America and in a certain sense even in 'socialist' countries. (Compare with the estimate of the total number of employed in manufacturing in capitalist industrialised countries, which came to about 77 million in 1970.) This practically inexhaustible reservoir of potential labour existing above all in the developing countries displays the following characteristics:

- (a) Wages actually to be paid by capital, including fringe benefits, in low-wage countries (which means practically all developing countries) are roughly 10 to 20 per cent of those in traditional industrial countries.
- (b) The working day, the working week, the working time per year are as a rule considerably longer in developing countries than in traditional industrial countries. (Thus, for instance, the average of 'productive hours' of work per year per employee comes to roughly 2 800 hours in South Korea as compared to 1 900 productive hours in the Federal Republic of Germany).
- (c) Labour productivity in production relocated to developing countries is generally equivalent to the productivity of comparable industry in traditional industrial countries.
- (d) The labour force can be hired and fired virtually limitlessly. This means, *inter alia*, that higher labour intensity can be enforced by quicker exhaustion of the labour force. Exhausted workers can almost without any restrictions be replaced by newly recruited ones.
- (e) The extent of the available reserve army allows for an 'optimal' selection of the most suitable labour force according to age, sex, skill, discipline, etc., (for example, young women).

Second, technological developments have made the location of industrial sites and the direction and control of production itself less dependent on geographical position and distance.

Modern transport technology has made possible rapid and relatively cheap transport between the locations of intermediate and/or final production and the consumer markets: bulk carriers, containerisation, air cargo. (Thus, for instance, the air freight for one piece of clothing from South East Asia

to Western Europe is about 0,50 to 1,00 US dollars.) Telecommunications systems, data-processing techniques and other organisational devices make feasible the direct control of production world-wide.

Third, the development and refinement of technology and labour organisation, which make it possible to decompose complex production processes, are now so advanced that even an unskilled labour force can easily and quickly be trained to perform such fragmented routines. This is particularly so for a labour force which has been prepared for future factory work by some years of primary schooling. In this way, skilled labour receiving high wages can be replaced by unskilled or semi-skilled labour receiving much lower wages, especially in underdeveloped countries where effective trade unions do not exist. The companies must in each case calculate whether they have to make sure of the relatively low-skilled but extremely cheap labour force which is readily available world-wide by appropriate rationalisation (Decomposition) of the work process and/or by relocating parts of the manufacturing. In addition, by means of the progressive fragmentation of production processes, capital secures for itself a monopoly of knowledge, so that it can control each phase of the labour process and its mode of execution and deprive the workers of the possibility of planning and control.

The coincidence of these three preconditions for the present world-wide expansion and accumulation of capital, that is, the existence of a global 'reservoir' of potential labour, the advancement of transport and communication technology, and the fragmentation of production processes, has brought into existence a world-wide industrial reserve army, in the exact sense of this term, given that - and to the extent that - all this potential labour competes and is compelled to compete 'successfully' with workers in the traditional industrial countries for available jobs.

In this way there has developed a world labour market and a world market for production sites which, as regards manufacturing industries, now effectively encompasses both the traditional industrial countries and the developing countries for the first time. For many locations in developing countries this means that for the first time in the history of capitalist world economy industrial sites for world-market-oriented production of intermediate and finished industrial goods are operating there on a profitable as well as competitive basis and must hence be utilised by capital.

This is a process which -

- ★ is bound to break up the traditional partition of the world into a few industrial countries on one hand and the great majority of developing countries integrated into the capitalist world economy only as raw material suppliers on the other;

- ★ enforces increasing subdivision of the manufacturing process into separate partial production processes at different locations around the world.

it will be designated by the term 'the new international division of labour' - a division of labour which is to be understood as an ongoing process and not as an accomplished result.

On the world-wide labour market, workers in traditional industrial countries are now forced to compete for their jobs with their colleagues in developing countries. On the world-wide market in production sites, traditional industrial countries and developing countries now have to compete against one another in attracting industry to their sites. And lastly, enterprises, in order to survive, must today re-organise production according to the world-wide conditions of present-day expansion and accumulation. So far, schemes for the rationalisation of production in the traditional industrial sites were the most important means by which enterprises secured their continued survival. These means alone are no longer adequate today. The relocation of production around the world to exploit the cheap labour force is now operating in conjunction with rationalisation. Again, that is not all. The development of the capitalist world economy in the future will be determined more and more by the introduction of 'rationalisation' schemes in combination with the transfer of as many jobs as possible to new sites. Workers who lose their jobs in the traditional industrial countries as a result of rationalisation schemes or of relocation, or owing to a combination of both, are either made redundant and not replaced, or are replaced by workers in a foreign factory which might even be a subsidiary of the workers' 'own' company. In the future, the chances of these workers to find another job, let alone a comparable one, will be much worse. Hence 'job mobility' (with regard to both skills and sites), which for the workers means that they are compelled to secure the market value of their labour power through stepped-up retraining - i.e., by quick physically and psychically exhausting adaptation to changing demands, will increase in the future.

The currently observable crisis phenomena in traditional industrial countries (such as stagnating or decreasing rates of investment) can be interpreted on the basis of the analytical framework outlined above as (a) the results of the implementation of the new international division of labour so far, and (b) the manifestation of uncertainty on the part of capital, which sees itself confronted by the secular trend towards a new international division of labour but also by some counteracting factors which might slow down this trend, an uncertainty as to 'how are we to go on'. These counteracting factors involve:

- possible concessions by the State and the trade unions in traditional industrial countries to persuade capital to 'stay at home';
- 'political instability' in some regions of the so-called Third World;
- the possibility (in some cases) of achieving the same or even higher profits through enforced rationalisation schemes applied in traditional industrial centres than through relocation of production to a 'low-wage' country.

An additional element of uncertainty is the question of whether the current protectionist tendencies will continue to assert themselves in world trade or not. Were the protectionist tendencies to prevail, relocation of production for supplying the markets of industrial countries with manufacturers from other industrial countries or from low-wage countries would become harder to promote. On the other hand, if protectionism is further intensified, there will be an increase in relocations which are aimed at replacing prevailing exports from industrial countries by domestic production, especially if in the countries to which production will be relocated political conditions are created under which the purchasing power of the mass of the population might eventually be increased.

The uncertainty about what the right policy could be, which derives from the secular trend towards a new international division of labour and the concomitant counteracting factors, could therefore provide scope for political action on the part of the trade unions of traditional industrial countries, which is something that has not seemed to be on the agenda for many years now.

### **The Present State of the Implementation of the New International Division of Labour**

The extent to which this trend toward a new international division of labour has already taken effect cannot, in quantitative terms, be deduced from the analysis outlined above. To answer this question, it was necessary to carry out empirical investigations, some of the results of which are presented below.

An analysis of the employment figures for the Federal Republic of Germany's manufacturing industry shows that the number of employees in manufacturing industry in the FRG ranged from 7,5 to 8,5 million for the period 1961-1975, while in the same period the number of employees of West German manufacturing companies in factories abroad rose steadily from about 350 000 in 1969 to about 1,5 million in 1975. Hence at the beginning of the 1960s, for every 100 workers employed by West German manufacturing com-

panies in Germany, there were about 4 to 5 employed in foreign countries by West Germany manufacturing companies, but by 1975 this figure had gone up to 20 per 100. Thus the manufacturing production of West German subsidiaries abroad has reached the same relative dimensions as that of the USA's manufacturing industry.

In the period 1961-1976, there could be identified 1 716 foreign subsidiaries of 580 West German manufacturing companies (capital share 25% and more) producing abroad (outside the EEC and excluding textile and garment industries). As for the structure of foreign production and employment, nearly all branches of manufacturing are represented. The number of West German companies involved is the highest in the mechanical engineering industry, while the chemical industry has the largest number of subsidiaries and the electrotechnical industry the highest number of employees in foreign countries. In the period 1961-1975 foreign employment by West German manufacturing companies in developing countries increased from 48 385 to 378 730.

**Table I**

**Subsidiaries & Employment of West German Manufacturing Companies in Developing Countries, by Countries [without Textile & Garment Industries, including Agriculture, Forestry, Energy, Mining].**

	Number of Subsidiaries identified for the Period 1961-1976	Number of Subsidiaries for which Employment Figures could be collected for 1975	Number of Employees on Basis of Figures collected for 1975
Total number in developing countries including:	1 051	732	382 350
Spain	186	141	46 042
Portugal	33	24	8 753
Greece	47	34	6 678
Turkey	18	15	7 900
Mexico	63	50	22 433
Argentina	52	39	21 883
Brazil	267	176	177 793
Liberia	2	2	3 160
Iran	32	16	6 567
India	80	44	38 480
Indonesia	21	17	3 934
Singapore	14	4	5 748
Malaysia	15	13	4 229

**Source:** Fröbel/Heinrichs/Kreye, *Die neue internationale Arbeitsteilung*, Table II-8.

## **The New International Division of Labour**

West German manufacturing companies have their subsidiaries (outside the EEC) situated in 77 countries. The most important countries are Brazil, Spain, the USA, Austria, South Africa, India, Mexico and Argentina. The major regions are Latin America, the Mediterranean, and South and South-East Asia.

Table 1 shows some figures for selected developing countries. (It should be noted, however, that textile and garment industries are not included, while agriculture, forestry, energy and mining are included and that employment figures are not known for a considerable number of the subsidiaries identified.)

The data indicated exclude cases of West German foreign production with only a low West German capital participation (less than 25%) or no formal capital participation at all. It is, however, possible for West German industry to utilise foreign production facilities and foreign labour in many ways without capital participation, as is evidenced by such cooperative arrangements as international subcontracting, management, supply and licence agreements. There is a high proportion of this type of foreign production in the West German textile and in particular in the garment industry (subcontracting arrangements with Eastern Europe and subcontracting by industry and commerce in South East Asia).

The extent of the relocation of garment production from West Germany to foreign countries in the last 15 years is made evident by the fact that in 1960 the turnover of the West German garment industry derived from domestic production was still 99,3% of domestic consumption while it was only 82,6% of domestic consumption in 1975. This massive relocation of West German garment production to foreign countries has had as its concomitant a corresponding decline in the employment figures of the West German industry, which dropped from 536 000 in 1960 to 351 000 in 1975, about half of which is attributable to increasing garment import surpluses. An increasingly large proportion of West German garment imports (and by now the predominant share) comes from the developing and the centrally planned economies. In its foreign subsidiaries (capital share 25% or more), the West German garment industry in 1975 employed about 30 000 workers, two-thirds of whom were engaged predominantly or exclusively in production for the West German market.

The data presented are based on an in-depth investigation of the manufacturing industry of a major industrialised country; they show how the changed conditions of the world-wide expansion and accumulation of capital are forcing an increasing number of industrial enterprises from all branches of

industry to reorganise production, which, in a growing number of cases, means having to produce abroad (in a growing number of countries). The trend towards a new international division of labour manifests itself in the changing distribution throughout the world of West German companies' production sites.

In developing countries this process is tied up with the genesis of a new type of industrial site - the free production zone - and with the establishment of a new type of factory - the world market factory. Free production zones are industrial enclaves set up for world-market-oriented production at sites where cheap labour is abundant. World market factories are factories established on these sites and also outside free production zones for the purpose of utilising the available labour force, predominantly for production for the markets of the traditional industrial countries.

In 1975, a total of 79 free production zones were in operation in 25 developing countries, 11 in Asia, 5 in Africa, and 9 in Latin America. In 14 other underdeveloped countries world market factories were operating outside free production zones. During 1975, 39 free production zones were under construction in 21 countries, including 11 countries in which no free production zone was as yet in operation by 1975.

While in the mid-sixties hardly any industries were manufacturing in the developing countries for markets in the industrial countries, by the middle of the 1970s, thus only ten years later, thousands of factories were in operation in at least 39 developing countries (15 in Asia, 8 in Africa and 16 in Latin America), virtually all of them producing almost exclusively for the markets of the traditional industrial countries.

