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**Trade Union
development in
sub-Saharan Africa**

S. Shane

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Ekserp

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EKSERP

Hierdie verslag suggereer dat Suid Afrika 'n Derde-Wêreld land is wat die beste binne die konteks van sub-Sahara beoordeel kan word. Vakbonde word as 'n belangrike element van die nywerheidsverhoudinge stelsel bespreek, en die ervarings van 'n aantal lande word aangedui. 'n Oorsig van vakbonde in Suid Afrika word gegee, sowel as besprekings oor die effektiwiteit van vakbonde. 'n Benadering word voorgestel waarvolgens vakbonde verstaan kan word as organisasies wat hulle omgewing reflekteer.

ABSTRACT

This report suggests that South Africa is a Third-World country which is best appreciated within the context of sub-Saharan Africa and its attempts to industrialize and develop. Trade unions are discussed as an important element of the industrial relations system, and the experiences in a number of countries are indicated. An overview of trade unions in South Africa is given, as well as a discussion on the effectiveness of trade unions. An approach to understanding trade unions as organizations which reflect their environment is proposed.

INTRODUCTION

This report is the first on a project which is concerned with the management of trade unions in South Africa. It is felt that the subject can best be appreciated within its context, which is sub-Saharan Africa and the region's attempts to industrialise and develop. Until recently, the very clear differences which exist between this country and others in Africa, especially its level of development and sophistication, have been used to place it within the context of the Western industrial nations. This was reinforced by having aligned its development and pattern of industrialization to the needs of its trading partners in the West. Developments in recent years have, however, resulted in the recognition that this country is a part of Africa and the Third World. Wilson (1986, p. 37), supports the regional contextual view of South Africa in suggesting that,

The whole of the southern [African] sub-continent should be regarded as a single economy, centred on the mineral wealth and industrial complex in the PWV area.

1.1 South Africa: First World or Third World?

Closely allied to the regional context is the debate concerning South Africa's First and Third World characteristics. This dichotomy could in some cases be replaced by an assessment of the developed and developing aspects of the economy. Perhaps the factor which has most influenced the viewpoint that South Africa is a Third World nation is characterized by the "dramatic escalation in the extent of poverty amongst South Africa's black population, both in the urban as well as the bantustan areas" (Keenan and Sarakinsky, 1987, p. 108). Other factors which have contributed to the evaluation of South Africa as a Third World country include increases in the rate of population growth, poverty related disease (Disler and Oliver, 1984, p. 67), and

differentials between the highest and the lowest paid employees.

The differences between this country and the rest of Africa can be demonstrated by statistics which show that in 1960, for example, 67 percent of South Africa's labour force is in wage employment compared to about 20 percent in Africa as a whole, and "only a small proportion of the wage-earners in any of these [Black African] countries, except South Africa, were employed in manufacturing" (Sandbrook and Cohen, 1975, p. 130). The situation in 1985 was that South Africa had an economically active population of 8,7 million, 1,3 million (15%) of whom were employed in manufacturing activities. In the same year there were 170 000 people employed in manufacturing activities in Zimbabwe (International Labour Organization, 1988, Table 3.; South Africa, Republic of, 1988, Table 2.1).

An oft-stated observation that South Africa's is a dual economy with both First World and Third World elements is sometimes used to explain away wide disparities in the distribution of wealth, earnings, and resources such as land. The dual economy approach tends to obscure rather than explain South Africa's situation, since wide disparities in the distribution and allocation of resources characterizes Third World nations. Thus the existence of these differentials should be used to reinforce acceptance of South Africa as a Third World nation.

1.2 Origin of industrial relations systems

The development of industrial relations in sub-Saharan Africa has been strongly influenced by the former colonial powers. Countries which have been classified as Anglophone or Francophone tend to have systems of industrial relations which parallel those of France or Britain. The French instituted an Overseas Territories Labour Code which resulted in unions in Africa being uniformly modelled on those in France. Although the British were less consistent in the regulation of industrial

relations, the influence of industrial relations in Britain and of British unionists who worked in Africa, resulted in systems which showed core similarities (Damachi, Seibel, and Trachtman, 1979, p. 4). An attempt was made in Angola to establish a centralized trade union organization similar to that which grown out of the constitutional changes in Portugal. Two of the three trade union federations rejected the plan for the reason that it was believed that it had been developed on instructions from the then Portuguese government (Ananaba, 1979, p. 64). In the period since independence the industrial relations systems in countries in Africa have grown more diverse as each country adapted in the light of its own experience.

1.3 Trade unions or industrial relations?

An essential feature of all the industrial relations systems in Africa is that trade unions play a significant role. There are variations in different countries in the nature of the role of trade unions at the level of society and the way unions are involved in relations between employers and employees in the workplace. There are also indications that the trade union as an organization tends to reflect the circumstances of its environment.

The focus of this analysis is on the trade union as an important element of an industrial relations system and not as a synonym for it. It is hoped that in furthering the understanding of trade unions in their total context this analysis will facilitate the effective use of all resources in managing the relationship between employers and employees.

