African Trade Union Studies: Analysis of Two Decades.
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The upsurge in African labor organization and trade union growth began after the Second World War; interest in this subject is now approximately two decades old. This paper assesses the state of African trade union studies by surveying the literature in the field and delineating four central areas of concern that have emerged. These areas, which will be dealt with in the body of this paper, involve a consideration of formal-descriptive studies, issues concerning the political significance of African labor, the question of the external involvements of African unionism, and issues surrounding the social change process.

Before turning to a consideration of these issues in detail, it would be useful to consider several preliminary questions. We might begin by examining the source of materials on African labor organization: basically, the literature in this field has been generated by three distinct groups.

First there have been the official organizations. These include the various government organizations (e.g., labor departments in pre- and post-independence Africa as well as semigovernmental organizations such as the International Labour Office (ILO) in Switzerland and the Inter-African Labour Institute (ILI) located in Brazzaville (at least until 1965). The ILO published the massive documentary study, the African Labour Survey, in 1958, and continues to publish relevant material in the International Labour Review. The ILI, an intergovernmental organization of African labor departments formed in 1952, published the Bulletin between 1954 and 1965.

Governmental materials on tropical African labor date back a considerable time originating, in all probability, with Orde Browne's Labour in the Tanganyika Territory (1926) and his more general The African Labourer (1933). Governmental sources are, at one and the same time, the most detailed but the most frustrating. These sources have often provided the best statistical materials (even if the data have been dubious) while containing material of low analytic quality. Without considerable additional study, these materials have been obscure and bloodless, incapable of being understood without considerable additional research or unusual skills in Aesopian analysis.

A second major source of materials has developed from what can be called the labor practitioners. These have been individuals who have had specific work assignments dealing with African labor. The practitioners have come in two types, governmental and trade union. The former have been employees of governments whose assignments have been with African labor and who have written

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personal materials rather than official accounts (cf. Lynd, 1968; Millen, 1963). The latter are practicing trade unionists from other continents (with the exception of Singh, 1969; and Ananaba, 1970) who have worked on the African continent in varying capacities and have prepared descriptive or analytic accounts of their experiences.

The third major source of material comes from scholars who have chosen to work in the trade union sphere for a variety of reasons. Some are interested in social change processes whereas others are specifically concerned with African trade unionism and/or industrial relations. Some of the scholars have had little or no personal background in trade union studies whereas others have been involved with them for lengthy periods of time. The scholars, on the whole, have been concerned with descriptive studies of industrial relations and analyses of social change processes.

An examination of the literature in the field reveals that, while, in one sense, it is voluminous (cf. Friedland, 1965b, with 683 bibliographical entries), it can be demonstrated that the major literature consists of less than two dozen significant works. The definition of ‘major’ studies is, of course, one involving important definitional problems on which reasonable people can disagree. In selecting the ‘important’ works on African unionism, a list of nineteen studies have been utilized.1

The thinness of the material on Africa can be seen by examining the table which encompasses the nineteen major works. It will be noted that with over forty countries in Africa, there are only eight studies covering six countries. Only four studies have been conducted in narrower compass than the individual country, both in Nigeria and Zambia. Nigeria represents, therefore, the most heavily studied country encompassing a total of five studies, Zambia with its large industrial proletariat has only had two studies, and Zaire, Sudan, Tanganyika, Kenya and Uganda have had only single studies each.2

One additional point should be made the study of African unionism: the subject has always involved considerable insecurity because of the delicate subject matter involved. In the post-independence period, scholars have recognized that the independent African governments have not always welcomed trade union studies and have therefore eschewed this as a subject of inquiry.