By 1975, there were at least 725 000 workers employed in world market factories both inside and outside the free production zones. 500 000 of these inside a free production zone.

As for the structure of production in these locations, nearly all branches of manufacturing industry are represented. However, as far as individual zones and countries are concerned, there is a tendency for industrial mono-structures to develop. By far the largest share of production in 1975 was in the textile and garment and in the electrotechnical product groups. To a high degree, production in the world market factories is vertically integrated into the transnational operations of individual companies and involves non-complex production tasks, the manufacture of each product or within each product group, if, on the whole, characterised by a partial production process, i.e., by the manufacture of parts, the assembly of parts, or the final assembly of components only. Only in a few product groups does a complex production process take place, as in textiles and garments - and that in only a few countries.

The employment structure in free production zones and in world market factories located outside a zone is extremely unbalanced. Given a virtually unlimited supply of unemployed labour, the world market factories in free production zones and at other sites select a highly specific type of labour: mostly women in the younger age groups. The criteria for selection are unmistakable. Labour is employed which requires the minimum remuneration (often considerably less than US \$0,50 per hour for semi-skilled workers), which can produce the best results (a fresh labour force which can be expected to provide the highest work levels), and which is predominantly unskilled and semi-skilled.

### **Consequences**

The consequences of the emergence of the process of a new international division of labour, as described here, are already clearly recognisable, or, at least, evident in their broad outlines.

With regard to the traditional industrial countries, the primary implications of this process are high and constant rates of unemployment, attributable in the main to the relocation of production and the concomitant possibilities for and pressures towards intensifying rationalisation. It is to be expected that to the extent that implementation of the new international division of labour advances, there will be further large-scale lay-offs of labour in industrial countries. Thus, for the next five to ten years, the prospects are by no means a gradual decrease but instead an increase in the relative and absolute unemployment figures in the industrial countries.

As our investigations have shown, the world-wide reorganisation of industrial production through increasing relocation and intensified rationalisation is by no means limited only to those product groups the public knows about from the media, i.e., to such branches as textiles, garments, leather and shoe industries, precision mechanics and optics, the electrotechnical industry, and the like. Relocation of production can be shown to have started in all branches of manufacturing industry. There is increasing talk about a 'structural crisis' in the steel industry, in shipbuilding, and in mechanical engineering; this only means that the impact of relocation and rationalisation, which was first felt by other branches several years ago, has now reached these industries. And other branches will be similarly affected in the near future.

Even the adoption and practice of protectionist measures will not substantially slow down or reduce industrial relocation at any rate not in those traditional industrial countries which are characterised by high export rates for manufactured goods. To the extent that protectionism may for a moment



That relocation of production is bound up with new possibilities and new compulsions to rationalise production and this both in the traditional and the new locations of industrial manufacturing is exemplified by the electro-technical industry. Electromechanics could only be replaced by electronics in the electrotechnical industry itself and in other industries as well on the basis of large-scale production of cheap miniaturised components, mainly semi-conductors and integrated circuits. This in turn was made possible by utilising cheap labour in developing countries, that is a labour force able and 'willing' to work with microscopes. (As early as in 1974, more than 80 000 workers in developing countries were employed in the production of electronic components alone.) The resulting vast increase in output and supply of low-price components made possible and rendered necessary the rationalisation process generally referred to as the 'replacement of electromechanics by electronics' which has taken place in the electrotechnical industry itself as well as in other branches.

The redistribution of production on the world market for industrial sites increasingly forces countries to compete with each other to maintain or expand production on local sites or to attract industry to establish new sites within the national territory. To the extent that traditional industrial countries feel the negative impact of industrial relocation (which involves both the transfer of existing production to foreign locations and investment in expansion abroad), tax revenue from production and from profits tends to decline while at the same time the respective governments have to use fiscal incentives such as reducing the tax burden and/or providing subsidies to keep companies from moving out of the country or to encourage them to expand existing units of production there. Accordingly, what is termed 'the fiscal crisis of the state' is attributable to a considerable degree also to the redistribution of the sites of industrial production.

However, the further implementation of the new international division of labour also has another implication. It may be expected that the interests of wage labour in industrial countries and the interests of wage labour in developing countries will tend to converge. The lesson to be learned by the labour movement in the industrial countries from the process of the new international division of labour is to recognise that to defend their own interests in isolation from the labour movements in the developing countries is self-defeating. Now that the world market for labour has been established, there seem to be only two alternatives : There will either be a world labour movement or no labour movement at all. And, in the same way, governments pursuing social democratic politics will have to learn that social democratic policies detached from the interests of the wage-earners will become impracticable.

decrease relocation of production which is intended to manufacture goods for the domestic markets, this will be compensated by the accelerated increase in many cases of relocation to supply former export markets with products manufactured locally.

While the world-wide reorganisation of production results in growing unemployment in the industrial countries, it does not on the other hand noticeably reduce unemployment at the new sites of industrial production in the developing countries which are undergoing this process of industrialisation. The present rates of unemployment and underemployment in developing countries are already so high that even the relocation of a considerable proportion of world industrial production to new sites could create jobs for only a small number of the underemployed and unemployed in addition, the far-reaching structural changes in agricultural production in developing countries may be expected to increase rapidly the reservoir of potential labour which is already practically inexhaustible.

Nor are the consequences of the world-wide reorganisation of production limited to changes in the regional distribution of employed labour. Increased intensity of labour, extension of the working day (overtime, reduced time for sick leave) more rapid deskilling and last but not least falling real wages are even now a part of the everyday experience of workers especially in recent times also in traditional industrial countries. A downward trend in mass purchasing power is observable in traditional industrial countries which is not compensated, world-wide, by a corresponding growth of mass purchasing power in developing countries.

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# **The Foreign Impact on Lagos Dockworker**

## **Unionism**

### **Peter Waterman**

#### **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.<sup>1</sup> 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 portage 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 portage 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 1960s. 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 registered dock 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 the 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<sup>2</sup>, 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<sup>3</sup> 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<sup>4</sup>, 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 Adebisi 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 than 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 Adebisi 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 activities 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 Adebisi 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 beware 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 were 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 Adebeyi 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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# **Notes on International Labour Bodies and their Relevance to South Africa**

**L.C.G. Douwes Dekker**

## **Introduction**

The need for worker solidarity on an international level is as old as the trade union movement. With the increased focus on the power and influence of multi-national companies, the demands for control over their activities and the role of international union solidarity in this control is becoming more persistent. What are the likely issues around which international union solidarity expresses itself?

A survey conducted by the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), revealed that trade unions recognise that the question of inadequate employment conditions in a country would not easily bring about international solidarity.<sup>1</sup> The survey revealed that international solidarity on the issue of wage rates could be expressed, but concern about this area was not widespread. On the question of union rights, however, trade unions considered that there was considerable readiness to take concerted international action against a country which did not protect freedom of association. International solidarity of unions has also been expressed in terms of boycotts of particular products made by a company rather than united strike action in those various countries.

However, the problems underlying the right to take sympathy strike action across national frontiers is increasingly being debated. The argument being used for sympathy strikes in different countries is that if money or capital can be moved across national boundaries by multi-national companies, then trade unions should be free to take collective action across such frontiers.

In an article in the *International Labour Review* of the International Labour Office, A Pankert argues that international solidarity action gives rise to two kinds of legal problems.<sup>2</sup>

Firstly, there are widely differing restrictions which the different legislation places on solidarity action on the national level and secondly, there is the question as to whether such action is unlawful simply because the primary or initial dispute took place in another country. The increased attention given to these legal problems will lead to a demand for clarification and harmonisation of international legislation.

## **International Trade Secretariats**

As international union organisations developed and became effective, the possibility of their role in propagating certain Government policies received attention. This will become particularly apparent from the discussion on the nature of international federations of national coordinating bodies.

International Trade Secretariats (ITSs) operate in the free world in the following broad sectors: Metal, Transport, Chemical, Food, Commerce and Office, Postal and Telegraph, Clothing, Leather, Textile, Building, Wood, Printing, Graphic, Journalism, Plantations, Mines, Teachers, Public Servant employees.

An international trade secretariat is a coordinating body of the national unions of workers employed in the same trade or sector in the different countries. Their activities include the exchange of information on achievements in the various countries in the field of collective bargaining as well as details of strike actions taken. The influence of the ITSs is considerable, particularly on matters relating to the protection of trade union rights, the protection and liberation of trade union prisoners, collective bargaining and financial assistance, support during strikes, particularly attempts to influence multi-national companies.

The ITSs give considerable attention to countries where freedom of association is restricted. For example, in 1978, publicity was given to the suppression of the trade union movement in Tunisia and South American countries such as Chile, as well as support for groups operating in Czechoslovakia and Russia, who were demanding a free union movement.

In 1978 a boycott campaign was supported against the products of an American clothing company, J.P. Stephens, in support of the fight for union recognition in the USA. The International Union of Food Workers Association launched a campaign during 1978 against Unilever for its refusal to recognise the Sweet, Food and Allied Workers Union in South Africa.

In order to coordinate international action for workers employed by multi-national companies, some ITSs established World Councils. During the 1960s, the International Metal Workers Federation formed such World Councils which covers motor car assembly companies such as Ford, General Motors, Volkswagen. The World Councils first aim is to achieve harmony in working conditions, salaries and family allowances for all workers employed in the various countries where these multi-nationals operate. This approach was confirmed at a 1971 Congress when further emphasis on issues such as employment security, even spread of the production line, paid holidays, etc., was agreed upon.

The ITSs operate on the various sub-committees of the International

Labour Office (ILO) set up to establish uniformity in working conditions for specific sectors. From the work of such committees, international conventions can be drawn up by the ILO such as those determining the conditions of seafarers.

International Trade Secretariates have effective contact with South African trade unions. In 1975, a regional council for South Africa was established by the International Metal Workers Federation and in 1979, a Southern African (including Zimbabwe) Council of the International Union of Food Workers will be established as well as a South African Coordinating body of FEIT.

Registered trade unions, primarily those belonging to the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA), from the following sectors, are affiliated to ITSs. Certain metal and engineering unions, garment, textile and leather unions, tobacco unions, transport unions and unions in the distributive and hotel trade.

Black unions established by the Urban Training Project during the period 1973-1975 became affiliated members of the relevant Trade Secretariates when they were formed. The exception was that unions in the chemical, paper, laundry and dry cleaning trades were only offered associate membership status of the International Chemical Workers Federation.

The pragmatic nature of the services of the ITSs and adherence to the views of affiliates has led them to adopt a constructive engagement policy to the question of foreign investment in South Africa. It is stated that the 1978 report by the IMF/IG Metal subsequent to the fact finding mission to South Africa which argued for constructive investment, facilitated the raising of a capital loan by ESCOM in Germany. However, the *quid pro quo* of this policy by the ITSs has as yet not been specifically spelt out or understood in South Africa. Their requirements obviously include adherence by the subsidiaries of multi-national companies to the EEC Code, the Sullivan Manifesto and also the guide lines regarding employment practices and industrial relations of the OECD.

It can be noted that because the ITSs have a direct link with affiliated unions in specific countries that their influence is potentially far more effective than that, for example of the ICFTU. (See Appendix A for the names as well as membership strength of certain ITSs, and the requirements contained in resolutions passed at Congresses on South Africa).

A study conducted by Prof Roberts revealed a non-cooperative attitude by management to the extension of collective bargaining from a national to an international scale. However, Prof Roberts postulates that the desire by the trade unions to go beyond national frontiers in their influence will be assisted by the role which governments will be asked to play in persuading multi-national companies to recognise the cross national interests of trade unions



in the establishment of common policies in employment practices as well as procedures of negotiation and consultation.<sup>3</sup>

The unions of communist countries also have ITSs but little is known about their operation.