2 WHO IS THE WORKER IN AFRICA?

In order to fully appreciate trade union and industrial relations activity, it is worthwhile to consider just who is the worker in Africa.

2.1 Employment or unemployment?

The concept of unemployment is a good point at which to start. In the more developed world there is the ethos that all members of society make their contribution to it by providing labour to enable the society to reach its objectives, whilst society has the obligation to provide work for the bulk of the population. Any deviation from near universal employment is considered to be abnormal, whether in capitalist or communist societies. An unemployment rate of 15 percent in the industrialised nations is considered high, whereas in Africa a rate of employment of 85 percent is an unattainable dream. The level of development is such that access to the wage economy is severely restricted for most of the population. Ananaba (1979, p. 212), is not alone in pointing out that 'Africa is a potentially rich but actually a poor continent because her economy has not been developed'.

2.2 Poverty and employment

For many people not having access to the wage economy does not represent a problem, as their position as peasants in agrarian communities is a viable alternative to wage employment. This does not suggest that all peasants who are not employed in the wage economy are satisfied; for a variety of reasons there are many people for whom poverty is the only alternative to wage employment. A common response to poverty is to attempt to become urbanized in order to gain access to the wage economy. For others, involvement in the wage economy is a means of maintaining the viability of life in the 'country'. Thus, when observers report that workers view their jobs instrumentally, that is, as being without intrinsic value and performed only in order to satisfy their perceived needs, it need not necessarily be seen as pejorative. Migrant workers may or may not have an instrumental view of their work. There is, nevertheless, a significant section of the various populations in Africa which is urbanized and which is married to wage employment and which

can be compared to the workers of the more developed nations. However, Gordon (1987, p. 11), warns against equating the divide between urban and rural workers in South Africa with the division which exists between developed and developing nations. Despite this a factor to consider is that urban and rural dwellers have significantly different needs.

2.3 The unemployed and trade unions

With their limited resources, many who are trying to join the wage economy have no alternative but to join the squatter communities which are to be found around many of the formal urban areas. Those who are unable to obtain jobs can accurately be called 'unemployed' and, due to their numbers, are an important factor for consideration by the trade union movement. Reaction to the position of the unemployed varies; some South African trade unions provide psychological support for the unemployed, whilst the National Unemployed Workers Co-ordinating Committee is affiliated to the Congress of South African Trade Unions. One of the reasons for trade union interest in the unemployed are that they represent a threat to the bargaining position of trade unions *vis a vis* employers. Another, which needs to be reconciled with the bargaining threat, is that the plight of the unemployed is an affront to the social conscience which is inherent to trade unionism. The role of the so-called 'pool of unemployed' is a factor which cannot be ignored in any negotiations about wages and benefits.

2.4 Working class work in Africa

Integral to the different notion of a working class in Africa is that the pattern of employment in Africa is very different to that in the developed world. For example, in most countries in Africa the government is the major source of paid employment. Because there is little engrandisement of 'working-class work' there is a wide attraction for white-collar jobs, to a greater

extent than was the case at equivalent points in development of the more advanced economies. In the industrialized world there has been a transition from blue-collar work to white-collar work in recent years largely due to the increased use of technology. This suggests that there is no fixed pattern for economic development, or at least, that it is possible for societies to 'leap-frog' certain stages.

2.5 The working class and class conflict

With the difficulty which has been experienced in determining just who the worker in Africa is, it is not surprising that there are problems in bringing the concept of the working class successfully into the analysis of industrial relations. However, the historical and political connotations of the term 'working class' are so strong that its use by many intellectuals in Africa, particularly non-black intellectuals, is to be expected. One way in which the term could usefully be applied in Africa is if its meaning were to be adapted in terms of the African experience (Damachi et al., 1978; Sandbrook & Cohen, 1975). An adaptation could be to use 'working class' to refer to the divide between those in the wage economy and those who have never been part of it. So prized is membership of the working group that Arrighi (1970), has remarked on the emergence of a 'union aristocracy' made up of workers who are employed and members of a trade union. Seen in these terms one is left with the deduction that much of what passes in Africa for class differentiation is, in fact, recognition of unacceptable inequities.

The increase in the relative wealth of those with political positions is a cause of hostility between groups. Sandbrook and Cohen (1975, p.199), refer to the 'political class' in an attempt to replicate in Africa conventional class relationships.

These authors imply that workers are assigned a group classification as a result of pressures from two directions. From above workers "are treated as a group whose self-interest must somehow be restrained" (p. 203) and from below are opposed by those not in the wage economy who hold the view that workers, because there are so few of them, are likely to become 'labour aristocrats' (p. 204). If it is true that 'workers' in Africa develop a group classification as a result of these pressures, it certainly indicates that there are significant differences between the working classes of the more developed world and the working 'group' of Africa.

3 TRADE UNIONS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

One of the problems faced by most countries in Africa has been the relatively low level of industrial development, as well as difficulty of access to the wage economy for much of the population. The lack of industrial development has not prevented the emergence of means, such as trade unions, for managing the relationship between employees and employers. In general, trade unions were recognized in Africa more readily than they had been recognized in their early stages in Europe (Damachi et al., 1979, p. 6).

