The International Labour Organisation and its Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV) in Africa on the Eve of the "Glorious" 1960s[1]

Hakeem Ibikunle Tijani

ABSTRACTS

Dieser Artikel untersucht die Rolle und Bedeutung der International Labour Organisation (ILO) in den Arbeitsbeziehungen und bei der Arbeiterbildung im südlichen Afrika während der „glorreichen" 1960er Jahre. Die Entstehung, Herausforderungen und Errungenschaften der ACTRAV-Aktiviäten in diesem Bereich werden historisiert. Die erfolgreiche Setzung internationaler Standards unterscheidet die ILO von vielen anderen internationalen Organisationen. Der Artikel untersucht den Stellenwert des subsaharischen Afrikas in den jährlichen Tagungen des International Labour Congress (ILC) und seinen 200 Konventionen und Empfehlungen am Vorabend der 1960er Jahre. Während diese Standards ursprünglich darauf zielten, direkte Arbeitnehmerrechte zu schützen, hat die ILO seit den 1930er Jahren begonnen, diese Funktion auf andere Felder wie soziale Sicherheit oder Beschäftigungspolitik auszuweiten. Der Artikel untersucht die Blaupause der ILO in Bezug auf den Aufbruch Afrikas in den 1960er Jahren und die ACTRAV-Ausbildungsmaßnahmen.

This article examines the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) roles and impacts in labour relations and education in sub-Saharan Africa during the "glorious" 1960s. It historicise the genesis, challenges, and accomplishments in the area of labour union education – ACTRAV activities, its technical assistance programmes, Decent Work Projects, and its resolve to set interna-

---

tional labour standards in sub-Saharan Africa. The setting of international labour standards is perhaps what separates the ILO from other international organisations as sub-Saharan colonies witnessed different levels of decolonisation during the post-World War II era. The article interrogates the place of sub-Saharan Africa in the mix of many annual sessions of the International Labour Congress (ILC) and its 200 conventions and a similar number of recommendations before the dawn of the 1960s. While the standards adopted in the early years were intended predominantly to protect workers in the physical performance of their work, as early as the 1930s the ILO had began to extend its standard-setting to a wider field of social policy, covering areas ranging from systems of social security to employment policy. The article examines the ILO's Blueprint as it relates to its momentum in Africa and ACTRAV's labour union education during the 1960s.

1. Introduction

In the Preamble to its Constitution, the ILO notes that, "Whereas also the failure of any nation to adopt humane conditions of labour is an obstacle in the way of other nations which desire to improve the conditions in their own countries."[2] The Constitution further notes that in the annexed Declaration as follows:

> *Labour is not a commodity*
> *Freedom of expression and of association are essential to sustain progress*
> *Poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere; and that,*
> *The war against want requires to be carried on with unrelenting vigour within each nation, and by continuous and concerted international effort in which the representatives of workers and employers, enjoying equal status with those of governments, join with them in free expression and democratic decision with a view to the promotion of the common welfare.*[3]

This declaration fits into its goal of promoting decent work, social justice, economic stability, and the protection of human rights through its constituent unit, ACTRAV, throughout the world. Despite what we can describe as ILO's "low" activity in Africa during the inter-war years (except for intervention in the Liberia forced labour scandal in 1930),[4] the organisation seems to have rejuvenated and pursued the actualisation of its goals in Africa between early 1959 and the late 1960s.[5]

The ILO and its ACTRAV mantra was not perfunctory in Africa, even before the glorious 1960s. This decade was momentous indeed and the push by the ILO seems to have

---

2   See ILO Constitution, 1 April 1919. <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:62:0::NO:62:P62_LIST_ENT-RIE_ID:2453907:NO> (accessed 31 January 2020).

3   Quoted from C.C. Joyner, The United States' Withdrawal from the ILO: International Politics in the Labor Arena, in: The International Lawyer 12 (1978) 4, pp. 721–739.

4   Liberia became the first African nation to join the ILO in 1919. It was followed by Ethiopia in 1923.

5   See H.I. Tijani, Building "Sound" Industrial Relations in Nigeria: The British and Organised Labour, 1940s to 1960, in: Lagos Historical Review 11 (2011), pp. 21–36; D. Maul, Human Rights, Development and Decolonisation: The International Labour Organisation, 1940–1970, London 2012, pp. 168–172.

gained strides with the Wind of Change from 1960 onward. African nations south of the Sahara marked a record emancipation from the colonial powers in the 1960s, except in areas controlled by the Portuguese, Belgians, and the apartheid regime in South Africa.

In 1946, the United Nations formally recognised the ILO as a specialised agency for labour matters globally. This nomenclature strengthened its status as an agent of workers well-being throughout the world. The ILO remained a global force in labour matters through its sustained union education, gender equality at workplace, sound industrial relations, and the sponsorship of social and economic transformation programmes aimed at the well-being of the working population worldwide and most especially its Decent Work agenda.