#### **International Federations of National Coordinating Bodies<sup>4</sup>**

The ITSs were established from 1887 onwards, but the move towards a central international organisation of national trade unions only came to fruition in 1913 when the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) was established. After the war years, in 1919, it had to be revived. The American Federation of Labour (AFL) which had initially participated withheld support for two reasons. The 'bread and butter' unionism of the AFL could not easily relate to the European trade unionism which had close ties with socialist political parties. Furthermore, the American trade unions accepted that they had a role to play in implementing US foreign policy. The European trade unions did not believe that their governments were leading them necessarily to a more democratic world.

However, during the 1930s, the AFL again considered rejoining the IFTU because fascism constituted a serious threat to the whole idea of trade union action. Also, inter-union rivalry, specifically the emergence of industrial unionism in America through the Committee for Industrial Organisations (CIO) became significant because the AFL did not want the CIO to become a spokesman of American workers if it affiliated to the IFTU.

After World War II, the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) superseded the IFTU. The CIO did affiliate but not the AFL as the latter felt that the communist unions were not independent of their governments. The communist countries gained control over the WFTU and a re-alignment occurred in 1949.

What international trade union bodies of national unions operate at present?

The **World Federation of Trade Unions** (Head Office in Prague) has a membership of 153 million workers, 60% of whom are from the Soviet Union, 30% from the Eastern Bloc countries and 10% elsewhere (primarily France and Italy).

Levinson states 'this is a top-heavy bureaucratic operation totally controlled and financed by the Government of the USSR'. Levinson predicted in 1972 that 'with the growth of the multi-national company, both in the West and towards the East, the WFTU affiliated unions in the West face the risk of isolation. The political propensities, strong centralised structures and international affiliations contributed towards removing them from the main

stream of dynamic world labour'.<sup>5</sup>

In 1978, the French CGT indicated its displeasure at the Congress of the WFTU regarding the timid reforms which were proposed for that organisation (to make it independent from Government control) by refusing to put up the name of a candidate for the position of General Secretary.

The **World Federation of Labour** (Head Office, Brussels) has 16 million affiliated workers - 28% in Europe, 23% in Asia, 35% in Latin America and 10% in East Africa. This Christian world-wide co-ordinating body, formed in 1920, has had discussions with the ICFTU with the view towards greater co-operation, if not amalgamation.

The **International Confederation of Free Trade Unions [ICFTU]** (Head Office, Brussels) has approximately 55 million affiliated workers - 67% in Europe, 16% in Asia, 7% in Latin America and 10% elsewhere.

The ICFTU, as a federation of national co-ordinating bodies from the free world, was established in 1949. It was formed when Western European Unions left the WFTU because of demands by Russia to have the WFTU condemn the Marshall Plan. The AFL and the CIO co-operated in the establishment of the ICFTU. It differed from the pre-war body IFTU in that, of the 53 countries represented, 33 belonged to less developed countries; 'the third world had made its entry bringing with it its own massive problems and seeking help in resolving them'.<sup>6</sup>

In 1956, Canada, West Germany, Great Britain, the USA and the Scandinavian countries set up, within the ICFTU, a solidarity fund (ISF) to help finance international trade union action, particularly assistance in organisation campaigns and workers' education. A basic principle was that this multi-lateral activity be mainly financed by trade union assistance. The implications behind the establishment of such a fund was that the AFL-CIO renounce its own activities in the area of organising financial assistance and co-operate solely with the ICFTU:

The American reaction to the fund was lukewarm and initially they refused to nominate a candidate for the executive board of the ISF. 'It then transpired that the Americans had a project under way in Africa which was on a collision course with ICFTU plans for a trade union school on the same continent'.<sup>7</sup> A compromise solution was worked out to get American support, but this merely meant postponement of the eventual break-up.

In 1959, the Americans began criticising the General Secretary of the ICFTU. Some time later, the British Unions began to attack the ISF. It was said the fund had too much money. 'They were supporting artificial national union confederations instead of helping to establish unions at the local level in the less developed countries'.

This led to a cut in the ISF budget. The AFL-CIO demanded money back

for the years 1961 to 1963. At the 1965 Amsterdam Congress, the further reduction in the ISF budget meant an end to ICFTU work of real significance in less developed countries. At the same Congress, the personality disputes between Walter Reuther (Union Automobile Workers/CIO) and George Meany (AFL) re-emerged. Reports about CIA funding of international trade union activities were also made available. The European unions felt closer to Reuther because of his socialist background than to George Meany.

The pre-World War II characteristics of international involvement by American Unions again became apparent. In particular, the use of the AFL to implement United States foreign policy as well as the reaction against socialist tendencies of the European trade unionists.

In 1969, the AFL-CIO left the ICFTU but at the same time it blocked the way for the UAW becoming affiliated by insisting that its possible return depended on the UAW not being received into membership of the AFL-CIO. The AFL-CIO continued to exercise its crippling influence on the ICFTU: 'In complete breach of the statutes, the AFL-CIO also retained its membership of ORIT which was the Latin American local organisation of the ICFTU'. As Wedin observed 'It hardly makes sense to be a member of the American Regional Organisation of the ICFTU without being in the International itself'.<sup>8</sup>

In 1965, the AFL-CIO began to operate the African American Labour Centre. Similar bodies were established in Asia and Latin America. The American approach changed the principle of multi-lateral aid to less developed countries to that of bilateral aid. The Americans also broke away from the principle that trade union aid across national frontiers should be paid out of union funds, by relying primarily on funding from the American Government.

The following summary by Wedin offers a useful explanation of the 'battle' between ICFTU and AFL-CIO in Africa:

The AFL-CIO was an experienced operator in Latin America, and had no need of the ICFTU there. In Africa, by contrast, the AFL-CIO did not have as significant a past or the established machinery. The AFL-CIO could also use the ICFTU there as a tool against British, French and Belgian 'colonialism' in order to acquire an influence of its own. In a purely general way the ICFTU was a particularly appropriate tool for this purpose during the first phase. The African liberation movements were using their trade union connections to make their voice heard in the world, and for many of them the ICFTU became a mouthpiece in the outside world. The trade union movement in Africa was not infrequently the backbone of liberation strength, and this also made it tempting to apply the more political, American method of ap-

proaching the African problems.

The ICFTU could also benefit from the feeling of dissatisfaction with the colonial powers, since the organisation was supporting the African trade union movement before liberation and emancipation. It is clear from their propaganda there - also in the capacity of ICFTU representatives - that the Americans wanted to win friends and influence in Africa against the 'colonialists' in Britain, France and Belgium. It is also clear from their planning for their own future bilateral activities. It is hardly to be wondered at that the British, who as far as one can judge, were striving to provide trade union support and clearly felt a special sense of responsibility for and particular empathy with their colleagues in the former British areas, became disturbed by the American actions.

The French situation was somewhat different since France had tried to make her African possessions into French overseas provinces. This had its counterpart on the union side in an arrangement with organisations affiliated to the communist-dominated French CGT. To the extent that the unions in the mother countries operated as a brake on the development towards independence, it was in the French case the Communists who played the part of delaying liberation. The WFTU had hitherto had great difficulty in gaining members in Africa, and there are those who blame the CGT in large measure for that. That is as it may be. During the struggle for liberation the ICFTU was of great use for the trade union, but perhaps, above all for the political aspirations of the new countries. The International was the only world forum in which they could advance their views and in addition the only source of concrete proof of solidarity in difficult days. Their membership figures in the ICFTU were large.

After liberation, however, the trade unions acquired a new role. Often they constituted the only source of structure and organisational experience in the new states. Their leaders were on the whole the only ones available to turn to. They were rapidly sucked up into the administration of the new states. In contrast to practically every other sector of society the trade union movement could make trained people available.

Thus the trade union leaders now became administrators and statemakers and the trade union organisations, which previously had been able to operate in a fairly 'European' manner *vis-à-vis* their colonial employer, had to accept an increased national responsibility. Their position became ambivalent. Should they in the first instance safeguard the interests of their own members, who most frequently constituted a small advanced section of the people, or should priority be given to the interests of the country? In the ICFTU people had to do a lot of rapid rethinking. It was perfectly obvious that one could not simply follow the old scheme of things and condemn or-

ganisations which did not serve their members but the State, if one was serious about the talk of adjusting to the different conditions in different countries. But there was serious disquiet about the prospect of organisations constituting a tool which the State used to exercise control **against** the workers instead of being the weapon of the workers in their struggle **for** the interests of their members. There are several testimonies in the material of the great efforts made by the ICFTU. The importance was also stressed there of such things as co-operative ventures in cases such as these, where the whole gamut of trade union activities could not be carried on. The members had to be offered something.

The rethinking perhaps proceeded too slowly. Perhaps it did not go far enough. Perhaps there was never any real possibility of rescuing the situation in time. In Africa, Panafricanism began in the early 1960s to threaten affiliation to the ICFTU. Two groups emerged after the important Casablanca conference in 1961, when the '**Casablanca group**' - cheered on by the WFTU, which had no member organisations in Africa and accordingly had nothing to lose - came out with the proposal that the trade union organisations in Africa ought to merge in one continental organisation and leave all the Internationals. The '**Monrovia group**' took the view that a continental organisation would be fine, but that this could very well be combined with membership of the ICFTU. As a matter of fact, developments proved to be catastrophic for the ICFTU, which suffered an enormous loss of members.

The ICFTU suffered from one further disadvantage, namely that its status was that of an international organisation primarily for national confederations. This had been an advantage in collaborating with the liberation movements, but it became a major handicap in this new situation. When the national organisations in Africa became part of the state machinery, relations with the ICFTU moved almost into the sphere of 'relations with foreign powers'. The ICFTU was early aware of this tendency and tried increasingly to operate via the International Trade Secretariates, which could more readily be accepted as exclusively devoted to union and not political activities. But this shift did not proceed swiftly enough either. Even bilateral activity was more likely to be accepted in the new situation. This explains what is otherwise an incomprehensible state of affairs, that the African organisations did not wish to belong to or collaborate with the 'imperialist dominated' ICFTU, at the same time as they could without hesitation accept American money paid to them direct. One further explanation is presumably that the fight for souls between East and West was increasing and this made it attractive for the Africans to be so unattached that they could accept assistance simultaneously from various quarters. <sup>9</sup>

As indicated above, trade union centres in African countries affiliated to

the ICFTU before and during independence but subsequently because of different circumstances, dis-affiliated from that body. With the formation of the Organisation for African Unity (OAU), it was inevitable that the demand for an all-African National union co-ordinating body be made. In 1972, the Organisation for African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) was established and it was required to follow the policy of the OAU. This explains why OATUU has officially to regard Black trade unions from South Africa as stooges of the apartheid regime. However, because Black trade unions from South Africa meet their colleagues from African States through ITSs whose operation in Africa has not been curtailed, informal contacts have been established.

The ICFTU was increasingly made a **persona non grata** in the independent African States. In 1975, the policy of 'guided democracy in labour matters' adopted by the Nigerian Government included prohibition of affiliation to foreign associations by the government promoted trade unions.

The role of the ICFTU in Rhodesia in the latter part of the 1960s, has been heavily criticised, particularly because of the method of operation of its local representatives. The ATUC of Rhodesia talks with disdain of the 'foreign messengers' of international bodies. Phineas Sithole said in 1978, 'Trade unionism in Rhodesia has never been given a breathing space to organise themselves by foreign international organisations who send money to divert the union from pursuing correct trade union objectives'.<sup>10</sup> He maintained that ICFTU aid has provided material comfort to leaders and has not dealt with the problem of poverty; that the aid has been associated with paternalism and advice; and that it has created and sponsored 'splinter unions' which are little more than 'paper unions'. However, the criticism is against international aid policies as practiced and not against 'appropriate' aid **per se**. He accepts international assistance (provided it is given to organisations and not individuals) for education, financing educational institutions legal services and office accommodation for the union.