3.1 The role of trade unions

Trade unions exist, are recognized, and have been accepted by governments as representatives of workers in most African countries. Nearly all countries in Africa have complied with the standards of the International Labour Organization with regard to the rights of workers to join trade unions and for trade unions to exist (Onyelemukwe, 1973, p. 154). Trade unions were frequently active in the movements towards independence in many former colonies, and as a result attained positions of influence in their countries. Following independence there was a general move by the new governments to limit the influence which trade

unions could exert (Damachi et al., 1978, p. 11, Onyelemukwe, 1973, p. 154, Sandbrook & Cohen, 1975, p. 198).

3.1.1 Trade unions, bureaucratization, and strikes

Without their institutionalization through unions, strikes are spontaneous and tend to be violent and disruptive, if not riotous (Damachi et al., 1979, p. 6).

This statement suggests the rationale for the recognition of trade unions in many countries in Africa without the sustained opposition which preceded their recognition in Europe, and that, during the process of industrialization, some lessons were learned from more developed countries which facilitated progress.

The ideology of the British Labour Government in the late nineteen-forties coincided with the process which was to see the end of colonialism. This ideology was expressed in the actions of the labour officers who were sent out to the colonies to facilitate orderly industrial relations, who generally promoted trade unionism. It was reinforced by the support offered by unions in the West to their newly emergent counterparts in Africa (see Smock, 1969. p. 15). On the negative side, bureaucratization of industrial relations resulted from the cooperation between government and union in the post-colonial era. Thus there are frequently strike procedures which involve long delays before official strikes can be called. This tends to result in workplace relations which appear to be free of conflict on and overt level. In reality these are circumstances in which conflict is expressed in other ways, such as non-cooperation or restrictions on output (Edwards & Scullion, 1982, p. 232). Thus the process of bureaucratization has tended to negate some of the benefits which can flow from presence and recognition of the trade unions in the workplace.

3.1.2 Restricting the trade union role

The manner of restricting trade unions took the form, in some countries, of being denied a political role. For example, Liberia and Kenya have displayed a more *laissez faire* economic policy toward business than many other African states, which has resulted in difficulties for trade unions in gaining acceptance by foreign controlled businesses. Where military governments have been in power, trade unions have been inhibited in their activities. On the other hand there are countries such as Tanzania which have subverted trade unions by bringing them into the party structure and making them part of the establishment. A characteristic of trade unions in Africa is that they do not enjoy the freedom and scope for independent action seen in Western Europe and America. Thus, for Onyelemukwe (1973), it appears that unions have the choice of joining the establishment, being neglected or attempting to raise sufficient support in order to provoke a crisis. Damachi et al. (1978, p.14) point out that governments in Africa have lost an important channel of communication with workers when they have subverted the union movement for their own political purposes. In general, the policy appears to have been either to co-opt or subvert trade unions with the express purpose of satisfying the 'greater good'. It is a negative evaluation of trade unionism in Africa when it is said that the result was that "responsible participation became the new theme for African Trade Unions" (Martens, 1979, p. 40).

3.2 The trade union as an alien model

Many writers on trade unionism in Africa convey the feeling that they are disappointed with the contribution which trade unions have made to the position of workers (Kilby, 1969; Onyelemukwe, 1973).

We see that the Western method of industrial

relations has largely failed to solve the human problems of industry in Africa. Unions are not likely, as presently constituted, to be of much help in this. While unions join ranks with political parties to drive away colonialism, there is no reason why African governments have to feel compelled to solve industrial relations problems through trade unions (Onyelemukwe, 1973, p. 158).

Some writers on Africa seem to feel that the source of the problem is that the trade union is an alien institution which has not been sufficiently adapted to the specific needs of Africa. Hunter (1962, p. 216), states that "trade unionism came into Africa from above" and, "in most African societies, there is no precedent for the type of organization embodied in modern trade unions" (p. 222). Warmington suggests that the membership is "ignorant of the nature ... of voluntary societies of this sort" (in Onyelemukwe, 1973, p. 156). In Vuta Kamba, Friedland (1969), attempts to analyse the process by which the trade union as a social institution was transferred from one socio-cultural context (Britain) into a developing context, that of Tanzania both before and after independence (p. 4). The problem with the approach to trade union development in Africa adopted by Friedland is that it is assumed that none of the precursors of trade union development in the 'donor' society exist in the 'receiving' society. In Africa, the 'donated' trade union was not received into a vacuum; its support came from populations who were intimately involved with many of the values associated with trade unions. This is not to deny that much of the formal organization of trade unions has been stimulated by external parties, ranging from colonial governments to the local intelligentsia. Hunter (1962, p. 217) notes that payment of union dues was often as a result of a desire for social conformity, which is still one of the forces behind union membership almost everywhere. There are differences in the way union membership will be perceived by workers in different societies. For example, union membership in Africa has been strongly associated with the struggle for independence and as a

symbol of sovereignty.