Thus, an overall assessment of the field indicates the relative paucity of detailed statistical material as well as descriptive and analytical studies. Despite this, it is clear that four major areas of concentration have developed. These areas will be dealt with as they developed chronologically rather than according to an estimate of their significance by this writer. The first area shall be designated as 'formal-descriptive' studies. This involves descriptive studies of trade unions and industri-

1. In selecting the list I have included all books dealing with African unions or industrial relations but have not included books such as that by Pfefferman (1968) which is concerned with labor market analysis and deals with unionism only peripherally or Beling (1960) whose concerns were with the politics of international Arab labor organization. On the other hand, I have included the chapter 'Trade Unionism and Social Cohesion' in Epstein (1958), and shorter-than-book-length chapters such as Berg (1959), and Berg and Butler (1964). These three shorter pieces not only contained significant materials on African unionism but influenced the subsequent development of the field. The major works considered for analysis here are: Fawzi (1957), Epstein (1958), Roper (1958), Berg (1959), Poupard (1960), Warmington (1960), Yesufu (1962), Tulatz (1963), Berg and Butler (1964), November (1965), Davies (1966), Scott (1966), Meynaud and Salah-Bey (1967; originally published in French in 1963), Roberts and de Bellecombe (1967), Friedland (1969), Smock (1969), Singh (1969), Ananaba (1970), and Bates (1971).

2. Short historical articles have appeared providing some information on early labor protest developments in a number of other African countries. See, for example, Savage (1963) for Kenya and Conway (1968) for Sierra Leone.
al relations, largely based on formal (e.g., written) materials such as collective agreements, constitutions, etc., as well as statistical studies. The second area has been concerned with the political significance of African trade unionism and has included a substantial literature on the relations between unions and political parties as well as unions and governments in the post-independence period. The third area has focused on the issue of external involvements of African labor. This includes, in earlier periods, the question of the role of outsiders in helping unions begin or survive their early days, and more recently the question of affiliation with non-African international labor bodies and pan-African labor organization. The final area consists of studies primarily focused on social change questions but which study social change through a consideration of African labor and trade unions.

1. Formal-Descriptive Studies

Formal-descriptive studies originated in the needs of African colonial governments for data on labor. While the subject of labor did not crystallize as a specific area for investigation by colonial governments in Africa until Orde-Browne's Tanganyika study (1926), the issue of the involvement of Africans in the labor force represented one which preoccupied colonial regimes throughout Africa. Out of these early needs developed a concern for the systematic collection of data on the size and distribution of the labor force, occupational skills, migration patterns, remuneration rates, conditions of employment, etc.

The first entities systematically concerned were the primitive departments of labor. The reports which they began to make in the 1930's, but more regularly after the Second World War, provided the information base upon which successive waves of students of African labor would depend. The buildup of data was subsequently reinforced by the involvement of the International Labour Office (ILO). ILO manifested interest in African labor at an early stage (in the 1920's), but continuing interest did not develop until after 1945. Because of its semi-governmental status, the ILO follows a pattern of eschewing controversy. Much of its materials consists of formal-descriptive statements of the condition of labor based...
upon formal-descriptive statements originating with specific governments. The massive collection encompassed in the *African Labour Survey* is a case in point. Besides this type of study, ILO has been the originator of two additional types of material. First, there have been the articles and studies appearing from time to time in the *International Labour Review*. Written primarily by scholars and practitioners, these articles less often reflect an official point of view but rarely contain controversial material. The second type of material is less well-known: the technical assistance series, usually the product of a technical mission to a specific country assigned to provide advice on a very specific issue, e.g. labor education. Always carefully drafted and frequently bloodless, these reports usually contain substantial amounts of down-to-earth material.

After World War II, the African colonial governments created an intergovernmental organization, the Inter-African Labour Institute. Publishing its *Bulletin*, which took a form similar to the *International Labour Review*, the *Bulletin* became a useful source of information, albeit limited by its tendency to accept official governmental pronouncements as concrete reflections of reality. The *Bulletin* ceased publication in 1965.

The second source of formal-descriptive studies originated in the interests of world trade union organizations in African unionism. After the Second World War, the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) and, after its split from WFTU, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) created a union-oriented body of materials. The subsequent competition between ICFTU and WFTU, and the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (IFCTU) for African affiliates, led to the sending of delegations, study groups, and technical advisors. This produced, in turn, a body of materials. Much of this type of material fits into the formal-descriptive category: it is heavily based on ‘official’ trade union sources and is almost invariably published in a manner which is protective of the African affiliate and the international organization involved.