In 1978, the ICFTU is said to have admitted the inadequacy of its previous policy in Rhodesia and expressed concern to give financial assistance only through worker educational organisations.

The ICFTU has since 1979 had a full-time representative in Lesotho.

The American trade union movement has retained its contact with trade unions in Africa. The African-American Labour Centre established a trade union training school in Botswana in 1974.

The need for a labour research centre was said to be suggested at an AALC Conference organised in 1969. The AALC established a Regional Economic Research and Documentation Centre (RERDC) at Lomé (Togo) in 1972. Its aim is to assist African trade unions in developing research ac-

tivities. At an AALC-sponsored journalism Conference it is said the trade unionist urged the publication of a Pan-African labour newsletter. This was agreed to. Two publications are now sent out: **Labour and Development**, a monthly review of socio-economic events and **African Trade Union News**, a fortnightly coverage of specific union events. The continued presence of an American organisation involved in these activities must have caused concern.

Under the terms of an agreement signed in January 1977 by the organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) and the African American Labor Centre, the OATUU will resume control of RERDC over a five-year period. All AALC projects are geared to Africanisation - the assumption of full managerial and financial responsibilities by the various African labour movements. The OATUU-AALC agreements represent a first step in this process. <sup>11</sup>

As a result of the severe Government harassment the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) was forced to go into exile in 1964. Its direct linkage with the African National Congress implied that it could not get direct support from the ITSs or ICFTU, although sympathy was extended as SACTU claimed to be the only spokesman of Black workers. SACTU gained observer status at the ILO in 1976 and was able to become recognised in the wording of resolutions adopted at Annual Congresses of national co-ordinating bodies such as British TUC and AFL-CIO.

With the re-emergence of Black trade unions in South Africa in 1973 and their recognition by international union organisations SACTU's claim to be the sole spokesman for Black workers was challenged.

In 1958, two representatives of the ICFTU visited South Africa to attend the Annual Congress of TUCSA. At that congress it was resolved to organise all workers regardless of race. But no action was taken.

At that time, 6 African unions which did not identify with the 'political' approach of SACTU and which were assisted by officials from TUCSA trade unions, established a co-ordinating body called Federation of Free African Trade Unions (FOFATUSA) under the presidency of Jack Nyaoase of the African Bakers and Confectioners Industrial Union. By mid-1962, 20 African unions were affiliated to it. It became affiliated to the ICFTU.

However, in 1962, TUCSA decided by majority vote to amend its constitution to permit affiliation of African unions. Over the ensuing five years, 13 African trade unions of FOFATUSA affiliated to TUCSA. In 1965, the organisers of FOFATUSA decided to disband it as the President was forced to leave the country.

The ICFTU continued to send its Rhodesian representative to TUCSA annual conferences until, in 1969, TUCSA changed its constitution to again

debar African unions from affiliation. <sup>12</sup>

### **National Co-ordinating Bodies**

Certain national co-ordinating bodies of Western Europe have made fact-finding visits to South Africa. These visits came out of the revelations of poverty wages paid by South African and multi-national companies and because of the re-emergence of Black trade unions.

In 1973, a delegation from the British **Trade Union Congress** visited South Africa and recommended that financial assistance, channeled through the ICFTU, be given to workers educational organisations. In fact the plus/minus R20 000 per annum granted to Urban Training Project and the Institute of Industrial Education was directly given by the TUC. The position since 1977 with these grants is, however, not clear.

In 1975 and in 1978, the Swedish **LO/TCO** sent a delegation to South Africa. Financial assistance has been given to Black trade unions who have organising campaigns at subsidiaries of Swedish corporations.

Subsequent to the 1976 banning of trade unionists, the Dutch **CNV** visited South Africa. The invitation came from Urban Training Project which had received financial assistance. The **CNV**, an affiliate of the **WCL** adopted the report of its delegation, but the October 1977 suppression of Black organisations resulted in a decision accepting the principle of disinvestment. However, it was agreed that continued aid be given to UTP and Black unions. In 1978 an Italian workers delegation was refused entry.

The German **DGB** has kept back from direct contact with Black grade unions and operates through the ICFTU. However, this position is being re-considered and in 1978 the 2,5 million strong **IG Metall** sent a delegation to South Africa with the International Metal Workers Federation. The **DGB** at one stage gave support to the Black and Allied Workers Union.

The **AFL-CIO** had up to 1976 contact with **TUCSA**. **TUCSA** invited a delegation to visit South Africa and believed that its invitation had been accepted. Certain financial assistance from American Unions has come via the **ITSS**. Since the attendance of Black unions at the 1977 **AFL-CIO** a more concerted policy is being developed, but it appears that care is taken not to upset the **OATUU**. No contact with **TUCSA** appears to be maintained.

### **International Regulation**

International solidarity campaigns in the form of boycotts or sympathy action are necessary weapons which the international union movements



demand. But as with individual trade unions a relationship pattern through which to regulate wages, working conditions and quality of life of workers is more satisfactory. However, the establishment of world councils by the ITSs has not been effective enough.

Since the late 1960s, increased attention has been given to the formulation of international codes of behaviour on multi-national enterprises, particularly since their growth suggests these enterprises increasingly dominate economic and social life. Roberts and Liehaberg observe 'The concept of a code was first advocated as a managerial strategy by business economists who were primarily concerned with possible Governmental restrictions on the development of multi-national enterprises; but the idea of a code was soon taken up by the trade unions and later by representatives of the third world countries whose concern was to monitor and control the activities of multi-nationals'.<sup>13</sup>

Thus the operation of the European Economic Community Code as a control over the subsidiaries of multi-national companies operating in South Africa is part of a trend. What codes are being formulated, and put forward by whom?

In 1972 a working party of ICFTU/ITSs concluded that a multi-national treaty on multi-nationals under the auspices of the United Nations was ideally required. The working party was critical of the idea of a voluntary code of conduct and proposed:

- the establishment of international guidelines;
- the co-ordination of national legislation and government control;
- the conclusion of conventions imposing enforcable standards;
- the adoption of machinery to keep under constant review the impact of multi-nationals on industrial and economic life.

At the 1975 World Congress of the ICFTU, a Charter of Trade Union demands for the legislative control of multi-nationals was adopted. The adoption of international conventions by international agencies in seven areas is requested. These are:

- Public accountability;
- Social obligations;
- Control of foreign direct investments and take-overs;
- Restrictive business practices and oligopolistic pricing;
- Taxation of multi-nationals;
- Transfer of technology and the role of multi-nationals in development;
- Short-term capital movements.

Roberts and Liehaberg observe that the maintaining and enforcement agencies required to assimilate all the information demanded by these conventions would not only be costly but their administration would give rise to uncertainty and slowing down of decision making. In any case what if some countries enforce such a charter, and not others?

The employers' representatives at the ILO and on the OECD Advisory Committee were against recognising, in any form, that the existence of multi-national enterprises constitute a problem. However, trade union pressure continued and from 1974 the ILO, the United Nations, the OECD and the EEC were all involved in carrying a means of regulating their activities.

The multi-national companies have more confidence that the OECD will develop a code of regulation which would protect their essential interests than the ILO and the United Nations. The OECD, as an organisation of the governments of the industrially advanced western democracies, is mainly concerned with economic growth and development. In fact, by 1976 a set of guidelines had been adopted by the Trade Unions and employer parties to the OECD. 'The speed at which the OECD reached agreement on the guidelines was undoubtedly influenced by two factors; there was fear that some countries might begin to impose restrictions on the flow of international investment and the continued development of the multi-national enterprise. The second factor was the succession of scandals associated with the business activities of multi-nationals which involved interference in the domestic political process of a number of countries and the bribery of politicians and prominent men in public life to win sales in highly competitive areas. The OECD guidelines aimed to take into account the damage a code might be to the development of a multi-national enterprise. They also rely on voluntary agreement by those companies regarding adherence to the guidelines.<sup>14</sup>

In comparing the ICFTU and the OECD formulations, Roberts observes: 'The ICFTU demands for the regulation of multi-national enterprise are based upon a fundamental skepticism about the liberal principles supported by the OECD and reflected in its guidelines. This is not merely a matter of financial trading and practice which the ICFTU disapproves of, but a belief in the superiority of political action over the free movements of capital and labour'.<sup>15</sup>

The ILO has since 1971 instituted a number of studies to provide the basis for possible future action by the ILO. In 1977 the ILO Tripartite Advisory Meeting on multi-national enterprises produced a draft declaration of principles dealing with the social aspects of the activities of multi-national enterprises to be submitted to the United Nations for inclusion in a code of conduct. Roberts states that they cover the same ground as the OECD guide-

lines, but emphasize the particular social concerns of the ILO, namely freedom of association; bargaining rights; employment, training and pay and benefits; safety and health; grievances and disputes.

The United Nations Economic and Social Council is also concerned about the role of multi-national enterprises but more specifically with their impact on the third world nations. To gain data, an Information and Research Centre on trans-national corporations has been established. Considerable difficulties face this body in developing a code because of the conflicting interests of the countries concerned.

What tentative conclusions can be drawn from the above considerations?

The pressure on multi-national companies to upgrade the conduct of the employment practices of their subsidiaries in South Africa can be expected to increase. The international trade secretariates will maintain a close watch and take action themselves when deemed necessary and national union centres will require their Governments to take action short of economic sanctions. The EEC Code will continue to have an evolutionary influence on employment practices.

South Africa will be regarded as an experimental area. A positive role for the OECD guide lines and the Trade Union Advisory Committee of the OECD can be envisaged.

The total support by all forms of the international trade union movement for the Black trade unions in this present form suggest that a strong link has been established, which, even if the South African Government does not want to recognise, must be heeded by subsidiaries of multi-nationals. The pattern adopted in certain African countries whereby the Government controlled the national centres because of rivalry and, for a period, banned international assistance and affiliation, will not so easily be accepted should this be adopted in South Africa. The Black people have no rights. This could well lead to recognition by the international union movement of underground or exiled Black union leaders if Black unions are not recognised. However, disunity in the Black union movement will prevent effective international solidarity actions. It is hoped this will not, therefore, be artificially fostered.

The unresolved problem of political rights of the Black people will shape the nature of the trade union movement amongst them if it can and is able to develop, in a different form to that of union movements in African states after independence. The imposition of control cannot be justified on grounds of national loyalties (e.g., the acceptance of the Kenyan Government 'take-over' of the rival national centres).

The conciliatory role which the Americans have adopted between OATUU and the emerging Black unions has positive implications if South Africa is seeking closer economic ties with Africa.

The extent to which the 'rivalry' between ICFTU and AFL-CIO is still a factor, is difficult to assess. Since the disaffiliation of America from the ILO and because of concern of the AFL-CIO to maintain a world influence, other possibilities are being considered.

However, the question can be asked whether the influence of these two bodies on the emergent Black unions will extend to the nature of unionism being developed. That is, will the American model of 'business unionism' or the European model of 'socialism/workers' participation be adopted as a reference group? The establishment of the committee system is probably a more determining influence towards a form of 'workers participation' in South Africa.

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## APPENDIX A

### INTERNATIONAL TRADE SECRETARIATS 1976

1. **International Federation of Building & Wood Workers**  
S.A. affiliate BCAWU  
(No detailed information)
  
2. **International Federation of Chemical Workers Union**  
South African unions only associate members  
(No information)
  
3. **International Federation of Commercial Clerical & Technical Employers**  
[FEIT]  
Six million members in 152 unions.  

Europe	52
Americas	40
Asia	42
Africa	20

  
 Three South African unions 6 100 members  
 NUDW CCAWUSA NUCCAW  
 In a resolution adopted by the Executive Committee in Nairobi in respect for Basic Human Rights and Trade Union Rights, which condemned other countries, the following clause was included: 'Condemns the persistent violation of human and trade union right of regimes based on racial discrimination such as South Africa and Rhodesia'.
  