3.2.1 Is the trade union alien to Africa?

Much analysis of the development of trade unions in Africa has been based on a premise which, it is suggested, is neither correct nor helpful in appreciating the development of trade unions in Africa. The faulty premise is that there was a transfer from the more developed world of an alien institution, namely the trade union, or of a concept, namely trade unionism. The reaction which a burgeoning desire for trade unions provoked in nineteenth-century Europe and America was more due to employers' perceptions of the threat represented by organized workers than to the organization itself.

It was also not uncommon for workmen to combine as early as the late seventeenth century for the purposes of mutual insurance against sickness, old age, or death (Pelling, 1971, p. 20).

In other words, the trade unions which were opposed in the nineteenth century were not new organizations at all, but products of earlier social developments. Similarly in Africa, there is a tradition of activities which underlie effective trade unionism, such as consensus (Onyelemukwe, 1973, p.90), mutual aid and cooperation within communities. A recent report (Franks and Shane, 1988, p. 32), on the development of cooperatives in Africa stated the following:-

Spiegel (1980) discusses a number of arrangements relating to agriculture. Here the co-operative relationship might entail villagers ploughing for one another or using another's land for grazing. In return for this service the land owner or plougher may be allowed to use the other's animals for draught purposes, or some other form of exchange might be agreed upon. In this way households may accumulate resources enabling them to, "increase their value as members in co-operative companies" (Spiegel, 1980, p. 132). In other instances the obligation of a

co-operative member may be met by paying for the services of a person to perform necessary work. Similar arrangements are found in West Africa. Skinner (1964, p. 81) discusses the means by which the extended family copes with a workload which exceeds its own capacity. The co-operative formed may vary in size and in motivation. In some cases its members cooperate in order to subsist and in others to accumulate goods or money. Ali Taha (1978, p. 126) discusses the traditional cooperation used to meet the needs of the village for food and housing.

It would appear then, that the process of people coming together for mutual support and benefit is common to societies in different parts of the world and at different times. However, it could be argued that both the examples mentioned above occurred at similar levels of development. This suggests a deterministic view of trade unions, in that, as industrialism developed in Africa, so trade unions would evolve to cope with changed circumstances and life-style. They would evolve out of the indigenous organizations and activities which had themselves developed in response to the perceived needs of agrarian communities. Indeed, there are indications that this occurred, one example being that there were trade union-like organizations in Ghana in 1911 (Kraus, 1979, p. 111). The idea that trade unions are organizations which reflect their environment is developed more fully in section 5 of this report. Trade unions are, in the broadest sense, 'reflective' of industrialism. Hence there is a stronger argument that it is the form which modern industrialism has taken which is alien to this continent, and so it is at this concept that any alien based analysis should be directed. The trade union itself is no more alien to Africa than it can be considered alien to Europe.

3.3 Influences on trade union development

Damachi, Seibel and Trachtman (1979, p. 1) consider the following to be some of the major factors influencing the

development of trade unions in Africa:-

- * Opposition to colonialism
- * Differences in colonial policy
- * International aid
- * Legal recognition of trade unions
- * Class conflict
- * Labour and income conditions

These factors suggest some of the differences in the development in industrial relations in Africa compared to Europe. A common factor, however, which has led to the development of trade unions in Africa as well as in Europe are sudden rises in prices and a fall in real earnings (Damachi et al., 1979, p. 1). These authors point to the conservatism of workers, in that workers did not, generally, fight for structural changes in their personal situation, but to restore their pre-inflation position.

3.3.1 Colonial heritage

It is apparent that industrial relations in sub-Saharan Africa cannot be disentangled from the colonial heritage of its countries. The list of colonial powers includes Britain, France, Portugal, Spain and Germany. Since the history of South Africa is tied up with the colonial activities of Britain, it has been logical to assume that the experience in the former British colonies are likely to prove most useful in understanding the development of trade unions in this country.

According to Damachi et al. (1978 p. 3), the two important factors that differentiate the development of industrial relations in Africa were that:-

- * employers were foreigners of a different race.
- * the largest employer was the government.

Thus, even though the actions of workers and unions were aimed at rectifying problems of pay and conditions of work, their actions were perceived by the ruling powers as forms of rebellion. These perceptions were reinforced by laws and regulations (which virtually outlawed strikes), and by the absence of the effective means to institutionalize the handling of conflicts of interest. The violent repression which the authorities frequently used resulted in only short term benefits.

Africans learned the lesson that a strike was not only an economic but also a political tool. Henceforth African political leaders and some trade unionists started to see the strike as a political weapon, or at least could be used with political overtones. ...This was more a result of labelling on the part of the Government, i.e. labelling strikes as rebellious, than of conscious drive for political freedom (Damachi et al., 1978, p.4).

3.3.2 British ruled Africa

Unlike France, Britain did not introduce a uniform system for industrial relations in its various colonies. The guiding factor in decisions relating to industrial relations was the need for productivity. A full-time labour advisor was appointed only in 1939 as a response to the labour unrest which had occurred in a number of colonies, despite the official view that trade unions were seen as a way to avoid labour unrest and as a way of ensuring that workers had identifiable leaders. In many cases the local powers did little to encourage trade union development, particularly where large numbers of settlers were to be found. Damachi et al. (1978, p. 7), consider that government policy was to, "ease the transition to industrialisation, unlike the *laissez-faire* practises which characterised early industrialisation in Europe". This approach meant that the authorities had considerable powers of intervention in matters relating to industrial relations. These

powers were passed on to the post-colonial governments, who were able to become intimately involved in worker and trade union matters. This suggests that the departure of the colonial power is best seen as a phase in those countries' development rather than as a hiatus between totally different systems.