Since the end of World War II (and the imminent colonial reforms, decolonisation, and the transfer of power [planned or forced] by European powers in Africa), the ILO made positive impacts through its conventions and regulations in building and shaping sound industrial relations between employers and employees. In addition, through its provision of technical assistance to emerging ministries of labour and employment in independent African nations it became relevant in labour policy matters and beyond across Africa.[6]

This article examines ILO's roles and impacts in some African nations during the 1960s as it strives to make a mark in the merging independent nations. It examines challenges and accomplishments particularly in the area of labour union education, that is AC-TRAV activities, its technical assistance programmes, and Decent Work Projects, and not to the least efforts at setting international labour standards. The latter is perhaps what separates the ILO from other international organisations. In fact, its original task, which remains one of its main fields of activity, was to define international labour standards. Since 1919, the annual ILC sessions have adopted nearly 200 conventions and a similar number of recommendations to this end (instruments that are not binding under international law).

In the period after the World War II, human rights issues such as freedom of association and protection from discrimination at work increasingly became the object of the organisation's normative activities. During the same period onward, the ILO also began to function as an agency of technical cooperation in areas such as vocational training and the formulation of social policy. Finally, the International Labour Office has, since its inception, acted as an institution of research into global social problems. Its authority as a source of information on social issues and compiler of labour and social statistics for governments cannot be underestimated. This, indeed, remains one of its assets as an international organisation.

---

6   See Maul et al., The International Labour Organization, pp. 222–264.

2. The Context: What is ACTRAV?

The ILO tripartite role engages the workers on like any other international institutions. The Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV) remained the main link between the ILO and the world of work through one of its constituents: workers' organizations. Thus, ACTRAV is positioned to ensure that the interests of workers' organizations globally are central to its policy development and activities setting the standard for governments and other agencies that employed labour. From its headquarters in Geneva, the ILO facilitates the realization of the activities of ACTRAV through labour union education, technical assistance, particularly in developing economies like African nations.

In addition, ACTRAV serves as ILO's agent supporting workers' organisations in the defence and promotion of workers' rights, with Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCP) offices were opened in regional areas like Eastern, Southern, and Western Africa for effective implementation of earmarked projects and activities during the first decade tagged "Africa's Glorious" age. The idea of Decent Work is to protect workers, and at the same time ensuring that employers are responsible. Suffice it to say that a living wage based on meaningful work is projected as rights of workers to be protected globally. The nexus between ACTRAV, Decent Work, and workers' organisations is central to ILO's activities analysed in the following.

Tijani et al. have analysed the origin and changing role of the ILO in labour relations in Africa and its driving motif for labour relations predicated on sound labour relations in the workplace, decent work, social justice, and responsibility.[7] The colonial experiences of African nations before the 1960s seems to align it with ILO's mission and vision.[8] The experience, however, differs depending on the policies of the colonising power, or as in the case of Ethiopia and Liberia, the prevailing world market and events in neighbouring countries that had multiplying effect.[9] Thus, in order to explain how ILO have shaped labour relations in Africa, a thematic approach is adopted in this analysis.

It is pertinent to define the phrase "labour relation" in order to contextualise the significance of ILO activities generally, and in Africa in particular. Labour relation is defined as the relationship between the employers and employees. By extension, it is the relationship between the employers and the unions where there is one. It is also the relationship between the employees as well. It also takes into cognisance the effect of such relationship on production and the well-being of the employees. Generally, labour relations are about the tools put in place to ensure sound industrial relations. These tools include communication, processing of grievances or disputes, collective bargaining, benefits, welfare etc. Above all, it is primarily the study of how employers and employees work together to create a conducive workplace. To contextualise ILO's shaping of labour

---

7   Ibid.
8   H.I. Tijani, Union Education in Nigeria: Labour, Empire, and Decolonisation since 1945, London 2012.
9   The two nations were never colonised by Europeans, despite of the occupation of Ethiopia by Italy between 1936 and 1941.

relations in Africa, as elsewhere, this article explains some key areas of its activities and principles – technical assistance, social dialogue, sound industrial relations, social justice and decent work.

The ideology of social justice radiates all activities of the ILO, as it is succinctly stated in its constitution thus, "universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based on social justice."[10] Work is central to people's well-being. In addition to providing income, work can pave way for broader social and economic development, strengthening individuals, their families and communities. Such progress hinges on "decent work" for the workers. Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace, and social protection for families. Decent work means better prospects for personal development and social integration as well as freedom for people to express their concerns, organise and participate in the decisions that affect their lives. It entails equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

Decent work therefore is regarded as the key to the eradication of poverty hoping that access to it would bring prosperity and goodness. To the ILO, access to decent work therefore is crucial in making globalisation and its gains a reality in developing African nations. As noted in one of its official publications, the ILO opined that "creating decent employment must therefore be at the heart of development policy."[11] In this vain, the ILO works actively with the United Nations and other multilateral agencies to develop policies and programmes that support the creation of decent work opportunities. Notable amongst its several programmes in Africa are decent jobs for Egypt's young people, the Dakar, Pretoria, and Yaoundé programmes to mention but a few. In fact, technical teams are located across Africa for effective implementation of projects and coordination of personnel. Invariably, decent work implies social justice for the worker and by implication the sustenance of sound industrial relations. With these in place, the ILO seems to ensure the success of its major task of peaceful labour relations in the workplace throughout Africa as elsewhere. It is no coincidence that labour relations today form an integral part of all country programmes that are run under the decent work agenda.[12]

3. The ILO in Africa in the 1930 and 1940s

The ILO is a remarkable institution for many reasons. Its position within the network of UN organisations alone is exceptional in two respects.[13] First, the ILO is the oldest by