4. **International Graphical Federation**  
One South African affiliate  
(No information)
  
5. **International Federation of Journalists**  
South African Society of Journalists, Writers' Association of South Africa

**6. International Metal Workers' Federation**

13,5 million members

Europe	5 900 000	27 unions
Africa	170 000	26 unions
(9 from South Africa 88 000 members)		
USA/Canada	3 745 000	11 unions
Latin America	285 000	20 unions
Asia	2 016 000	25 unions
Near East	83 000	7 unions
South Pacific	279 983	9 unions

The IMF has consistently and persistently condemned and protested against discrimination in South Africa.

**7. International Federation of Plantation, Agricultural & Allied Workers**

4,5 million members

Asia	20 affiliates	14 associates
Africa	12 affiliates	10 associates
America	27 affiliates	13 associates
Europe	18 affiliates	
Caribbean	6 affiliates	

(No South African affiliates)

**8. International Textile, Garment & Leather Workers Federation**

5 million members in 119 unions.

Africa	23 unions
America and Caribbean area	39 unions
Asia	18 unions (including Australia)
Europe	39 unions

9 unions in South Africa with 122 000 members

**9. International Transport Workers Federation**

(No information)

Council of Transport Workers Association, TAWU affiliated from South Africa. A number of resolutions passed condemning South Africa's racial policies.

**10. International Union of Food & Allied Workers' Association**

2,2 million members in 160 unions in 61 countries

Africa	12
Latin America	32
North America	10
Caribbean	11
Europe	54
East Africa	
(Pacific)	34
East Mediterrean	7

6 affiliates from South Africa. Resolutions passed condemning South Africa's apartheid policy.

**11. Miners International Federation**

987 796 members in 33 countries

Europe	14
America	3
Africa	7
Asia	9

No South African affiliates

Resolutions passed condemning apartheid and letters written to 28  
28 Gold and Coal Mines.

**12. Postal, Telegraph & Telephone International**

3,3 million members in 161 countries

Africa	16
Americas	61
Asia	37
Europe	47

No South African affiliates

Resolutions passed against South Africa including mandatory economic  
sanctions.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **THE ICFTU & THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADE UNIONS IN KENYA**

A mission of the ICFTU to Kenya in 1951 reported that the trade unions were badly organised and that a regional representative be stationed in Nairobi. The ICFTU was also critical of the Department of Labour which believed that the African is not ready for trade unionism 'and wanted to encourage other forms of worker representation'. Tom Mboya was elected General Secretary of the Kenya Federation of Trade Unions (later Kenya Federation of Labour) in 1953 and considered that outside assistance was essential if he was to maintain the trade union movement through the difficulties caused by the Emergency. He strengthened the relationship between his Federation and the ICFTU.

Mboya and the ICFTU regional representative established an effective relationship and brought order to the Kenyan unions and thereby ensured they gained some power. The following achievements were recorded:

- organisation of courses and seminars and the establishment of an ICFTU college at Kampala;
- respect of Unions by employers by securing trade union representation on Government boards;
- recognition of Unions by employers;
- union representation on wage councils and joint industrial councils;
- reform of Unions on an industrial rather than a craft basis;
- establishment of shop stewards and stop orders for union subscriptions to overcome the problem of financial difficulties of the unions as a result of irregular income;
- use of the ICFTU to keep up the publicity against use of emergency measures to detain trade unionists.

However, Mboya faced increasing challenges to his leadership. It was to be expected that his association with and dependence on ICFTU would be used against him. Already in December 1958 the passing of a resolution favouring an all African trade union organisation had been passed at the Conference in Accra.

Clayton and Savage point out that 'the issue of affiliation would become the major point of conflict between the ICFTU and dissident unions led by Ghana' in the move to establish the All-African Trade Union Federation. In 1961 when the AATUF went on record as opposing all affiliation of African Unions except by that Federation, ICFTU unions walked out; also because of the too



close association of the other African national bodies with the WFTU. 'The ICFTU responded to the challenge of AATUF and sponsored the creation of a rival organisation, the African Trade Union Confederation in 1962. However, this was a desparate final measure with no likelihood of success. But similarly, the influence of the WFTU remained insignificant.

The intra-union conflict between leaders, further aggravated by the question of international affiliation, led to disturbances which resulted, in June 1965, in three deaths. Sandbrooke state 'President Kenyata appointed a Ministerial Committee to suggest how labour unity could be restored.... Their compromise proposals to end disunity involved closer Government supervision in the union's sphere'. The rival federations were de-registered immediately and a new federation (COTU - Central Organisation of Trade Unions) was established. Furthermore, all affiliations with organisations outside Kenya were to be cancelled. This decision was altered in 1969 but only in regard to ITSs.

In 1973 OATUU was formed and the position against affiliation of any other world confederation by African national centres was confirmed. Kenya accepted the position, and in fact the present General Secretary is from Kenya. Only some countries North of the Sahara, e.g., Tunisia, remained with the ICFTU

## **Contact across Continents – Interview with B.L. Shop Steward**

**Francine de Clercq interviews Bob Ashworth, senior shop steward at the British Leyland Rover Plant, Solihull about his visit to South Africa**

**Q: How did you first get involved in international worker issues?**

**A: It goes back earlier to my involvement in the union as a shop steward of the Rover plant when a racial issue came up in the factory. You see, the leadership of the union in the factory used to be very Right wing and were reluctant to resist management. For instance, they agreed tacitly for nearly 20 years to a practice of racial discrimination preventing coloured workers from being promoted to skilled production jobs on the track. After a while, the coloured workers rebelled against that discriminatory practice. They received the support of the whole factory which asked for the abolition of this form of discrimination. This was very important because it showed that not only workers were against racial discrimination, but also that they were prepared to go on strike over these issues; in other words, it showed that their interests as workers overshadowed in the end all the racist propaganda and undermined the employers' strategy of divide and rule. We won the issue and this was a real breakthrough for the factory.**

For me, personally, this issue made me think and read much more about the wider issues beyond the factory. For workers in the factory this issue brought to the surface a whole lot of other problems they had with the Right wing leadership of the union in the factory. From there on a campaign developed against the leadership, and after 6 months of continuous hard work among the rank and file, the leadership was completely changed. As a result, not only did our wages and working conditions improve (from being the lowest paid car factory in the Midlands we became, in less than two years, one of the highest paid car factories in Britain), but also our shop steward structures changed and became more democratic. Before, no outside correspondence was read, no discussion was held on problems beyond our immediate problems in the factory and no meetings of outside bodies were attended. Today all correspondence is read, links are built with other factories and shop

steward delegations are sent to the various meetings of outside organisations. Report-backs are held and followed by long discussions. In other words, our outlook has considerably broadened and the factory became known as one of the more progressive British Leyland factories. This heightened awareness is crucial in order to understand why we should get involved in issues like South Africa.

More concretely, our involvement started when B L Longbridge plant told the B.L. Combine (a meeting of shop stewards' delegates from all B.L. factories) that they were receiving sub-frames from B L South Africa. The Combine decided to get more information from people linked to South Africa about B.L. involvement there and on the position of black workers in those factories, in order to be able to make representations to the management in this country about it. We got some information and went to management, but they replied that they had no power to interfere with the South African operations.

Soon after this, in March 1978, the ICFTU called for a week of action in support of South African workers and trade unionists. Lots of discussions took place about the possibility of a boycott, and the B L Combine passed two resolutions put to them by the Rover shop stewards; one was to boycott all CKD (Completely Knocked Down parts) kits to South Africa and the other was to set up an international committee of the Combine to forge links with other Combines and with other countries (this committee was left to the executive to study). Then, at the Rover plant, we drew up a leaflet informing B L workers in this country about B L involvement in South Africa, their policies regarding black union and the wages and working conditions of black workers at B L South Africa. We felt particularly concerned at Rover by the fact that the Land Rovers we produced were supplying the apartheid regime with weapons which were used by the police and the army against black people and were therefore seen as a tool of oppression. The leaflet was distributed to all B L plants and received very good responses. The Rover plant boycotted kits going to South Africa, and a few other plants like Massey Ferguson succeeded in boycotting exports to South Africa.

**Q:** About your own visit to South Africa, could you say how it came about in the first place?

**A:** Some time ago, the Rover management told us that a general secretary of a South African union at BL was visiting the factory and wanted to talk to shop stewards. We were very suspicious because it was a Centre

of Information Office-sponsored visit (i.e. a Foreign Office-sponsored visit) and we thought he was probably the secretary of a company union of BL on a visit tour of the British BL plants. The whole meeting remained very cautious; we talked about BL involvement in SA, wages and working conditions in Britain and South Africa and agreed to keep in contact in the future. We then discovered that this particular union was a genuine non-racial union. Later on, the South African union suggested that somebody in BL Britain come to visit South Africa in support of the South African workers' attempts to win full trade union recognition.

**Q:** Was the invitation made to any trade unionist or was it specified that it should be a shop steward as opposed to a trade union official?

**A:** They wanted a worker from BL to come, but I do understand that they have visits from union officials as well and this is obviously important in influencing the international trade union movement and the various governments. However, the problem with the union officials' visits, is that these are organised by the government and by some white and coloured unions such as TUCSA. Here, the officials do not have the opportunity to talk privately with the black workers about their work and their trade unions, nor do they see where and how the black workers live. On their return to Britain, they discuss their visit with other union officials, make valuable statements and arrange for some representation to be made to the parent British companies. But their report-backs rarely reach the shop floor and the workers themselves never get to know what is happening in South Africa and what the problems of black workers are. Thus, it was felt to be important to have a two-way approach and have officials' visits and shop stewards' visits so that some kind of factory-to-factory contacts could be established in the course of providing more practical support and assistance to the South African unions.

**Q:** What was the response of the shop stewards and your union to that invitation?

**A:** They all were very enthusiastic about it. It was discussed at shop steward level, at the Combine level and at district trade union level and finally it was agreed that I should go to South Africa and that on my return I should give extensive report-backs of my trip.

**Q:** What would you say was the value of your visit? In what ways was it helpful to the workers in South Africa?

**A:** The most useful and practical support came from the fact that I could, as a worker, relate to their day-to-day problems even though they were South African workers and we could discuss things at a common level. It showed me that workers' problems are the same wherever one works and that the workers' struggle is one and the same around the world.

Also, they were encouraged by the fact that British workers were keen to link up with South African workers and pressurise their management in Britain in support of the South African workers' struggle. It was important to establish direct factory-to-factory contact so as to get the information flowing from one country to another and equip the BL workers in Britain with a better understanding of the situation in South Africa so they could counteract the management's stories. At another level, my visit was important for South African workers in that I brought them the experience of the British trade union movement at a time when they were developing genuine trade union and shop floor organisations; they could learn from both our achievements and mistakes.

Thus, in brief, they could understand more concretely the principle of international workers' solidarity and were presented with a concrete basis from which to build it.

**Q:** Do you think such factory to factory visits should be repeated on a larger scale?

**A:** Very much so. It is important to inform people in this country about what is really happening in South Africa and how the struggle is developing over there. Many people in this country believe that the oppressive apartheid regime is such that no sustained struggle can take place and that no genuine trade unions would be allowed to exist. My experience in South Africa tells me that it is not the case. There is a growing union movement which is developing on a very democratic non-racial basis. These unions encourage shop floor participation and have very democratic internal structures. Also these visits, which must be done at the invitation of the unions themselves, are very informative for workers in this country in order to understand that we, in the union movement, are taking a lot of things for granted, such as union access to the factory, facilities for shop stewards inside the factory to carry on their union business, check offs, and so on. In South Africa, these basic workers' rights do not exist; instead workers are subject to intimidatory tactics, sackings and very little job security.