3.4 Inside African trade unions

Smock (1963) attempted to study the impact on a modern trade union of a traditional social and political system. This system almost totally lacked stratification, using consensus to reach decisions. This author hypothesised that a trade union which developed out of such a society would function on the basis of diffuse power to a greater extent than Western trade unions. The results of the study, however, did not support the hypothesis. It was found that power was centralized in an 'exaggerated form'. The reasons for this centralized power, given below, are obviously not "relevant to all trade unions in Africa" (Smock, 1969, p. 7). Even though they are a somewhat simplistic series of factors, they are useful referents against which experience can be judged:

- 1 Vast differences between the leadership and the rank and file in terms of education, sophistication, and information control result in the fact that many rank-and-file members look to the leadership for direction and at times dictation, so that the leadership is able to maintain tight control of Union activities.
- 2 Difficulties involved in intra-organizational communication encourage and reinforce centralized control.
- 3 Because of their unfamiliarity with Western representative democracy, leaders often do not operate their organizations democratically.
- 4 The use of political models by trade unions and other organizations in Africa encourages internal struggles for power and fosters attempts by the faction in power to rule like a victorious party.
- 5 Since the retention of office is highly valued by those in power, leaders attempt to control the organization in

such a way that they can stay in office.

- 6 Divisions within an organization cause the various subsections of membership to try to control it so that their own needs and desires are given priority. (Smock, 1969, pp. 7-13.)

The tone of these factors is clearly critical of the workings of the union in which the research took place, particularly the adherence to democratic principles. One of the complaints of managements in South Africa, in contrast to factor 3 above, is that leaders of unions for blacks with whom they negotiate insist on returning to the members in order to gain a mandate before agreement can be reached. It appears that trade unions in South Africa have tried to avoid factors which could leave them open to criticism.

3.4.1 Negative aspects of trade unions in Africa

Some of the other negative aspects to be found in the literature about trade unions in Africa are the following:

Unions themselves have been faced with internal problems. Lack of sufficient funds, corruption, struggle for leadership, poor organization and internal politics have weakened many of them; and in some countries efforts to get a unified national movement, even with the prompting of government, have become impossible (Onyelemukwe, 1973, p. 155).

Like other Western-modelled institutions in Africa, the unions have an appearance of democracy, but in fact their actual workings have little resemblance to the model (Onyelemukwe, 1973, p. 156).

Not all that has been written about trade unions is critical of their value to workers:

As regards what trade unionism has done for the Ghanaian worker, all the interviewees agreed that the unions had achieved many socio-economic benefits for their members. They ... were now sure of regular wages and

fringe benefits gained mostly through collective agreements (Damachi, 1975, p. 191).

3.4.2 Avoiding simplistic notions

The negative conclusions reached by Onyelemukwe (1973) and Smock (1969) are partly due to a failure to appreciate or to take into account the way in which the unions themselves were the product of industrialization in their countries. Damachi *et al.* (1979, p. 8), reminds us that the autocracy of colonial rule provided an example which influenced trade unions and the nascent political systems which emerged in the post-colonial era. An additional characteristic has been lack of material and human resources which are necessary for a trade union to function effectively (Martens, 1973, p. 48). The process of co-optation or subversion has also provoked disunity in the ranks of many trade union movements (Kendrick, 1973, p. 73). The rationale given by the President of Cameroon for undermining trade unions will be recognized by many in this country.

In a country like Cameroon, where class conflict does not exist and where the state seeks to ensure social justice, the role of the union should be constructive, rather than contentious (Kendrick, 1973, p. 86).

Ananaba (1979, p. 201), in suggesting that the quality of trade union leadership is one of the factors influencing trade union activities, is not stating the obvious, but warning against a simplistic approach to explaining trade union activity. Similarly, Onyelemukwe (1973, p. 17), indicates that organization structure is not an end in itself, but a means to achieve an objective.

3.4.3 The effect of colonial departure

When discussing trade unions in Africa, it is necessary to consider the period when the colonial power withdrew from that

country as a discrete phase in the country's development. The political impetus which had developed in the pre-independence period was generally taken up in some way in this marginal phase. Political functions, where they existed, and personnel were frequently transferred from the union to the new political parties. It is hardly surprising that people who had gained experience in trade unions should have been called on to fill political, managerial and administrative positions (Damachi et al, 1978,p. 7).

Much of the growth in employment in the post-colonial era has been in the civil service, which was a trend further increased in countries which adopted socialist policies. It can be seen that the incorporation of trade unions into the new 'establishments' resulted in governments, as employers, being denied the benefits of the trade union as an actor in collective bargaining. For example, there is a greater temptation for "the Chief of State to step in to resolve the problem" (Martens, 1979, p. 49). This is particularly a problem when the trade union is integrated with the party. The government will perceive a threat from workers with wage claims, particularly so when the claims are linked to popular unrest (Martens, 1979, p. 63).