---

10   See ILO Constitution, Preamble.
11   ILO, The ILO at a Glance, Geneva 2007, p. 3.
12   ILO, Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs), Geneva n.d., <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/program/dwcp/countries/index.htm> (accessed 31 January 2020).
13   J. van Daele, The International Labour Organization in Past and Present Research, in: International Review of Social History 53 (2008) 3, pp. 485–511; J. van Daele et al. (eds.), ILO Histories. Essays on the International Labour Organization and its Impact on the World During the Twentieth Century, Bern et al. 2010. I should note that the following section substantially draws on Maul et al., The International Labour Organization, pp. 222–230.

far of all the constituent parts of the present-day system of international organisations under the umbrella of the UN family. Set up in 1919 under the Treaty of Versailles and run under the auspices of the League of Nations before the World War II, it was given the status of a UN specialized agency in 1946 – the only institution connected to the League to have survived the war unscathed. The ILO's original mandate to improve the conditions of working men and women, the world over, was partly a reflection of demands voiced by European philanthropists and social reformers. The World War I had then provided the political environment favourable enough for action to be taken. The integration of the reformist workers movement into the war effort in many countries and the Russian October Revolution of 1917 convinced even hesitant forces among the Great Powers that some concessions had to be made to the moderate parts of the labour movement in order to reward its war time contribution and calm its revolutionary potential. Beyond there was a widely held recognition of the need for state intervention in the reconstruction of national economies destroyed by the war. Many held the ILO to be a suitable institution for the coordination of these efforts.[14] The ILO is also distinguished within the UN system by its unique tripartite structure, an organisational principle made manifest in the fact that the delegations sent by each member state to the political bodies of the organisation include, as well as two government envoys, one representative each of the country's employers' and workers' associations, both of whom have full voting rights. Unlike other international agencies, the ILO is thus not a purely intergovernmental forum. It is the only international organisation, which fully involves non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in its decision-making processes. Tripartism has always been more than a mere structural principle to the ILO. The organisation's makeup has lent a special element to all the discussions taking place in its forums and tripartism has always been treated by ILO officials (as well as by a significant proportion of the ILO's constituents, in particular the workers) as one of the main ideological pillars on which the ILO rests. Aside from the tripartite aspect, the ILO's structure mirrors that of the UN and other international organisations. It has a permanent secretariat, the International Labour Office (often referred to here as "the Office"), headed by a Director-General and employing a permanent staff of international civil servants who work in the Geneva headquarters or in one of the ILO's regional and field offices. In its 100 years history, it has grown in bounds and lengths, but with major challenge on the continent of Africa because of its peculiar colonial rule and policies unfavourable to ILO's activities.

It is now a common knowledge that the ILO faced more barriers entering the African space before the 1960s. Before this period, the colonial powers resisted ILO in all forms rendering its international observation of colonial policies the territories null except on a somewhat humanitarian deal about "Native labour", i.e. the systematic use of forced labour. The focus on forced labour lead to the creation of the "Native Labour Code"

---

14   For an account of the period leading up to the establishment of the ILO and the early days of the organisation, see A. Alcock, History of the International Labor Organisation, New York 1971, pp. 1–49; B. Reinalda, Routledge History of International Organisations: From 1815 to the Present, London 2009, pp. 137–177 and 221–268.

(1930–1939) as a collection of conventions that defined the limits to the abuse of "native labour", at the same time circling in an area separated from the general international labour code and thus outside the realm of "the social". The installation of a non-tripartite Committee of Experts on Native Labour, helped to prepare the said conventions, mainly consisting of colonial administrators and colonial economic interests, among them Lord Lugard, Albrecht Gohr from the Belgian Ministry of Colonies, Martial Marlin, former governor of various French Colonies, and Freiherr von Rechenberg, former Governor of German East Africa underpinned the patronizing character of this work.[15]

Between the middle of World War II and the immediate post-war period, the ILO made a quantum leap in its treatment of the social problems of the colonial territories. Attached to its hallmark Declaration of Philadelphia of 1944, in which the ILO, on the side of the Allied powers, claimed a comprehensive role in social and economic post-war planning based on the idea of universal social rights, was a programme of colonial reform to be enshrined in a series of recommendations and conventions to be adopted between 1944 and 1948. In the course of this process pre-war "native labour" became "social policy in dependent territories" and the colonial powers committed themselves to develop their territories in line with a broad social objective.[16]

The conventions reflected the growing influence of colonial reformist development thinking on the official mind and was also a result of the propaganda value the metropoles saw in a colonial "fresh start" on the basis of social rights vis-à-vis colonial populations and their American Allies alike, on whose good-will their return into imperial power depended to a large degree. At the same time the colonial powers still resisted the full application of the international labour code to the colonies. Mainly for two reasons: For one applying schemes of social security wholesale to the colonies, in other words to build the colonial welfare state as a parallel operation to European post-war reforms was regarded as being way too costly. Colonial economic and social policy post-1945 in Africa started partly with ambitious schemes, in particular in the French territories, but came around very quickly to more sober calculations.[17] Secondly there were political reasons, which became particularly evident in the area of trade union freedoms, an issue to which the attitude of the colonial powers was especially ambivalent. Although trade unions were encouraged, both the colonial bureaucracies and the officials on the ground did their utmost to limit their activities to such an extent that they could be guaranteed not to grow into a political threat. As a result, even after World War II's remaining

---

15   S. Zimmermann, Special Circumstances in Geneva. The ILO and the World of Non-Metropolitan Labour in the Inter-war Years, in: van Daele et al. (eds.), ILO Histories, pp. 221–250. See also J.P. Daughton, ILO Expertise and Colonial Violence in the Inter-War Years, in: S. Kott / J. Droux (eds.), Globalizing Social Rights, Basingstoke 2013, pp. 85–97.