Finally, it is important for workers in this country to understand that they can play a role and help the South African workers in their struggle. In BL for instance, the South African workers won a trade union agreement including redundancy, dismissal and grievances procedures which based on our own agreement with BL Britain. The South African union's contact with the BL unions in Britain gave them a lot of confidence in struggling to get this agreement. When the shop stewards in Britain heard about that victory in BL South Africa, they were very pleased and were made to feel part of it; a permanent link was established between

them and the workers in South Africa.

**Q:** To elaborate on this, could you say a bit more about how you think your visit to South Africa benefitted the workers in this country in their own struggle?

**A:** South African workers can assist British workers in their struggle by organising in strong unions and trying in that way to stand up to the 'internationalisation of capital' and the ways in which the multi-nationals are free to operate the way they want. Today, the multi-nationals have developed ways to transfer their plants from one country to another; whenever a labour relations' problem arises (like higher wages being won or strong unions developing), the multi-nationals try to shift their production plants somewhere else where the labour is cheaper and unorganised. In order to prevent this internationalisation of capital which effectively undermines workers in the more industrialised world, workers all around the world must organise and try to get their wages and working conditions at the same level. This international link up of workers, however, should not only be done on the basis of self interest (i.e. specific job losses), but should also be a broad appeal for working class solidarity across the world. This internationalisation of labour which involves the forging of links with other unions, with other Combines and with other countries, should try to uncover any shift in production by the multi-nationals.

**Q:** How much do you think the South African apartheid regime reinforces or is linked with racism in this country? Did your visit give you an insight on how racism is used to divide workers in this country?

**A:** The best way to answer this is to relate a struggle that we had recently in our factory. A group of workers had been worked on by the National Front (a fascist organisation) to stir up racist feelings in their section, which is a mixed section of coloured and white workers and eventually workers said that they refused to work with a particular person on the grounds that he was too aggressive. The worker about whom they complained was a black. Eventually it came to physical blows between a white worker and the black worker. This fight led to the instant dismissal of the two workers, at which point the shop stewards got involved; they resolved the incident by agreeing with management that the two workers should be suspended and reinstated in their previous jobs. When the suspension order expired, the group of workers on the section agreed to take back the white worker but not the black worker. At that stage, the shop stewards intervened again and, feeling that there was a lot of racist feelings in that section, they decided to fight it by calling a mass meeting of the whole factory to resolve the issue. The mass meeting

agreed unanimously with the shop stewards' recommendation that the black worker should be allowed back to his previous job and that any worker who refused to work on a multi-racial section, should leave the factory. This issue was important because it showed that, when confronted with racism, workers will fight it because it undermines their interests as workers. Workers realise that racism is used by the bosses to divide them and to take them away from the main problem which is a problem between the owners of the factory and the workers. Workers have more in common with other workers irrespective of their colour than with the white management of the factory, and in a similar way, workers in Britain have more in common with other workers in South Africa than with the British directors of the plant in South Africa. This is why workers must unite and resist the employers' strategy of playing one worker off against the other, or one factory off against the other.

**Q:** Did you think racism was a big problem in South Africa and how did the unions take up the racial question in South Africa?

**A:** The unions I visited had a very good position and attitude to the racial problem despite the fact that apartheid overtly divides people according to their race. It is important to understand how different the situation is between South Africa and Britain. In Britain, the trade unions are open to everyone irrespective of their colour and workers will deal very strongly with any form of discrimination. However, in S. Africa the legislation stipulates that workers of different racial groups form different unions and up to recently black unions were not recognised. The white unions and some coloured unions became very racist and reactionary as far as black workers were concerned and tended to prevent these workers from being promoted to skilled jobs. The employers themselves tried to resist these unions' demands because they were desperate to employ black workers in skilled jobs. On the other hand, there are some new unions which have developed more recently and are explicitly open to all workers irrespective of their colour. These unions are very important to support because it is vital to develop non-discriminatory unions as a step towards international workers' solidarity.

**Q:** How do you see the way forward for South African workers and how do you see this linking up with the issue of international workers' solidarity?

**A:** At the moment, there is a growing non-racial union movement in South Africa which is fighting for better wages and working conditions, but in the future this struggle will inevitably have to spill over into questions of bus fares, housing, education. Look at the recent Ford strike where one single issue developed into wider political problems; it shows that

workers' grievances go well beyond their particular problems in the factory.

On the issue of workers' solidarity, more trade union links must be forged at all levels and more publicity given on particular companies and their international operations so that the unions in this country can take up and highlight the problems of workers in other countries. For instance, there should have been more publicity over here about the Ford strike from the Ford Combine

Finally, we must remember that, with the downswing of the world economy, workers' gains in the world are under severe attack and because of the interdependence of the national economies, no country can for long be sheltered from that recession. It is thus important for trade unions to launch an international struggle not only against the multinationals but this will have to be directed at governments if they are to defend and advance their rights. The workers' struggle must always be both economic and political since workers experience problems in society as a whole, not only in their factories.



## **Review**

### **African Trade Unionism since Independence: A View from the White Highlands of Brussels**

**Peter Waterman** ★

**The Trade Union Movement in Africa: Promise and Performance**  
by Wogu Ananaba, Hurst, London, 1979.

The African trade union movement has long needed a short, popular, reasonably-priced and general work that could orient and train the new generation of leaders and activists which has developed in the two decades of independence. Wogu Ananaba, a veteran trade union officer, author of a workmanlike historical account of Nigerian trade unionism just one decade ago (Ananaba 1969), would seem to have been well qualified to produce such a one. His failure to do so points, I believe, to the failure of the African strategy of the Brussels-based International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the organisation for which Ananaba has long worked and whose attitudes he has evidently internalised.

What sort of book has he produced and what exactly are its shortcomings?

The work is divided into two main parts, the first being a country-by-country sketch of national union developments, completed by an examination of past and present continental union bodies. The country sketches are of varied lengths and have different cut-off dates, thus somewhat reducing their value even as a register of leaders, organisations and major political events. It is only in one of the longer case studies (20 pages on Liberia) and a shorter one (five on Tunisia) that one begins to glimpse some of the class conflicts that underlie the union-state relations to which most of the sketches are confined. But even these items are highly dependent on personal observation or ICFTU documentation and must, therefore, be treated with some caution.

★ Peter Waterman specialises on third world workers and unions at the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, Netherlands. He is a former Education Officer of the World Federation of Trade Unions, has taught and researched in Nigeria (on which he is currently completing a book-length study of Lagos port and dockworkers), and is editor of the *Newsletter of International Labour Studies*.

The second part of the book deals with such practical aspects of union work as organising, education and collective bargaining, as well as the political, international, legal and other 'factors affecting' unionism. Where Ananaba gives examples - particularly from cases he knows well - one obtains vivid glimpses of real problems of union development. But it is notable that he makes no mention of strikes, and that the one 'non-bargaining' activity he mentions is that of worker co-operatives. Only two or three pages, moreover, are devoted to employers as an influence on union activity, although the nature of the wage-labour relationship is surely a primary determinant of the nature of unionism.

One major problem of the work is that Ananaba's is a narrowly institutional study. He is not interested in workers and writes his account of their organisations as if they did not exist. It is notable that he has in his reading ignored a whole series of major works that have appeared since he wrote his last book, such as Cohen's (1974) on Nigeria, that of Sandbrook (1975) on Kenya, the collections of Sandbrook and Cohen (1975) and of Henry Mapolu (1976), and is apparently ignorant of such major sources as the **South African Labour Bulletin** and the **Review of African Political Economy**. The only recent writers to which he does refer are liberal and managerially-oriented academics such as the Ghanaian Iwuji, the Nigerians Adeogun and Damachi. Characteristic of the former studies is their close attention to the nature of the working class, their portrayal of its vigorous and often successful protest actions, their view of the multinationals and Western powers, local capital and state as being in opposition to that class.

We now come to the question of Ananaba's political orientation. For Ananaba, clearly sees neither the multinationals nor the Western powers, nor local capitalism as acting against the interest of the workers. Indeed, he believes that in Africa 'No government appears to have adopted capitalism as an economic philosophy'. (p212) And if he does see oppressive political power as an enemy, it is not as the **state**, but as certain types of **regime**.

Ananaba's work is permeated with the notion of African trade unionism since independence as a decline or deviation from the 'genuine trade union movement as we know it in Britain'. (p215) If there has been such a decline, what does Ananaba see as responsible for it? Well, the first target is radical nationalist post-colonial regimes that have taken over, administratively reorganised, or legislatively restricted trade unionism. He complains of the conversion of trade unions to a productionist role:

'in many countries claiming to be of socialist or egalitarian orientation... Union officials and representatives on the shop floor operate not in keeping with the wishes of their members but in accordance with the

decision of the parties or juntas' .(p205)

A second is trade union officers with a 'prostitute mentality' (p223), who fail to 'sit down in their offices and apply their brains and energy to trade union functions'.(224) A third is the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (pp135-140), which he ridicules as the creature of the Organisation of African Unity that created it, dependent on the goodwill of national governments and the financial support of non-members. National union affiliates, he claims, have been covering only 10 per cent of its costs.(p219)

Before we consider the explanation of the decline, we need to consider the Garden of Eden from which Ananaba considers the unions to have been expelled. The paradise seems to have previously existed in Africa itself, where the colonial powers bequeathed

'guarantees for security of life and property, free and fair elections... an impartial and independent judiciary...'(p208)

This was apparently doubly guaranteed at that time by the ICFTU which (despite the one or two minor errors or shortcomings our author admits) transmitted the 'free' union model of the colonial motherlands. The nature of the ICFTU model is revealed not so much by Ananaba himself as in the foreword by Omer Becu, former General Secretary of the International Transportworkers Federation and the ICFTU. Says this outstanding representative of 'genuine trade unionism'.

'notwithstanding **good advice and assistance**...we have not as yet reaped **the so much expected fruits**. African trade unions have been **repeatedly told** not to make the same mistakes as we have made in industrialised and **more advanced** countries...We were no doubt too optimistic and did not think deep enough, as for instance a **father** has come to terms with the fact that his own **son does not need his advice and must learn to stand on his own feet**. One can surely not expect that Africans...will achieve in a decade or two what took us in the **developed world** almost a century'.  
(My emphasis throughout - PW)

It was, of course, the self-righteousness, Eurocentrism and imperialist paternalism revealed in this passage that was in large part responsible for the failure of moderate reformist trade unionism in Africa, a failure which Ananaba's book records with regret on page after page. But what of the explanations that Ananaba offers?

It is true that in almost all African countries the liberal-paternalist labour control model of the late-colonial period has been replaced by either a corporatist or populist model, neither of which allows for the autonomous, competitive, wage-bargaining unionism of the earlier one. But, if Ananaba recognised the earlier situation as **one** labour control model, then he would not

consider its replacement by **others** as an expulsion from Eden. Workers have managed to protest forcefully under both new types of system, and unions have often managed to press worker demands despite the restrictions. In any case, the paradise was one in which workers were starved, unionists shot, imprisoned or bought off by the colonial powers. Both the liberal-paternalist model, and the illusions it creates amongst unionists, have gone forever. African workers and unions will have to struggle for a real paradise built out of African materials instead of seeking a return to the European mirage offered by Ananaba.

It is true that there are many prostituted union officers. What they are doing **is** sitting down in their offices and carrying out union functions - instead of acting as tribunes of the working class. Thus, studies of Ghana under conservative regimes (Kraus 1979) and Tanzania under a radical one (Mihyo 1975) reveal that whilst the fulltime union officers might have created powerful and even autonomous union structures, they are often outpaced in militancy by grassroots leaders and ordinary members. My own research on Lagos port and dock workers (see in this edition) shows the capacity of both Communist and Reformist leaders to respond to worker militancy, get out of their offices, and truly **lead** the workers in radical protest action, despite threats from military governments. So does the recent book of Richard Jeffries (1978) on the railway workers of Sekondi-Takoradi in Ghana, and the one of Adrian Peace (forthcoming) on Lagos factory workers. (The question of **from whom** African trade union leaders learned the practice of a bureaucratic style of union leadership we will consider later.)