3.4.4 The political nature of trade unions

The political nature of trade unions in which it is impossible to separate the leader from the led is frequently not appreciated by writers on African industrial relations. For example, Onyelemukwe (1973, p. 165), discusses the emergence of cabals in African trade unions which manipulate the membership, dismissing this as the result of individuals being attracted to the union for personal gain, and being able to do so due to the "lack of personal and psychological involvement by the African worker in the affairs of the union" (p. 156). Sandbrook & Cohen (1975, p. 199), suggest that there are three modes of union political activity:-

- * Self-seeking union leaders or a membership which expects the union to satisfy their needs and not act as an agent for societal change.
- * The union functioning as one of the segments in society which pressure governments to act to its (the union's) benefit.
- * Unions acting as a movement to transform the social order.

The experience in South Africa does not fit into any one of these (unidimensional) modes. Ncube (1985, p. 92), discusses the manner in which black trade unions were excluded from the Trade Union Council of South Africa and as a result formed the overtly political South African Congress of Trade Unions. This federation wanted to increase the involvement of black workers in trade union activities as well as to establish additional trade unions for black workers. Due to a lack of experienced people and funds to organize at the grass roots level, its strategy was to create unions out of the strike process. The policy had collapsed by 1963 because of the enforced absence of its remaining leaders. Warmington (in Onyelemukwe, 1973, p. 157), integrates the multidimensional mode of trade union behaviour which involves both political and materialistic activities. This author suggests that there is a rationale for a trade union to act on behalf of workers (by implication at the same time satisfying its own political agenda), hence it does not matter whether or not the union was motivated by workers or by someone representing their interests.

3.4.5 Democracy in trade unions

In some countries trade unions were recognized by the authoritarian colonial governments as part of a strategy to ensure a productive colony. After independence many trade unions

continued to concentrate on basic issues affecting their members. Concurrently, the external industrial relations system became more bureaucratized due to attempts by governments to control activities surrounding the production process.

Perhaps an even greater impact of this strategy was the subversion of the democratic tradition which existed in some societies, and which would otherwise have been the *modus operandi* of a trade union movement. This "has institutionalized the iron law of oligarchy in union democracy" (Damachi et al, 1978, p. 8). To an extent the aid which has been provided by international bodies with the aim of developing the trade union movement has contributed to enhancing the position a few high profile leaders (Damachi et al., 1978, p. 9). Davis (1966), has called on these bodies to be cognizant of the needs of the recipients rather than those of the donors, a request that has probably been largely ignored in the intervening twenty years.

3.5 Reasons for joining trade unions

The support for trade unions came from populations who were intimately involved with many of the values associated with trade unions. The desire for social conformity as a reason for union membership is given (Hunter, 1962, p. 217), although such a reason is unlikely to be a good basis for effective unionism. Onyelemukwe (1973, p. 155), expresses this as "negative rather than a positive participative action". Being denied the freedom to join a trade union is seen as a serious affront because of its association with independence and as a symbol of sovereignty. These views must be reconciled with research which indicates lack of awareness on the part of rank and file membership about the union to which it belongs (Onyelemukwe, 1973, p. 157). Research by Onyelemukwe indicates that membership of the union was seen as a protection against unfair actions of their employers. Members displayed an instrumental relationship with their union, although those employed under more enlightened

conditions were less likely to show strong union commitment. In general, it appears that people joined trade unions for instrumental reasons rather than the social interaction or recognition membership could provide.

3.6 The role of trade union federations

A characteristic of trade union development in South Africa and the rest of Africa is the role of federations. There has been, particularly among trade unions for blacks, a tendency to reverse the more usual development in which individual unions federate to create a supra-organization. For example, in Kenya the Federation of Labour promoted and provided the leadership for individual trade unions as well as negotiated on their behalf. In view of the frequency of this approach to trade union development, it must be assumed that it has a positive value for the member trade unions. It is suggested that the following are some of the reasons for the prominent role of federations in the development of trade unions in Africa:

- * The skills used in establishing a trade union are relatively independent of the industry in which the union is being formed. Hence it is relatively easy for an individual or group to transfer the expertise gained in establishing one union to establishing another. This gives rise to the term 'trade union entrepreneur' to describe an individual active in a number of unions. In the case of trade unions for blacks this entrepreneur tends to serve unions within a particular federation.
- * In common with industrial development there has been a shortage of people with the necessary skills.
- * There has been a shortage of funds to organize at the grass roots level.

- * The reasons for wanting to belong to a trade union tend to be common to most workers.
- * The leaders of a federation, if working from an ideological standpoint, are likely to consider it desirable that other workers be organized such that they will adopt the same ideology.
- * A federation is a more convenient method of channeling overseas aid to recipient unions.
- * The services which a trade union provides for its members (education, communication, financial), may be carried out more efficiently when done so through a federation.
- * By functioning within a federation the power of individual trade unions, and their capability for survival, may be enhanced.