16   See Maul et al., The International Labour Organization, p. 231.

17   F. Cooper, Decolonization and African Society. The Labor Question in French and British Africa, Cambridge 1996; A. Eckert, Exportschlager Wohlfahrtsstaat? Europäische Sozialstaatlichkeit und Kolonialismus in Afrika nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg, in: Geschichte und Gesellschaft 32 (2006) 4, pp. 467–488.

colonies continued to represent a world apart, or in other words, a sphere to which less stringent rules applied.[18]

4. The ILO and Africa approaching the 1960s

As new Director-General the American David A. Morse from 1948 onwards launched wide-scale technical assistance programmes catering to the developing countries. The ILO's centre of gravity shifted to Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East.[19] In Africa, however, the colonial powers showed no inclination to allow the ILO unfiltered access in labour matters or any colonial matters. They rejected the ILO's offer of technical assistance and they generally were keen to avoid at all costs any further "internationalisation" of colonial policy and the increased accountability they feared it would bring – especially in the light of the growing strength of independence movements in the colonies after the war and the colonial powers' tendency in many places to resort to defending their claim to power by force of arms. Instead they started to build up alternative bodies of inter-colonial cooperation like the Commission for Technical Co-operation in Africa South of Sahara (CCTA) in order to fence off against an internationalisation of colonial social policy. The forum which the United Nations offered at the same time to critics of colonialism only served to reinforce the colonial powers' sensitivity to "interference" by international organisations. As a result, in Africa in particular, the ILO found itself banging on closed doors in the 1950s. The ILO had to fight a whole series of difficult battles in the course of the 1950s before it managed to get even one foot in the door to Africa. This was illustrated particularly clearly in 1952 when the ILO first began to try to convince the colonial powers of the idea of an African field office, which, like those in Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, would be used mainly to coordinate technical assistance programmes on the African continent.

Since the ILO officials foresaw difficulties they remained in the background and let the Workers' group be charged with raising the proposal in the Governing Body.[20] As expected, the initiative was not received with much enthusiasm by the colonial powers. The British Colonial Office, asked the Office to proceed "very carefully" and warned that there were still the other members of the CCTA to think about, who were all, in general, extremely apprehensive of ILO activities in Africa.[21] While Britain pleaded for a firm but diplomatic approach, the other CCTA powers were more categorical in their rejection of the ILO's plans. The French, perhaps, were just sceptical, but the Belgians, Portuguese, Rhodesians, and the South African government did not tolerate any direct involvement in Africa by

---

18   Maul et al., The International Labour Organization, pp. 59–119.
19   Ibid., pp. 131–151.
20   Jenks to Morse, 20 December 1951, in: Historical Archives International Labour Organisation, Geneva (in the following: ILOA)-MF Z 1/1/1/13: Mr. Jenks – Africa.
21   Watson to Gavin, 19 January 1952, in: ILOA-NL 1002: Second Session of the Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories 1951.

international organisations. The hostility of the CCTA states towards "interference" by the ILO was so strong that it led on occasion to serious tensions between the colonial powers themselves.[22] In 1953, for instance, the British were reproached bitterly by the French for permitting an ILO mission to West Africa to investigate, among other things, the explosive issue of industrial relations and union freedoms.[23] France had been as good as forced to open its territories to the mission, and was so incensed by the ILO's critical findings that Paris attempted to get the CCTA states to address a joint letter of protest to Geneva. It took all the effort and skill the British could muster to dissuade them from the idea.[24] When the ILO took stock at the end of 1953, it found that "in no case has there been the slightest indication that any of them [Britain, France, Belgium] would give any support to the idea of establishing an ILO field office in Africa".[25] It was the Workers' group that opened the discussion again with a criticism against what they perceived as the ILO's too soft approach. They were proven partly right by the talks Wilfred Jenks, the ILO Assistant Director-General had with the Portuguese dictator António de Oliveira Salazar on the fringes of an expert committee meeting on colonial social policy that took place in Lisbon in which Jenks did everything he could to obtain Portugal's cooperation by attempting to convince Salazar of the benefits of a "positive policy of international action." If Portugal ratified the ILO's colonial conventions and opened its African territories up to the technical assistance offered by the organisation, it would thereby strengthen not only Portugal's own position, but that of all the colonial powers against the anti-colonial tendencies now manifesting themselves in every international body. Jenks used the imminent accession of the Soviet Union (due in 1954) to the ILO as another good reason for strengthening active cooperation between the Western countries, and tried to make the most of the fact that the ILO's entire approach up to this point, unlike that of the UN, had been "based essentially on an attempt to act with the fullest co-operation of the colonial powers". This last point at least was fully acknowledged by Salazar, who told Jenks to make sure to continue in future to defend the organisation's autonomy from the UN at all costs. Apart from this, however, Jenks failed to obtain any real concessions from the Portuguese dictator, and could only hope that the exchange had made a positive contribution to the long-term prospects of the ILO's plans.[26]

At the same time, the Lisbon meeting made clear to the Office that it could not continue to ignore the criticism voiced by the workers' group. The observers from the international trade union federations had caused a stir in the Portuguese capital by lodging an

---

22   The ministerial officer responsible for social and ILO-related matters in the French Overseas Ministry, Guelfi, accused Britain of having "sold the pass to the ILO" after the country had approved Gavin's West Africa mission without consulting the CCTA first. Watson to Tennant (MOL), 25 February 1953, in: CO 859/367: International Labour Organisation, Committee of Experts on Social Policy in Non-Metropolitan Territories, 3rd Session, Lisbon 4–19 December 1953.