The third source of formal-descriptive studies comes from a small number of European scholars who, by and large, have been involved in such studies in European countries. Especially notable in this regard is B. C. Roberts (1964; cf. also Roberts and de Bellecombe, 1967). While more analytical and generalizing than the previous two sources, these studies suffer from the significant defect of being almost totally dependent upon formal sources of information. Thus, Roberts and Meynaud and Salah-Bey (1967) have depended heavily on collective agreements and formal governmental reports to develop their materials. In this approach, industrial relations are reduced to a set of formal relationships containing little or no references to social and economic contexts, as Allen (1969: 298-299) has correctly pointed out.

While the formal-descriptive studies have had some usefulness, several distinctive problems remain with the contribution that has been made by this genre of study.

First, all formal-descriptive studies have had limited utility since they tend to accept formal descriptions of behavior as social realities. Most of these studies ignore the social and economic context of events; in the case of governmental publications, political contexts also are seriously slighted or referred to only obliquely.

A second major limitation is that the utility of these studies depends on knowledge developed through other means. To understand government reports requires either considerable additional knowledge or remarkable Aesopian skills in reading between lines and understanding the oblique meanings with which such materials abound.

A final comment is necessary on these types of studies, particularly of the genre produced by governments and intergovernmental bodies. Despite their defects and deficiencies, the continuation of this source of data from post-independence Africa would be most welcome. The drying up of this source of material after
the middle of the 1960s has been quite remarkable. It was at least possible
during colonial times to depend on annual reports to be issued in most of the British
territories; while reports continued for several years after independence, most have
appeared irregularly if at all in recent years.

2. The Political Significance of African Labor

The political significance of African labor was recognized in some of the earliest
writing on the subject. As the nationalist movements began to grow after the
Second World War, the concomitant development of trade unionism was also
noted. The early emphasis on politics (cf. Fawzi, 1957; Beling, 1960) flowed,
in all likelihood, from the analytic model of trade unionism that had developed in
Asia where, according to students of the subject, intimate relations between the
unions and the political parties had existed from the beginning (Ghosh, 1960;
Millen, 1963; Sufrin, 1964). Because of a closeness between unions and parties,
the tendency was to emphasize the similarity of the Asian model in the African
context.

Nowhere was this parallel clearer than on the subject of the ‘outside’ leader-
ship that was so pervasive in Indian trade union studies (Myers, 1958: 135-140;
Ghosh, 1960: 132-142). In the early days, the fact that African trade union leaders
displayed different social characteristics (e.g., were overwhelmingly white collar
workers) from the members of the unions (who were overwhelmingly unskilled
and illiterate manual workers) led many to see African union leaders, like their
counterparts, as ‘outsiders’. This view was particularly prevalent with labor
officers in the colonies and was transmitted by them to some of the early students
of African labor. It has taken some time for the ghost of ‘outsidism’ to be laid in
Africa (Berg and Butler, 1964; Friedland, 1969, ch. 7, 10).

The Asian model was especially pervasive with respect to the idea that parties
and unions were integrally connected. In Asia, the unions were closely associated
and involved with the political movements. In Africa, the existence of certain
parallels led many scholars to assume a similarity to the Asian situation. In this
respect, Hodgkin’s pioneer study (1957, ch. 4), while correctly developing an
understanding of African nationalism that transcended mere political organization,
calling attention as it did to religious separatist movements, workers and peasants
organizations, etc., as manifestations of nationalism, had the inadvertent effect of
reinforcing the idea about the identity of labor and political movements.

The process was continually reinforced by the oft-noted (Berg and Butler, 1964:
361; Sufvin, 1964: 31; Nelkin, 1967: 40-41) fact that a considerable number of
prominent political leaders had union antecedents. This correct recognition that
the unions served as an important mobility channel to political power became
confused with an incorrect assessment of the identity or closeness of the unions
and the parties.