As a result, the federation acts as a focus of leadership and expertise, and can be considered a rational organizational form within the constraints facing trade unions, aside from the ideological affinity to form common-interest groups. The situation then arises that constituent unions may be restricted in their degree of autonomy, tending to function as subsidiaries of the federation. However, there are obviously benefits in the sharing of resources within a federation. In this country, this can be observed in the way trade union offices are concentrated very often within the same office building. With the violent history suffered by much of the trade union movement, there is the additional benefit of increased physical security in grouping together.

3.6.1 Drawbacks of federations

There is a price to be paid for these benefits. A trade union which becomes dependent on outside resources will, as in most dependency relationships, not develop the resources to cope independently. A federation which uses its position to perform functions which an individual union cannot perform will succeed in bolstering constituent trade unions. To a large extent trade union federations in Africa have allowed themselves to take over functions, such as policy formulation, that individual unions should have performed, and in the process have weakened the trade union movement. Leaders of federations have been susceptible to manipulation by governments, often leaving constituent unions without essential expertise which should have been developed internally.

4 SOME AFRICAN EXPERIENCES

Colonists were attracted to Africa because of its resources and the desire to exploit them. A resource which they frequently found did not want to be exploited were the indigenous people (Cohen, Copans, and Gutkind, p. 7).

As a result various strategies were used to overcome this 'problem':

- * Introduce a tax which had to be paid in cash. The only source of cash was as wage labourers for the colonists (Cohen, Copans, & Gutkind, p. 9).
- * Institute forced or compulsory labour programmes (Damachi, Siebel, & Trachtman, 1979, p. 5).
- * Import labour from other parts of the world (de Kiewiet, p. 146).

It is unclear what influences this early contact with a modern economy, and the low pay which characterized it, has had on subsequent work-related behaviour.

In the remainder of this section synopses of the experiences in

a number of African countries is given. Information has been chosen for its illustrative value of trade union development rather than completeness.

4.1 Experience in Cameroon

The Government became totally involved in the trade union movement. It reorganized the unions and their elections and introduced an approved list of aspirant office holders in place of shop stewards. The Government, in a sense, entered into the trade union movement, rather than co-opting it into the Government. Check-off facilities, by which union subscriptions are deducted from pay packets, gave the unions assured funding. These funds were managed by representatives of the party, union and government. This resulted in a more 'unified' voice for wage setting procedures and consultation, rather than pluralistic negotiations. This is consonant with the French tradition of, ideally, regulating nearly all aspects of industrial relations by means of the law. The Labour Code, for example, makes provision for the control of union structure and functioning. Union representatives are protected from dismissal by being given priority when retrenchments or transfers are contemplated. In addition, the Labour Inspector must authorise any dismissals of union representatives.

The principal role of the union representative is to present individual or collective demands to the employer. Where the employer has failed to meet any legal obligations, the Labour Inspector would be called in to investigate the matter, prosecute where applicable and, in many cases, to conciliate. A system of national wage agreements exist (similar to industrial council agreements in this country), as well as a national system of job evaluation and classification. In addition, a statutory body uses this job evaluation data to determine wage rates, a factor which further diminishes the need for negotiated collective agreements.

4.2 Experience in Ghana

Kraus (1979, p. 111), reports that in 1911 there were guilds of craftsmen in Ghana "not dissimilar in objects and methods to a modern trade union". The relationship between a fall in real wages and an increase in trade union membership was particularly strong in Ghana between 1939 and 1945. Real wages fell by 34 percent in the two years prior to 1941, resulting in union membership growing from 900 in 1942 to 6000 in 1945, with a large number of strikes in this period. There is a case reported in 1939 in which the railway trade union organized a strike and was successful in obtaining a return to the wage rates of ten years earlier. The price paid, however, was that some union leaders were arrested and dismissed. A variety of views on trade unionism were evident during this period. For example, the Chief Inspector of Labour reported in 1938 that:

It is better to recognize a reputable and responsible organization through which workers can voice their grievances than to allow these grievances to remain unventilated (in Kraus, 1979, p. 113).

Legislation came about in 1941 as a result of union pressure from within and the British government as colonial power and paymaster from without. In terms of this legislation, unions had to register with the Registrar of Trade Unions, submit annual financial reports and register with the Assemblies of Chiefs. In addition a Labour Department was established to:-

- * Advise the Government on labour matters.
This entailed manipulating union leaders, spying on meetings and discouraging demands for increased benefits and union political involvement.
- * Conducting enquiries on labour conditions.
This entailed enforcing labour laws and mediating in disputes.

* Assisting and encouraging the development of 'responsible' trade unions. This further engendered employer hostility. A Secretary of the South Wales Miners' Federation was seconded to the Department, who followed the tradition of free and voluntary collective bargaining between employers and employees. Employer opposition was such that no progress was made prior to independence (Kraus, 1979, p. 114).