23   Ibid.

24   Watson to Tennant (MOL), 25 February 1953, in: PRO-CO 859/367; Watson to Guelfi, 14 February 1953, in: PRO-CO 859/348: International Labour Office, Visit of Officials to West Africa 1953.

25   Gavin to Morse, 21 November 1952, in: ILOA-MF Z 11: Africa General.

26   Jenks to Morse, 23 December 1953, in: ILOA-MF Z 1/1/1/13.

open protest during the Lisbon meeting against the ILO's lack of involvement in the African continent. [27] To prevent the Office from being put in such an unpleasant position again, Jenks believed it had to take the initiative itself so as at least to be able to point to some modest short-term success. With the authorisation of the Director-General, Jenks travelled immediately after the Lisbon meeting to London, Paris, and Brussels to campaign among colonial politicians for an agreement concerning the ILO's future policy on Africa, which was to be based essentially on the proposals put forward by the workers' group in the Governing Body (GB). Cautiously, Jenks tried to make clear to the British, French, and Belgian representatives that an agreement of this nature, which he argued would be in the colonial powers' own best interests with a view to avoiding future conflicts, could not be reached "unless the metropolitan powers felt able to make a substantial contribution towards securing it by offering a positive programme." [28]

The next year, 1955 marked a change in the ILO's Africa policy. In the run-up to another expert meeting on colonial social policy, which took place at the end of the year in Dakar (then French West Africa) the ICFTU took the initiative in the GB and demanded that the committee of experts would be transformed into a representative, tripartite body. Among the factors behind this demand were the disputes within the ICFTU regarding its position on colonial issues in Africa, which would reach a new climax in the middle of the decade. According to the US trade union federation AFL-CIO, the ICFTU was doing less and less justice to its role in tackling communism in Africa. This accusation was directed primarily at the British. The Americans believed that Africa was where the battle of the systems would next be played out, in the very near future at that, and the AFL-CIO now began to use threats to strengthen its demands that the ICFTU develop a clearer anti-colonial profile. If need be, the AFL-CIO would take independent action in Africa rather than wait for the ICFTU.[29] The ICFTU now attempted in the GB to use the ILO to extend its own influence in Africa, and in doing so eventually dragged the ILO in the same direction.

Firstly, the ICFTU called for the Committee of Experts to be turned into an African equivalent of the tripartite Asian Advisory Committee (AAC) that had been set up at

27   Ibid.
28   Jenks to Morse, 24 January 1954, in: ILOA-MF Z 1/1/1/13.
29   The underlying dispute between the AFL and the TUC at this time surrounded the question of which trade union movements should be supported in Africa. While the TUC was determined to stick to its approach of taking things slowly and creating "real" trade unions from the ground up whose activities were entirely apolitical, the AFL tended, in the name of the fight against communism, also to support groups whose activities had a political element or whose work was even predominantly political – that is anti-colonial. The AFL's main priority was to acquire partners capable of forming a protective bastion against communist influences. See A. Carew, Conflict within the ICFTU: Anti-Colonialism and Anti-Communism in the 1950, in: International Review of Social History 41 (1996) 2, pp. 147–181. On the conflicts between the ICFTU and the AFL-CIO in Africa from the mid 1950s see the biography of the Afro-American trade unionist and civil rights activist Maida Springer, who paints a different picture from Carew's of the disputes. While Carew emphasizes the political objectives of and secret service involvement in the AFL-CIO's work in Africa, Richards sees the experience of Maida Springer as being typical of the conflicts between the (predominantly Afro-American) representatives of the AFL-CIO in Africa and the representatives of the ICFTU, who were often British and whose familiarity with the colonial administrations was too great for America's liking. See Y. Richards, Pan-Africanist and International Labor Leader, Pittsburgh 2000.

the beginning of the 1950s. This was an ingenious proposal as it had further-reaching implications than a mere change in the size and structure of the COESP: an African Advisory Committee (AFAC) would incorporate both the African colonial territories and the independent States of the region under the same auspices, and thus, in a roundabout way, effectively formally integrate the colonies into the organisation. The second demand brought the idea of an African field office back on to the agenda, and the third was for an African Regional Conference (AFRC) to be held as soon as possible.[30] The ILO leadership was temporarily overwhelmed by the new demands coming from the workers' group and other anti-colonial elements within the ILO's membership. Director-General Morse complained about the lack of understanding shown by its critics of the difficulties the Office faced with regard to its policy on Africa. "The ILO," he stated, "cannot deal with African issues like a pressure group. It cannot overreach the realities of the political situation."[31]