Reaction against this concept and the development of a realistic perception
began with Berg and Butler (1964) who concluded that the view of unions solely
as political instrumentalities was erroneous. Showing that the close relationships
between union leaders and parties that existed in the case of Kenya and Guinea
was not the pattern elsewhere in Africa (p. 348), Berg and Butler concluded:

‘This ascription of a political quality to labor unions by all groups concerned
has deceived many outside observers. But observers have often been willingly
fooled. They tended to seek out the political quality, to take as typical instances
in which it could be found, to exaggerate it when it was in reality insignificant,
and to ignore instances in which it was hardly present at all. Most frequently
the tendency to highlight and overrate the political aspect of labor organizations
springs from an a priori conviction that the labor movement in an underdeveloped,
colonial country must be politically involved and significant [. . .]’ (pp. 380-381).
The tenacity of the position arguing for the identity of labor and the political party is indicated by the analysis by Sufrin (1964: 25). Citing a study in Kimble (1960) among Ghana unionists that emphasized economic functions (negotiations, grievances, etc.) and in which unionists placed little emphasis on 'organizing of political party activities', Sufrin dismissed the empirical data. "That the organizing of political parties was so low in the hierarchy of functions is indeed surprising, since in Ghana the trade union movement has become part and parcel of the governmental machinery." This ignored a major strike by Ghanaian workers that had occurred in 1961, subsequently described by Drake and Lacy (1966). The typical error being made was to mistake the cooptation of the top ranks of the unions for a capture of the entire system of unionism.

Despite the empirical work produced, the political character of African unionism continues to be an important feature of the literature (Beling, 1968: passim). Thus, Lynd (1968) not only relates African unionism to politics but places his entire analysis within a global framework of the Cold War with unions playing out their roles as allies of 'Democracy' or 'Communism'. A scholarly emphasis on the political functions of the unions is found in Bates (1971) where the emphasis on the understanding of the politics of Zambia leads Bates to overlook the single most important and interesting issue in African unionism: Why and how the Zambian Mineworkers Union has been able to resist the domination that has characterized the trade union situation in every other country in Africa (Friedland, 1972).

This equating of unions with party or government has also contributed to giving African unionism a quality of invisibility. Unlike the formal-descriptive studies which often reduce unionism to invisibility by virtue of sheer boredom, the political analysis contributes to invisibility in other ways.

Focusing so heavily on politics, this approach overlooks the empirical realities on day-to-day life. This viewpoint sees events only as political phenomena related to the coalitions involved in national politics. A secondary effect is to consider issues from the top only, examining the actions of prominent national leaders—political, trade union, and otherwise. Since this form of action is very often political and since, as Bates (1971) has shown, the processes of cooptation of the national union leadership by the political leadership is relatively easy, it overlooks the many developments taking place at the grass-roots and certainly ignores the day-to-day realities of unionism as shown by Drake and Lacy (1966).

Several factors have contributed to this emphasis at the top and have produced distinct limitations in our understanding of African unionism. First, it is invariably easier to study events at the top; such events are far more glamorous since they are seen as important whereas, the nitty-gritty functioning of grievance procedures is hardly glamorous. Second, many scholars have had little preparation for the kinds of studies that are necessary on the ground. Oriented to 'important' political events, most scholars see little sense in considering such pedestrian institutions as grievance machinery worthy of study. Many practitioners, particularly the trade unionists, have such capabilities but they too often suffer from structural pressures that preclude concentration on such matters. For representatives of the international trade union bodies, given their primary concerns with the issue of affiliation, the questions of politics play a far more important role than do issues

3. The need for brevity does not permit a full development of the varying positions concerning the relationship of unions to parties. In passing it should be noted that Davies (1966) places heavy analytic emphasis on a close relationship. He does this, however, utilizing the approach that characterized Hodgkiss (1957) which sees, correctly, the political consequences of labor. In this respect, his work is significantly different from that of Wobbis (1961: 35-156) whose primitive Marxian analysis actually leads to a similarity in view to that of the cold warrior, G. Lynd (1968).
such as the workings of grievance machinery and how ordinary members relate to the union in this respect.