Ananaba's critique of the OATUU cannot be simply dismissed as sour grapes. The OATUU still has to prove itself as spokesman of the African working class, its effective defence against local and international capital, local states and international imperialism. In this, however, it is little different from the ICFTU, the World Federation of Trade Unions and the AFL-CIO - all of which have been shown to have often operated more in the interests of capital or state than of their own members. The OATUU is increasingly becoming an effective union of national trade union leaders, and that is itself something. It has also won the sympathy and support of the less-reactionary and paternalistic member organisations of the ICFTU, such as the Dutch and Swedes. Its ideology is one of Pan-Africanism, anti-imperialism and social reformism. This may well be insufficient for defence of African working-class interests, but could it be worse than that of Omer Becu, George Meany of the AFL-CIO, or the ex-KGB mummies appointed to lead the Soviet trade unions? It is certainly more **African**. But the OATUU is more independent of paternalistic and manipulative foreign union leaders than any previous continental African union body.

It seems to me that the responsibility for (1) African union acceptance of state controls, (2) African union leadership bureaucracy and corruption, and (3) the state-dependency of the OATUU can in large part be traced back to the European and US trade unions that were the previous patrons, suppliers of ideas and finance to the African trade unions. ICFTU missionaries themselves collaborated with colonial and ex-colonial labour departments and urged client unions to do likewise. The ICFTU did not aid the African **working class**; it subsidised **union officers**, who thus had little need to ever leave their offices, agitate their members and provide them with the services necessary to stimulate voluntary payment of union dues. The manipulative attitudes of the ICFTU, West European unions and AFL-CIO toward the trade unions of the third world are being increasingly exposed and criticised (Thomson and Larson 1978; **New Statesman**, March 2, 1979 : 282-5).

Ananaba conceals all this. Whilst he feels able to preach to the African national and continental unions from a position of high moral rectitude, he has no word of criticism for 'free' trade unionists who have been elsewhere identified as collaborating with white racism in Rhodesia and with the American CIA. The first is his ICFTU colleague, Bill Lawrence, of whose work he says, 'Lawrence did a good job during his 12 years stay in the country'. (p57) Did he? An article in the **South African Labour Bulletin** (Davies 1975:23) presents another picture, which is consistent with my own union officers and advisors in Africa:

'...although Lawrence may initially have been opposed to the Rhodesian Front regime, he has in the ten years he has been in Rhodesia, become incorporated into the system. He has acquired two houses in elite white suburbs (he appears to live in both, thus avoiding the charge that he is a rentier); he is a regular attendant at the Borrowdale race course, going to the predominantly 'white stands'; he voluntarily submits detailed records of his work to the Ministry of Labour; his courses are run through Ranche House College, an adult educational centre catering mainly for white and run without effective black participation. Finally, in the context of Rhodesia, it is pertinent to wonder why, if he has been performing his job of promoting a strong black labour movement satisfactorily, the Rhodesian Front regime has allowed him to remain uninhibited in Rhodesia for over ten years'.

The second figure is Irving Brown, of the African-American Labour Centre, of whom Ananaba only makes implied criticism concerning union splits in Rhodesia. Irving Brown has been splitting unions for U.S. imperialism ever since the Second World War, and my own research shows that even a single Nigerian industry (Lagos Port) has not been beneath his regard in this activity. But he has been accused of greater misdemeanours than imitating

(with far greater resources and therefore far greater effect) the ICFTU's own leadership-sponsoring strategies. According to ex-CIA man, Philip Agee, Irving Brown was at one time the 'principal CIA agent for control of the ICFTU!' (Agee 1975:603)

This type of behaviour is dealt with by Ananaba in the cautious code language familiar to diplomats but incomprehensible to rank and file trade unionists. Says he (p192):

'Probably the single factor which has done more damage to the image and reputation of the international trade union movement as represented by the ICFTU and ITS (International Trade Secretariats for transport, agriculture, etc. - PW) is the choice of some of the people assigned to work with the unions in certain countries. As individuals they were excellent in many respects and knew their jobs. But thanks to WFTU and AATUF (All African Trade Union Federation, radical predecessor to OATUU - PW) and their impact on certain African Governments, they were suspected of serving other interests and believed to be engaged in subversive activities in Africa'.

Even this cautious admission tells its own additional story. The explanation of failures of strategies, ideologies and organisations in terms of individuals is customary amongst moderate reformist writers (compare Ake Wedin (1974) on the ICFTU conflict with the AFL-CIO over 'development aid'). There is a suggestion that they were **smeared** by the WFTU and AATUF, whereas they were evidently not only guilty of a range of anti-working class activities, but were in the Nigerian case attacked and exposed by N.P. Adebola, a rightwing Nigerian veteran who was for many years an ICFTU leader on both the African and the international level (Waterman 1979).

All in all, it is evident that the White Highlands of Brussels provide a poor vantage point for viewing either the past, the present or the future of the African working class and trade unions. This is to be doubly regretted, because of the need for such a work as Ananaba has attempted, and because of the achievement represented by his first work. The strong point of both the writer and the West European reformist tradition he represents has been its attention to precisely that kind of humdrum daily grind which inevitably accounts for 90% of union history and without which the sudden leaps and breakthroughs could never occur (or never be sustained once they had occurred)! As a careful and sensitive chronicler of trade union history in a country he knows well, Ananaba has made a contribution to the African trade union studies. But this book will be considered of most value for what it unintentionally reveals of an archaic and irrelevant ideology.

Those who want to understand African trade unionism since independence had better turn to some of the items listed in the references to this review. From such works will the necessary popular one have to be constructed.

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## **Review**

**by**

**Helen Bradford**

### **Trade Union Foreign Policy by Jeffrey Harrod**

**(Anchor Books, 1972)**

So-called 'trade union imperialism' has been increasingly evident in Southern Africa during the past decade. The labour organisations involved include the British Trade Union Council (TUC), the American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO), the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), and the African American Labour Centre (AALC). The activities of such labour movements have, according to Thomson and Larson<sup>1</sup> included the funding of a trade union front for the FNLA in Angola; attempts to divide and control the Zimbabwean African labour movement; and considerable financial support for the training of black South African trade unionists, with the stipulation that this was to be 'strict training - no frills, and no politics'. It is in this context then, given the dearth of analyses of foreign trade union activities in Southern Africa, that Harrod's study of the involvement of British, American and international labour organisations in the development of Jamaican trade unions, is particularly important for those interested in South African labour movements.

Approximately half the book consists of background material, some of which is relevant for an examination of trade union imperialism in social formations other than Jamaica. Thus Harrod first discusses various reasons for international activity by nationally-based unions, and the means utilised therein. The reasons given include the possible connection between such intervention and the economic welfare of union members, as well as the utilisation of international activity to acquire domestic power. 'Serving the nation' is also discussed by Harrod as an incentive towards foreign involvement. If we demystify this ideological concept, he is in fact referring to trade union support for the dominant classes, for a variety of economic, political and ideological reasons.

The functions, structures, ideologies and policies towards 'less developed countries' of British and American trade unions are then examined, as are relations between these unions and employers, political parties and the government. A valuable point made here, although under-emphasised by



Harrod, is that rank and file participation in, or awareness of, the foreign policy of 'their' trade unions is almost non-existent. Such policy is instead inevitably formulated by trade union bureaucrats in collaboration with state officials, and Harrod implicitly presents evidence that British and US trade union foreign policies have invariably been supportative of the interests of the dominant classes. (They have, for instance, been antagonistic towards 'political' activities by unions and the propagation of 'Communism', and supportative for foreign investment and aid.)

The background material is then completed with an examination of Jamaica. It is here that Harrod emphasises the need to study Jamaica as a plural society, with cultural differences marking off the prime divisions. The growth of Jamaican trade unions is then situated very firmly within this framework of cultural pluralism. That is, these unions are characterised not only by their intimate links to Jamaican political parties, but also by their reflection of the cultural divisions of Jamaican society.

Thus the Trade Union Council of Jamaica (TUCJ) and the National Workers' Union (NWU) derive both their members and their structures from the 'imitative culture' - the culture of the 'elites' as derived from the metropolises - while the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union (BITU) reflects the 'evolved culture' of the Jamaican masses.

Harrod next proceeds to provide a mass of empirical information about the relations between various 'foreign elements' - such as the Colonial Office, national, regional and international trade union organisations - and the growth of Jamaican trade unions. As discussed below, he implicitly provides considerable evidence in this section of foreign unions, state and corporative encouragement of the development of a reformist labour movement. Explicitly, however, he makes two major points in this section. The first is that there occurred substantial foreign union involvement in promoting the development of the NWU, a general union drawing most of its support from the well paid workers of the bauxite-alumina industry. (Almost in passing, Harrod notes that this industry 'represented the most heavy investment of foreign capital in Jamaica in modern times'. (p 161) Indeed, the NWU, formed in 1952 to combat the supposedly Communist TUCJ, and the powerful mass-based BITU, would probably have collapsed without the considerable support afforded it by various foreign trade union organisations. These included the United Steelworkers of America (SWA), the TUC, AFL-CIO, ICFTU and the various bodies through which these organisations worked. And the second major point made in this section is that from the 1950s, concerted attempts were made by US companies and US trade unions to promote the 'American model' of business unionism.

In the last quarter of the book, Harrod presents his analysis of foreign union

involvement in the development of Jamaican unions. He touches here on issues such as the particular objectives of the British and US trade unions, corporations and governments involved; the extent to which these objectives were achieved and the reasons for the promotion of the NWU at the expense of the BITU. It is in fact only here - and only in the last ten pages at that - that Harrod emphasises the co-operation and shared objectives of foreign unions and their nationally-associated corporations and states. 'The involvement of the foreign unions was', he notes explicitly, 'a means by which the investment climate in a country might be improved'.

That Harrod only arrives at this conclusion at such a late stage, is explicable partly in terms of his empiricist methodology, and partly in terms of the implicit theoretical framework underlying his empiricism. This latter framework revolves around the related notions that nations, rather than classes, are the prime categories of analysis, and that culture is the principal identifying feature of a nation. This methodology and framework of course make his work extremely vulnerable to criticism. In particular, they mean that Harrod fails entirely through the vast bulk of his book, to situate the activities of the various labour organisations in the context of imperialism, the changing forms thereof, and the changing balance and composition of class forces on a national and international scale.

Instead, he presents his reader with a mass of material structured in terms of national and cultural categories. Thus Jamaican society is analysed, as noted, as a culturally plural society: the tautologous theory of pluralism is, according to Harrod, more applicable to Jamaica than the 'Marxist notion of class'. (p156) The state is seen as 'the organisational expression of ethnocentricity, group loyalty, and security drives' (p 46) rather than as a material condensation of a relationship between classes, and it is furthermore claimed that the cultural background of Jamaica 'determined both the nature of Jamaican unions as well as the form and strength of foreign elements involved'. (p137) The competing Jamaican unions are seen as 'reflections of the general cultural divisions' (p197) rather than as drawing upon different sections of wage-earners, and officials attached to foreign trade unions involved in Jamaica apparently frequently 'showed the characteristics of cultural shock'. (p357) Indeed, the explanation for the ultimate decision to reject the mass-based BITU in favour of the conservative NWU, is to 'be sought as much in the problems of cross-cultural operation by foreign actors as in the individual personality and inclination of Jamaican leaders'. (p359)

Given the impediments posed by such a theoretical framework, it is perhaps unfair to criticise Harrod for noting only in the last ten pages that the machinations of foreign unions facilitated imperialist penetration. He should instead be congratulated for tortuously wending his way to this conclusion.