Shortly afterwards, on the fringes of the ILC in 1956, Morse's envoys Jenks and Robert Gavin (the head of the Non-Metropolitan Labour Section), held two confidential meetings with the CCTA powers. Jenks told the representatives that the ILO was facing ever more frequent accusations that it was "the instrument of the colonial powers". In addition, the workers' group was "increasingly restless and liable at any time to suggest far-reaching proposals". In order to avoid Africa within the ILO turning into the "sport of political forces", the colonial powers had to move.[32] As a first step slowly after the colonial powers gave in to the founding of an African Advisory Committee.[33]

It revealed the first cracks in the united front, which the colonial powers had been presenting against the ILO's involvement there. The increased pressure from the international trade union movement was not the only factor behind this change. More fundamentally significant was the fact that in the early years of the decade the very foundations of colonial rule, renewed so determinedly after the war, began to crumble. The wave of nationalism sweeping the colonies shook colonial confidence in the metropoles badly. War-like conflicts such as those in Algeria and Kenya, coupled with the disappointing economic results of the colonial powers' development offensives after the war, triggered discussions in the metropoles regarding the wisdom of continued imperial rule. Even if relinquishing their territories entirely was far from the minds of those in Paris and London – and even further from the minds of those in Brussels and Lisbon – change was in the air. France gave up its South-East Asian possessions in 1954 (out of necessity, following its defeat against the Vietminh on the battlefield of Dien Bien Phu), and shortly

---

30   This idea came from the relatively small International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (IFCTU). By this point, the organisation was holding regular, tripartite regional conferences for Europe, North and South America, Asia, and the Far East and there had been a preparatory one for the Middle East. This latter took place in 1947 in Istanbul and was not actually followed by any regular conferences, because the Arab states refused to take part if Israel was included. See ILO Governing Body, 131 (1956), p. 41.

31   Cabinet meeting, 12 January 1956, in: ILOA-MF Z8/1/32: Meetings of the Director-General, Notes, Minutes, 1951–1957.

32   The minutes of the meetings of 19 June 1956 and 26 June 1956 are recorded by the Office in: ILOAMF Z 11: Africa General and in PRO-LAB 13/984: ILO and Africa 1955–1957.

33   ILO Governing Body, 131 (1956), RoP, p. 27.

afterwards granted independence to its North African protectorates Morocco and Tunisia. At almost the same time, Britain handed over power in Malaya. The most significant event in Africa was the British initiation of a transfer of power south of the Sahara. Ghana, as the Gold Coast was now called under Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah, was the first country to be given its independence (1957) in what were, at times, hard-bitten negotiations, and Nigeria followed in 1960.[34]

These developments not only provided further inspiration for nationalist movements in the remaining colonies, they also opened up new opportunities for the African and Asian States in international forums. As the Afro-Asian bloc grew, so did the force of the demands it raised within the ILO and all the other parts of the UN system for an end to colonial rule.[35] The new strength of this group of states inevitably affected the colonial powers' approach to colonial questions. On top of this, in the mid-1950s the US government renewed its criticism of its Western allies' colonial involvement – a response to the Soviet Union's new strategy of courting the newly independent nations regardless of their political orientation. From Washington's point of view, the slow pace of reform and the colonial powers' apparent inability to maintain political control by peaceful means simply played into communist hands. Britain and France experienced the full force of the United States' lack of trust in their abilities when it compelled them to abandon their commando action against Nasser's Egypt during the Suez crisis at the end of 1956.

At the ILC in 1956, these developments culminated in attacks against the colonial powers more acrimonious than had ever previously been seen inside the ILO. With the Algerian conflict still raging, France, inevitably, came off worse than the others. What was most galling for the colonial powers, though, was the fact that US representatives mercilessly used this, their hour of need, to call on them not to obstruct plans for an African field office for too much longer.[36] The icy calculation behind this move caused fury in the colonial metropoles, as Jenks reported to Morse.[37] One French representative declared himself to be dismayed by the "hatred of the colonial people against the white people and the West" he had experienced at the conference, but equally disappointed by the fact that the United States had shown no sympathy whatsoever for the problems of the colonial powers and had joined in the banging of the anti-colonial drum.[38]

True enough, these events made the ILO realise that it would now have to give up its previous caution, as any further delay could do severe damage to the ILO and its future

34 On the complex interplay of metropolitan, colonial, and international factors which accelerated the political decolonisation process in the mid 1950s, see W.D. McIntyre, British Decolonization, 1946–1997: When, Why and How Did the British Empire Fall?, Basingstoke 1998, pp. 79–101; R.F. Betts, France and Decolonisation, 1900–1960, Basingstoke 1991, pp. 78–114.

35 A mind-provoking view on the alliances within the post-colonial world under the banner of Afro-Asian or "Third World" solidarity is taken by V. Prashad, The Darker Nations. A People's History of the Third World, New York / London 2007.