Where internal or organizational studies have been made, all too often practitioners have been paralyzed by their non-African experience, seeing the disorganization of day-to-day life inside the unions. Comparatively speaking, of course, African unions are internally chaotic and procedures such as grievance handling are disorganized. The standard of comparison, however, should not be the European or American trade unions but African employers, governments, and other organizational forms in Africa. Once that context is established it becomes clear that, despite difficulties, the African trade unions continue to play significant roles in day-to-day life (Friedland, 1965a). What is less clear, however, is just how they play these roles, what their meanings are to their members, the degree to which the social attachments of members to the unions has meaning in higher-level political questions. For these kinds of questions, neither the practitioners nor the scholars have had any answers. It has become significantly difficult to work on such problems since they constitute politically delicate subjects. As a consequence, we can only guess at the significance of the unions to political life in Africa. This subject remains, then, one of the major areas in which research is necessary.

The major issues that remain are: Are unions totally dominated by government and/or the party? Have they become little more than ciphers in the development of African society? Or do they have a life of their own that creates dilemmas and problems for the African political leadership? My own study convinces me that, at the top, the unions have by and large lost their significance. At the bottom, however, the unions constitute viable and autonomous linkages in the social system for workers who are not otherwise significantly linked to the political system. These linkages will manifest themselves in political events as unionists demand of their organizations what they have come to expect of them: their defense as workers on issues involving wages and conditions of labor. This is an area, however, that requires extensive research on the ground and may therefore be difficult to implement.

3. African Unions and External Involvements

From the beginning of African labor organization, the relationship of indigenous development to external influences has played an important role. It is clear that the indigenous ferment often was given some ‘direction’ as colonial governments sought to maintain control over organizational tendencies in the African working class (Fawzi, 1957: 17; Friedland, 1961; Davies, 1966, ch. 4). In French Africa, metropolitan labor organizations played a role in organizing efforts (November, 1965: 69-74). After 1942, a number of trade unionists were seconded to the British territories as ‘trade union advisors’ (Roberts, 1964: 215). From the very beginning of African labor organization, issues of external involvements emerged as significant in the study of African unionism.

External interest in African labor development was exacerbated by trends outside the African continent. On the one hand, the onset of the Cold War created three distinct and competing international labor bodies, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (I:CTU) representing the West, and the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) representing the Eastern bloc. The warring between these bodies soon led to competition for affiliates among the burgeoning national union organizations in Africa. On the other hand, the internationals were concerned not only with their own warfare but in building trade union organizations in a part of the world in which they had not hitherto existed. This gave rise to the development of programs of technical and advisory assistance and brought to Africa a host of unionists from Europe and the United States. These
union advisors, in contrast to the government ‘trade union advisors’ could function openly and directly, supporting the unions. They often worked on general organizing problems in a country or area for a considerable period of time (cf., for example, Allen, 1962 and 1969: 301), participated in special emergency projects (Millard, 1969), or undertook generalized missions for short periods of time (Bavin, 1966).

After the wave of independence (1960-1963), the issue of international affiliation became increasingly important. Prior to independence, most African unions were affiliated to the western-oriented international labor bodies, ICFTU and IIFCTU. With independence, the tendency to look eastward burgeoned. On their part, eastern (Communist) governments wished to extend their influence in Africa, a continent from which they had hitherto been barred by the colonial powers. The considerable enthusiasm of many African governments in insisting on their independence from their former colonial masters by opening relations with the Communist-bloc countries also provided encouragement for the unions to seek relations with eastern trade union groups.

The situation was complicated further with the active pan-African nationalism of Ghana which became increasingly oriented to separate continental organization. In the early 1960’s, the Ghana-based All-African Trade Union Federation (AATUF) emerged to be followed by attempts to create ICFTU and IFCTU-based African organizations (Nelkin, 1965, 1967, 1968). From that time on, a battle raged—largely in the press, the international media, and among many writers on African labor—about the issue of international affiliation and organization. While the battle died somewhat after the 1967 coup that overthrew Nkrumah and led to the movement of AATUF from Accra to Dar es Salaam, the issue of international affiliation has continued to pre-empt the attention of students of African unionism (cf., for example, Egboh, 1970).

In my estimation, the issue of international affiliation has been vastly overblown, having little real significance for the development of African unionism. Smock, for example, indicates that the issue of international affiliation existed but had little importance in the Nigerian Coal Miners Union (1969: 62). This also conforms to the relative ignoring of the subject by Scott (1966), Friedland (1969), and Bates (1971) for Uganda, Tanganyika, and Zambia respectively.