This is not, however, to deny the utility of Harrod's work, particularly with regard to his empirical information. Indeed, the apparently mysterious disappearance of this book in the US, is perhaps an indication of the threat which revelation of this information was seen to pose. Of particular interest is his discussion of some of the mechanics of the alliance between British and US trade union bureaucrats, their respective states, and multi-national corporations. Informative too, is his examination of state and corporative influence over various regional and international trade union organisations. Harrod's statements on these issues are, however, underemphasised, and need to be placed far more firmly in the context of general imperialist mechanisms of control. Moreover, he is not exactly overly informative. The CIA is for instance barely mentioned, and mounting evidence of CIA penetration of US trade unions, including the AFL-CIO, as well as of various international labour organisations, is effectively ignored.

Harrod also provides valuable information about the numerous ways in which metropolitan labour organisations have intervened to encourage the development of pro-capitalist trade unions in Jamaica. Such intervention was restricted before the 1950s: foreign investment was limited and most initiatives to control the labour movement could be taken through the Colonial Labour Department. Thus the TUC was the only labour organisation to have significant links with Jamaican trade unions in this period. These took the form of financial support of the TUCJ and attempts to build up a cadre of reformist trade union leaders.

From the 1950s, foreign labour organisations were considerably involved in encouraging the growth of a depoliticised labour movement - an involvement which was intimately linked to massive US investment in the bauxite-alumina industry and to the fact that Jamaica has, since the 1950s, supplied the US aluminium industry with over 50% of its bauxite requirements. Harrod notes in some detail the various ways in which the different metropolitan-dominated labour organisations formed part of this imperialist penetration. These included the encouragement of the fragmentation of the labour movement and, more specifically, the support of the NWU against its more militant rivals in the bauxite-alumina industry. Economism within trade unions was actively promoted; capitalist social norms were vigorously propagated, and educational programmes were set up to facilitate the development of a 'responsible' trade union leadership.

Once again, however, this information is flawed by not being presented within the framework of imperialist activity in an underdeveloped social formation. Moreover, Harrod's particular theoretical framework inhibits the raising of key issues. How, for example, did the activities noted above affect the relationship between trade union leaders and rank and file workers?

What precisely was it about 'political unionism' in Jamaica that aroused the antagonism of foreign capital? To what extent was a 'labour aristocracy' created in the bauxite-alumina industry? And what of the contradictions inherent in the above attempts to create pro-capitalist unions? Promotion of economism has for instance severe limitations in underdeveloped social formations, as has **foreign** involvement in many post-colonial societies. Harrod, however, seems oblivious of the contradictions in such forms of intervention.

Key issues are of course avoided right through the book. Class struggle is for example, pushed into the background, and there is little information, let alone discussion, of the actual impact of metropolitan trade union intervention on the balance of class forces within Jamaica. Yet despite this, 'Trade Union Foreign Policy' should not be disregarded as a source of information about trade union imperialism. Much of the 'factual' material needs to be reworked and many of the conclusions are partial, distorted, or simply incorrect. Nonetheless, Harrod's book remains useful for those wishing to understand this particular aspect of imperialist penetration of Southern Africa.

#### Footnotes

1. Thomson, D. and Larson, R. : Where were you, brother? (War on Want, 1978), pp 58-59, p 109. See also Davies' article on Rhodesian labour in SALB, March 1975.

## **Dispute at Allied Publishing**

### **Alan Fine**

Despite the fact that the dispute between Allied workers and management did not ultimately result in strike action, work stoppages were narrowly averted on a number of occasions - it did, nevertheless, draw a fair amount of public attention. This has been prompted not only by the resolute response of the workers, but also publication of the conditions under which they worked. Most Allied workers are migrants and have had to work under very trying conditions for extremely low wages - at the beginning of 1980 the minimum wage at the firm was R22,00 per week.

The workers of Allied are no strangers to trade unionism and industrial action. During the early 1970s, BAWU made an attempt to organise them. However, it appears that the Union was unable to assist the workers and BAWU's contact with Allied workers eventually lapsed.

A number of strikes have occurred during the 1970s. In 1973, street vendors went on strike for higher wages. The nature of the industry is such that management has to make decisions quickly in the event of a work stoppage. After about an hour, it was agreed that commission on newspapers sold would be increased slightly.

Early in 1976 drivers and street vendors struck for higher pay. Once again, management granted wage increases. This time the strike lasted almost a full day.

In 1978, before Allied workers began joining the union (see below) the street vendors went out on strike and refused to pay in their takings until a colleague, who had been dismissed, was reinstated. The man had been dismissed after his Area Supervisor had found him 'sitting down'. Again management was forced to act quickly and an hour after the strike began, the man was reinstated.

Allied workers began organising themselves into the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union of S.A. (CCAWUSA) around mid 1978. Those involved included street vendors, clerks, drivers, deliverymen and a number of others - mainly unskilled workers.

During the following twelve months regular meetings were held at which grievances were discussed, and shop stewards were elected to represent the various groups of workers.

Finally, during August 1979, when Union membership and organisation was considered to be sufficiently strong, it was decided that management

should be approached with a view to resolving the workers' grievances. On 29 August a letter was written asking management to meet with Union officials and the shop stewards committee to discuss these grievances, which included such matters as wages, hours of work, backpay for unpaid overtime work, verbal and physical abuse by middle-management, deductions from wages or penalties for various offences and a number of others.

On 12 September a reply was received from Allied informing the Union that all these grievances had been brought to management's attention by its various Liaison Committees. After consultation with the workers, the Union wrote back pointing out that the workers had joined the Union specifically because of their disillusionment with Liaison Committees, that a number of the shop stewards were in fact ex-Liaison Committee members who had resigned from the Committees and that due to this, a number of the committees had collapsed. Workers now wished the Union to act as their official mouthpiece.

Allied's response to this was to put a number of questions to the Union Chief, amongst these was a demand to find out from CCAWUSA 'in order to get to know the Union better', whether it had or intended to register in terms of the IC Act.

The shop stewards committee and the Executive Committee of CCAWUSA were informed of this and both formulated the same attitude towards it. Firstly, although the EC had decided to recommend to the next CCAWUSA AGM that the Union apply for registration, it was felt that the issue was of no concern to Allied. Secondly, both committees agreed that the other details required by Allied should not be communicated in writing. Instead, the firm should be told that CCAWUSA would be happy to supply the information at a meeting between management and worker representatives, which should be followed by discussion of the grievances. On 21 December a letter to this effect was sent to Allied.

The firm's reply to this left no doubt that it was their intention not to communicate further with the Union until their previous questions were answered in writing. At this point, it was decided that further pressure be brought to bear on the company; a press conference was held where shop stewards spoke of working conditions at the firm.

The day after the appearance of the press reports CCAWUSA was contacted by Allied management who offered to meet with Union officials (without the presence of workers) and suggested that Mr. Sam van Coller, the Acting Director of the Institute for Industrial Relations (to which both CCAWUSA and Allied were affiliated) be asked to act as a neutral chairman and advisor to both sides. (The full role of the IIR in the dispute is discussed below).

Neither of these proposals met with the approval of Union officials or shop

stewards. Mr. van Coller was, however, invited to meet them to discuss the arrangements. The shop stewards eventually reluctantly agreed that the first meeting could be held without their presence. But it was unanimously decided that Mr. van Coller should not be allowed to chair the meeting and if Allied insisted on his presence, it should be on the understanding that he act as advisor to them only.

The meeting took place over two days - 20 and 22 February. At the meeting Union officials were informed that Allied would not consider granting full recognition to CCAWUSA until the Union had applied for registration and various other conditions had been complied with. Until then, while the Union would have access to management to discuss individual workers' grievances, matters such as wages and working hours could not be negotiated. Management would be prepared to discuss less important grievances with elected worker representatives in the interim.

Management then circularised this information to all its employees and told them to elect eight representatives to meet with them on 7 March.

At this point, the CCUWUSA offices were inundated with a stream of Allied workers objecting to this development. A number of meetings were held with the shop stewards committee and it was decided to call a general meeting of Allied workers for 8 March.

Management's apparent attempt to revive its Johannesburg Liaison Committees failed dismally - it was totally boycotted. In contrast, over 120 workers attended the Union meeting the following day. Union officials were mandated to inform Allied management that workers would have nothing to do with Liaison Committees and that they were 'giving management one week' to agree to meet with their representatives - both Union officials and shop stewards - to discuss grievances, primarily wages. A further general meeting was then planned for the following Saturday - 15 March - where, if there had been no satisfactory response from management, a date for a strike would be decided on.

The day after management were informed of their employees views, they contacted the Union and agreed to the workers' demand. The meeting was planned for 19 March.

When workers were informed of this on 15 March, they formulated wage demands and decided that their decision to strike (it was timed for 10 a.m. on Friday 21 March) should stand, and should be called off only if their representatives were satisfied by management's reaction to their wage demands. The demands were something in the order of 70% on the February 1980 wages.

The workers' representatives presented their demands of 19 March. After gauging management's response they decided to call off the planned

strike, and agreed to give management two weeks to consider the demands, present them to the company's Board of Directors and formulate a response.

An indication of the efficiency of the shop stewards and degree of organisation amongst the workers, is that although the meeting with management ended only just before midnight on 19 March, by 10 a.m. the next morning the vast majority of Union members were fully informed of the outcome of the meeting.

A further meeting with management was held on 2 April and at a general meeting of Allied workers on 5 April, latest developments were discussed.

Finally, on 10 April, agreement between the two parties was reached. Wage increases in the region of 30-60% for most workers came into effect on 13 April, together with the introduction of a service allowance scheme. These increases are over and above a 7,5% across-the-board increase granted by the company during March 1980. The agreement includes a provision that further wage increases be negotiated in one years time.

The agreement further provides for:

1. A non-victimisation clause.
2. The Union's right to hold meetings on company premises after working hours.
3. A Union notice-board at each depot.
4. The replacement of Liaison Committees by a shop steward system.
5. Reasonable time off with pay to be granted to shop stewards for trade union education.
6. A commitment by the Union not to 'call upon or compel' Allied workers to participate in worker's action which would disrupt normal operations except where it relates to the publishing trade.

### **The Role of the IIR**

The first the Union heard of IIR involvement in the dispute, was after the press conference late in January, when Allied management was reported in the Rand Daily Mail of 31/1/80 to have said that it had acted 'strictly within the terms of the guidelines set down by the IIR'. When CCAWUSA made enquiries from the IIR as to whether this was the case, an Institute spokesman proceeded to criticise what it perceived as CCAWUSA's unco-operative behaviour in its dealings with Allied up to that point.

As mentioned above, the Acting-Director of the IIR was put forward as a neutral chairman at the first meeting between the Union and Allied, and that this suggestion was rejected by the worker representatives.



Allied had further asked, and this was agreed to by CCAWUSA, that the IIR be requested to do an audit of Allied worker membership of the Union. However, when the job had been half-completed, CCAWUSA received a letter from the Institute saying that 'it is clear...that the relationship between CCAWUSA and the Institute is such that there might be some doubt about the validity of the membership figures produced by the IIR. As this would defeat the purpose of the exercise, we feel it necessary to advise you that we are unable to proceed with the exercise'. (By the time the agreement was signed the membership audit had not yet been completed).

Some days later Ms. Mashinini, the General Secretary of CCAWUSA received a phonecall from Mr. van Coller saying that he was withdrawing from involvement in the dispute. However, the IIR wrote a letter to the Union during mid-March informing CCAWUSA that the Institute was engaged in providing courses for Allied management. These courses were to teach senior management 'Negotiating skills' and middle management 'Industrial Relations'.

At its March meeting, CCAWUSA's Executive Committee decided that in view of the IIR's role in the dispute, the Union should disaffiliate from the organisation. In addition, Ms. Mashinini, a member of the Institute's Board of Trustees, has resigned from her position there.