36 ILC 40 (1957), RoP, pp. 235f.

37 Meeting between Morse, Jenks and Cox 6 July 1956, in: ILOA-MF Z8/1/32.

38 Discussion between Morse and Alexandre Parodi, French observer at the Conference and then-NATO ambassador of his country. Morse's memoirs, 16 August 1956, in: DAMP, B 89, F 14: Reflections.

position in Africa.[39] A meeting of the ICFTU in the Ghanaian capital Accra in January 1957, marked again by harsh anti-colonial criticism, provided more impetus for the ILO to take action. The ICFTU condemned the CCTA in no uncertain terms and demanded that Africa be opened up to international organisations. It renewed calls for an ILO field office in Africa as soon as possible, and asked for speedy preparations to be made for a Regional Conference. [40]

Shortly afterwards, a CO memorandum spoke in entirely new tones of the ILO's work:

> *The aims of the ILO are worthy, much of its technical work is first-rate, and it has considerable prestige, particularly of course among organised labour. Moreover, it is not conspicuously anti-colonial or prominent, in spite of the special representation of organised labour in the Organisation, among those agencies, which seek to interfere in the affairs of dependent territories. We consider that we ought not to attempt to insulate our dependent territories from the Organisation. On grounds of general principle, therefore, we are not disposed to obstruct the orderly development of ILO activities in Africa South of the Sahara.*[41]

Soon afterwards, Morse indicated to British delegates in the Governing Body that he would be agreeing to the Egyptian Government representative Said Salama's proposal to incorporate the costs of setting up an African field office into the ILO's budget for 1958. Once again, the British delegates attempted "by private pressure" and "urgent representations" to dissuade Morse from the idea,[42] but before long the first signals were received that, whatever they felt about it, London would not block the budget.[43]

Similar developments were observed with regard to the creation of a tripartite African Advisory Committee on the model of the one already in place in Asia. The British came around to the opinion, that the AFAC that it had fought so bitterly to prevent might well turn out to be a "safety valve for the expression of African hopes and aspirations".[44] In the course of 1957, most of the other CCTA powers also came round to this new position. They saw the increasing interest in African issues the Soviet Union was displaying in international forums, and the danger that, if they remained inflexible, the communist-dominated World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) might get its claws into the young trade union movement in Africa, as good arguments for a change of course. Eventually the question of an African Field Office came up again. Even something short of a contest broke out among the colonial powers over where it should be located. Both

---

39   Portugal and France already suspected that an agreement between the Office and the State Department was behind the Wilkins Initiative, and they attempted to get the other CCTA powers to unite in a joint protest against this interference. Morris (CO) to Kunzle (FO-UN), in: PRO-LAB 13/984: ILO and Africa 1955–1957.

40   Carew, Conflict within the ICFTU, p. 162.

41   Memorandum from the CO (anon.), "The ILO and Africa", 22 January 1957, in: PRO-LAB 13/984.

42   Robertson to Morris, 12 March 1957, in: PRO-LAB 13/984.

43   Memorandum by Robertson (MOL), "The ILO and Africa", 13 June 1957, in: PRO-LAB 13/984.

44   Robertson thought he could hear "sympathetic noises" coming out of the CO to the effect that Britain would vote for the AFAC and a regional office at the June 1957 meeting of the Governing Body, but not for a Regional Conference. PRO-LAB 13/984.

the British and the French made it clear to Morse that they would like to see it situated in one of their territories. Even Brussels declared its desire to play host in the Belgian Congo.[45] The Portuguese had no particular intentions in this respect but were by no means dismissive either, and even issued an invitation for the first meeting of the AFAC to be held on Portuguese territory in Africa.[46]

Morse's final choice of location for the field office was Lagos, Nigeria, where it began work in January 1959.[47] This choice was motivated by the fact that Nigeria was shortly to become independent and its leaders, unlike those of the alternative option, Ghana, displayed no ambitions to spearhead the anti-colonial movement. Establishing the office in Ghana may, in the light of the line followed by Nkrumah, have led to a re-politicising of the issue of the ILO's involvement in Africa, which was the last thing the Office wanted. In August, Morse announced his decision on the office's location to the governments.

More positively, the choice of Nigeria was of course also related to its fledgling position in the continent and among former British colonies. It is the largest south of the Sahara, and the most populated nation in Africa. It should be noted that ILO officials had engaged with a few liberal nationalists in colonial Gold Coast and Nigeria before their independence in 1957 and 1960 respectively. No doubt, it successfully persuaded most labour leaders to eschew leftist ideology for the Western model tagged "sound industrial relations."[48] Despite the movement of the regional office from Lagos to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the organisation continues to provide technical assistance, training, and education to countries throughout the continent. From Lagos, later Abuja, the ILO implements its activities for the West African countries, while similar base in Algiers, Antananarivo, Dar el Salaam, Harare, Kinshasa, and Lusaka serves Central, Eastern, Northern, and Southern regions, respectively. These regional offices work closely with ILO's constituents or partners such as the governments, employers, and workers organisations in other to promote decent work projects, ensure effective implementation of its conventions and treaties, as well as impart the idea of sound industrial relations across the continent.

The same year it opened the office, the AFAC met for its first meeting in the Angolan capital, Luanda, and preparations began for the first AFRC, to be held as soon as logistically possible. On a long trip to Africa in 1959, Jenks noted with satisfaction that the ILO's expansion into Africa now had the wide support of all the main powers represent-

---

45   Jenks' notes on the meeting about Morse's trip to Brussels with the ministers Troclet, Fafchamps, Buisseret (colonial minister), 14 January 1958 (Note 16/1), in: PRO-LAB 13/984.

46   Jef Rens' notes on the meeting with the Portuguese foreign minister Paula Cunha and the colonial minister Ventura 5/2/1958 (trip 1-4.2.), in: PRO-LAB 13/984.

47   Morse's note to George Tobias informing the US government about the Office's African plans, 21 August 1958, in: NARA – RG 174.5 (Bureau of International Labor Affairs), B 20: General Correspondence, 1953–1967.