That the subject captured the interests of many practitioners and scholars is indicated by the extensive literature that developed after the mid-1960’s. This can be accounted for by the considerable glamour which the issue held in the attempts to develop pan-African organization. A second reason for this interest stemmed from the relative ease with which data (sick!) could be collected. The various international labor bodies and AATUF were profligate producers of propaganda. Rather than working in the difficult day-to-day dross of industrial relations and grievance handling, it was far more interesting to follow the peregrinations of the Tettegahs, Mboyas, and others.

There is no intent here to argue that the affiliation issue is without any significance. The fact that competing labor centers could be organized in Uganda, Kenya, and elsewhere by (literally!) fly-by-night unionists whose main ability was to glom on to air travel tickets to Brussels, London, Moscow or Peking, did not give great significance to the development of trade union organizations on the national level. But it often created disturbances and occasionally, as in Kenya, the international splits fed upon real local splits between union leaders with significant local bases.

The more important issues of external involvements have focused on the question of technical advice and financial or other material support from sources outside the African unions. This remains an issue because the unions, whatever their strength and significance, confront powerful agencies with which they must deal. Whether those agencies are employers or the political parties or the military regimes that dominate the independent African governments, these are powerful forces and the unions have required and can still use various forms of assistance.
While early assistance tended to be material and technical, it now would appear increasingly that coherent ideological assistance from the outside would be helpful (Bottomley, 1971). A comparison of the development of African unionism with western forms reveals the relative absence of an intellectual cohort to provide general ideological and organizational support. This has been due, in great part, to the weakness of an independent African intellectual class such as became important contributors to the working class movements of European and Asian countries.

It is, however, highly unlikely that such ideological support will be forthcoming in the immediate future. The need for external support will, in all likelihood, continue to produce perturbations in the form of affiliation questions. My own guess is that we should not mistake the disturbances for the real causes which remain rooted in the needs for various forms of help. Since Africa does not have an intellectual class of independent means, the search for help by the unionists will continue externally and will, in all probability, be capitalized on by East and West in the search for friends and allies.

4. Social Change and Trade Union Studies

The final area of trade union studies in Africa has been a product of the interests of scholars in social change processes who have selected labor organization and unionism as their focus of study. While this group of studies began at a relatively early period, it did not take significant form as an analytic focus until well into the 1960’s.

The central intellectual problem arose from attempts by several scholars to understand early attempts at labor organization within a Malinowskian theoretical framework. Malinowski, in his book *The Dynamics of Social Change* (1945), had conceptualized the social change process in a way that argued for an analytic division of change into three distinct sectors, the African, the western, and the transitional. Moreover, Malinowski’s intellectual framework of ‘practical’ anthropology, as applied to Africa, called on anthropologists to ‘facilitate’ the process of change. The theoretical response to Malinowski came from Max Gluckman and the ‘Gluckman School’, a group of anthropologists centered on the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in what was then Northern Rhodesia. Gluckman’s criticism was that Malinowski failed to perceive the irrelevance of traditional institutions in the modern context and placed anthropology at the service of existing power centers to facilitate social control processes (Gluckman, 1949).

In the trade union area, the Malinowskian approach was applied by two anthropologists, Charles (1952) and Beaglehole (1954) who demonstrated an incapacity for grasping African realities and an anthropological hankering after the past. Their position took the form of support for the creation of ‘consultative’ forms of labor relations rather than of independent trade unionism. This was because Africans were unaccustomed to divided systems of authority and saw society as a unified whole with authority descending from the chiefs. In proposing this position, Charles and Beaglehole accepted the control-orientation of the colonial governments which saw unionism as dangerous and joint consultation as a useful device to make a gradual transition to some ultimate form of labor organization. (For a similar argument in the specific context of the Belgian Congo, see Brausch, 1956: 455-456.)