48   See <https://www.ilo.org/africa/about-us/offices/abuja/lang--en/index.htm> (accessed 2 November 2013). In addition, see H.I. Tijani, McCarthyism in Colonial Nigeria: The Ban on the Employment of Communists, in: A. Oyebade (ed.), The Foundations of Nigeria, Trenton 2003, pp. 647–668; Tijani, Building "sound" industrial relations in Nigeria: The British and organised labour, 1940s to 1960, in: Lagos Historical Review 11 (2012), pp. 21–36.

ed on the continent.[49] On the eve of African decolonization even the hostility towards the ILO's technical assistance programmes lessened. In a meeting Morse had with the French President de Gaulle in 1960, the President let it be known "que moi, de Gaulle, et la France, sommes en complet accord avec votre œuvre d'assistance technique, et vous soutiendrons dans tout ce que vous faites et ferez en Afrique française."[50]

In summary, the ILO's position on the problem of colonial social policy during the 1950s essentially remained the one it had taken during the reform phase of the war and the immediate post-war period. Its success in having integrated the colonial territories into a generally universalistic discourse was countered by its long-term failure to vanquish the double standard which the colonial powers continued to make use of within their domains. After the war, the double standard had manifested itself in the adoption of specifically colonial conventions, while now it was reflected in the very existence of a separate committee concerned with social policy in dependent territories. It continued to manifest itself in the "gradual universalism" which characterised the findings of the committee, and in the ILO's powerlessness to overcome the colonial powers' resistance to its involvement in Africa. Almost until the very end of their rule in Africa, the colonial powers thus managed to uphold their contention that under colonial conditions, a different set of rules applied to the path of modernisation process than those the ILO claimed to be of a universal nature.

It is pertinent to state also that the Bureau of Workers' Activities (ACTRAV) in labour union education gained greater momentum during the late 1950s. As noted somewhere else,[51] in 1950 the ILO began to deliberate on ways to educate workers throughout the world. ACTRAV became the focal point for pedagogy, methodology, and content in all matters relating to labour union education. It was not until 1956, however, that a systematic workers' education programme began in its office in Geneva. The scope of the ILO's workers' education was based on its organisational structure and its competence in social and economic subjects in the labour field. The curricular was designed to educate workers about industrial relations, social security, working conditions, occupational health and safety, and similar issues. In addition, educating the workers involve better understanding of the role of the machines and their adaptation to the changing industrial environment in the age of globalisation.

Labour education is non-traditional (largely during the colonial phase), nonconventional, not structured, and not credential- or degree-oriented. Yet, it is the pathway to workers' promotion, to better opportunities and to job security. It was an opportunity for most workers with primary-level education to garner skills at the end of the training. Labour union education transcends skills acquisition because it involves mental development. As a form of education in the workplace, its pedagogy is often hands-on or cooperative in nature. It is also about increasing workers' productivity without neces-

---

49   Report by Jenks, 29 April 1959, in: ILOA-MF-Z 1/1/1/13.
50   Minutes of talks between Morse and General De Gaulle, 15 January 1960, in: DAMP, B 4, F 4: France.
51   Tijani, Building "sound" industrial relations in Nigeria.

sarily being dogmatic or ideological. Although coloured during the colonial era by the ideological race, it is ultimately about access to information and means for workers to improve themselves. Such improvement, it could be argued, was ultimately beneficial to the employers (government and the foreign capitals) in that it ensured profit maximisation. Labour union education is not only tailored for specific country need, it generally aimed at workers' success through access to information and skill acquisition. Skill acquisition, access to information, and sound industrial relations at the workplace were central to the success of the non-traditional or informal nature of labour union education throughout Africa before the 1960s.[52] This, however, has changed since post-independent because of the dynamism and changing nature of labour relations throughout Africa. Ghosh opined that workers' education is "all kinds of educational activities which seek to provide workers with the equipment that will help them to develop fully their potentialities and enable them to fulfil more adequately their trade unions and related functions."[53]

The idea of labour union education therefore is contextualised in a variety of ways. Scholars have given various explanations to buttress their point of view.[54] Such view, as the history of Nigeria's labour union education shows, is often based on ideological position. In addition, the type and modules of education is based on changing social, economic, and political situation on one hand, and the nature of industrial relations on the other hand. Despite these varieties, one agrees with Whitehouse that,

> workers' education or labour education is a structure and process specifically designed to involve trade union members in education programmes and activities directly through their trade unions, or in joint cooperative developments with workers' organisations.[55]

5. Conclusion

This article has presented a post-colonial account of the role of ILO with particular reference to the activities of the Bureau of Workers' Activities, known as ACTRAV on the eve of independence in Sub-Saharan Africa. Despite the challenges during post-World War II era, the ILO remained steadfast in its efforts at ensuring decent work, social justice, and labour union education throughout Africa. The 1960s mark another epoch in the history of relationship between Africa and international organisations, including the ILO. Each African nation during the 1960s had the latitude to shape its destiny in policy formulation, relations, labour issues in a Cold War environment. The 1960s laid the foundation for what happened thereafter in different parts of the continent.

---

52 Tijani, Union Education in Nigeria.
53 P. Ghosh, Current problems and practices in workers education, in: International Labour Review 14 (1953), pp. 14–46.
54 Tijani, Union Education in Nigeria.
55 J.R.W. Whitehouse, New dimension of workers' education, Workers' Education CBWE, December 1977.