The Gluckman’s position was set out empirically by Epstein (1958) whose study of African labor organization demonstrated the irrelevance of traditional systems of authority in the modern context. Epstein’s work has not, however, laid the ghost

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4. This work was given additional empirical substance by Mitchell (1956) in *The Kalela Dance* as well as other members of the Gluckman School. Gluckman wrote a summary statement of his position in 1960.
of Malinowskian theory. The issue continues to involve the interests of scholars concerned with the development of modern institutions. Essentially it takes the form of the question: What is the relevance of traditionalism/tribalism in modern institutions? In this form, the issue continues to dominate concerns ranging from analyses of political parties, political competition among parties, guerilla movements, to the character of the military (cf. M’gage, 1972, as an example).

In African trade union studies, the issue has taken one special form—the importance of ethnicity or tribal affiliation in understanding the internal dynamics of African unionism. Scott (1966 and 1967), for example, has argued the case that ethnic identity continues to be a major explanatory variable in understanding the internal politics of Ugandan unionism. Friedland (1969, Appendix VI), in contrast, has argued in the Tanganyikan example, that tribal affiliation has been of relative insignificance in understanding the formation of blocs and groups. Smock’s (1969) study of the Nigerian Coal Miners Union also argued against the traditionalist position. Expecting, as an anthropologist, to find the union, composed heavily of Ibo workers, to reflect the decentralized decision-making processes of Ibo society, Smock found the contrary—a highly centralized organization with effective decision-making concentrated at the top.

The theoretical conflict between Malinowski’s and Gluckman’s positions thus remains unresolved. This conflict represents one key theoretical issue requiring empirical research before the issue can be resolved more satisfactorily.

A second issue has emerged as a result of interest in general social change processes: the validity and utility of transfer models from contexts other than Africa. This issue was originally broached by Apter (1955) and was used as a central analytic focus by Friedland (1969: 4-7). Nor was the issue solely of concern to scholars since the question of institutional borrowing (or transfer) was consciously developed by the Ghanaians. Rejecting the British models they inherited during the colonial period, the Ghanaians borrowed their basic structural design from the Israelis while taking over intact the organizational diagram of the German Trade Union Federation (DGB) (Tettegah, 1958). The central theoretical issues involved have to do with the validity of transferred models and the changes they will undergo as a result of transfer and adaptation to the African context.

The study of institutional transfer constitutes an important theoretical question going well beyond the study of Africa and trade unionism. With the wholesale ‘borrowing’ of institutional models as, for example, in the transfer of Soviet models to Cuba and China (where they were subsequently rejected—at least in part) and the continual search for models in a wide range of institutional sectors, the study of transfer requires a systematic research approach. The work on African trade unionism provides a base for studies in other institutional sectors.

5. Conclusion

Despite the paucity of materials on African unionism, a significant intellectual base has been created during the past two decades. This base has contributed to a better understanding of development in Africa and to general processes of social change. The major weakness in the present situation consists of the ‘dangerous’ aspects of conducting research on unionism in Africa. Not only have African governments stopped producing data on African labor and its various forms of organization but they have discouraged others from producing data on the development of African labor. Despite the heroic quality of a call such as that of Bottomley (1971) for intellectuals to provide the intellectual base of autonomous African unionism, there are few prospects for such a development. Africa does not, on its part, have an autonomous intellectual class that can provide such ideological input or relatively detached studies of the development of African unionism.
On their part, the vulnerability of non-African scholars precludes their effective production of a significant literature dealing with the subject. It would appear, therefore, that studies of African unionism will be produced fortuitously rather than systematically. Scholars interested in other subjects may collect materials and publish on African unionism as a by-product of those other interests. Practitioners will probably also continue to produce occasional materials. But, if serious work is to be done on African unionism, there will have to be a shift in orientations within Africa itself.

Ultimately, of course, it is to be hoped that African unions may themselves begin to generate some material of quality. This is a somewhat long-range point of view but is not totally hopeless since the continual development of African trade union leadership is taking place. As long as this leadership continues to be drained out of the unions into politics and administration, the prospects for its contributing to the development of knowledge on African unionism is small. Should this channel of mobility become constricted or dry up, the prospects for a contribution to an understanding of African unionism should improve.

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