There was a general strike in 1950 which lasted for three weeks, and virtually paralysed the country. The most important consequence of this was the number of strikers, especially union leaders, who lost their jobs. The union movement suffered as a whole. It was several years before the pre-strike membership level was again reached. Prior to independence, most unions were small in-house bodies. Many were "poorly managed, with low levels of member activity" (Kraus, 1979, p. 123). For example, just before independence, in 1955-6, few unions had more than 250 members. In 1958 an Act was introduced which resulted in the establishment of ten larger unions. This resulted in a tripling of union membership within two years. Due to the check-off facilities the financial base of the unions was improved to the extent that they were able to employ personnel to perform the routine activities within the union and respond to members' needs in the workplace. The Act resulted in greater government influence over industrial relations, and the trade unions. "In time, action was taken to integrate the trade union movement with the party" (Ananaba, 1979, p. 10). Although private sector employers were obliged to take part in collective bargaining (trade union membership for civil servants was resisted), regulations effectively precluded legal strikes.

Later changes of government resulted in the adoption of a unitarist model of industrial relations in which conflicts of

interest were to be avoided, and the trade union movement co-opted into becoming the "vanguard of the revolution" (Kraus, 1979, p. 133). This model evolved to the point that the trade union movement, in the form of the union federation, could validly adopt a position which was different from that of the government.

The employers' federation coordinated contacts between the private sector and the government and the unions, assisting with negotiations and arbitration when needed. (It is an indication of the nature of trade unionism in Africa and the shortage of expertise that a former trade union leader who had qualified as a lawyer led the employers' federation). When the trade union movement was deciding to rationalise, the General Secretary of the trade union federation said,

We do not want to be bothered with Cambridge essays on imaginary ILO standards with undue emphasis on voluntary association (in Ananaba, 1979, p. 9).

4.3 Experience in Kenya

Compulsory labour was introduced as a result of pressure from settlers, and was used in agriculture and the public service. In the period leading up to independence the trade union movement was the "main spokesman for Africans both politically and in the industrial field", according to Tom Mboya (Iwuji, 1979, p. 201). The anti-trade union orientation was evident in 1947 when a general strike was organized by a large union. This resulted in the banning of the trade union and internal exile of its leaders.

Trade unions were frequently promoted and lead by the Kenya Federation of Labour. The Federation was intimately involved in the activities of constituent trade unions, for example, it negotiated on behalf of some unions who lacked the expertise to

successfully conduct their own. This federation successfully survived as a national body free of inter-regional and inter-group problems for about ten years. It was the emergence of a rival federation in the early 1960's which resulted in an unstable trade union movement. The Government created a new body as successor to the two federations and had the final say as to who was to be its leader. In addition to the compulsory recognition of non-competing and registered trade unions, compulsory check-off facilities were introduced. These 'benefits' were countered by regulations which made striking legally more difficult.

4.4 Experience in Zambia

The first indication of the sort of collective action usually associated with trade unions is found in a strike which took place in 1935. The strike was led by members of an urban association. In 1940 urban workers were led by a Committee of Seventeen, composed of supervisors and educated employees [boss boys and the intelligentsia] (Gertzel, 1979, p. 310). Membership of the Committee was on the basis of leadership ability rather than ethnic affiliation, and on identification of common interests of industrial labour.

Following a number of strikes in the 1940's, the colonial government still considered that "African trade unions were premature" (Gertzel, p. 312) and opted for a system of Workers' Committees. The first trade union was the European Mineworkers' Union formed in 1936, whose militance entrenched the position of white workers and "determined the development of trade unionism on a racial basis" (Gertzel, 1979, p. 314). Although a Labour Officer, sent from Britain in 1947, influenced and promoted trade unionism, "the formation of African trade unions was ultimately the reaction of a new African urban society against economic conditions and the determination to challenge racial privilege" (p. 314). Mwewa (1958, p. 10), interviewed members of

a union who intimated that membership of the union was closely associated with their feelings of allegiance to the urban community in which they lived. Mwewa's (1958), research indicated that more recently urbanized workers were less likely to join the union than those with long residence. This author points out, however, that workers with longer urban residence also had longer service and were more protective of their jobs. Presumably such workers considered trade union membership of greater value than other workers. For this group of workers, membership of the union was of more value to them. At first the unions were led by educated workers such as clerks and messenger-interpreters on the railways.

The initial problems faced by trade unions related to internal dissension, organization, finance, and employer recognition. They were small organizations, for example seven of the fourteen unions in 1954 had less than a thousand members. A series of strikes in 1956 resulted in the government introducing legislation which gave it more control over trade union activities. There was pressure on the unions to become more politically involved. Gertz (1979, p. 320), reports a Branch Chairman as saying that politicians had responsibility to the country, but that trade unionists are responsible for the workers' cause.

Pressure continued on the unions, one tactic being that the political party persuaded union leaders to leave the trade union and take up government posts. The African mining union was better organized than the political party in the most important region of the country, and had a loyal membership. Thus the political party needed control of the union in order to control the region, and so avoid a future threat to its authority. In the process, however, the threat represented by the trade union was probably increased rather than reduced as the trade union membership had become more politicised.

After independence, Government control increased. New regulations stipulated that trade union officials were to have had three years employment in the industry in which the trade union was active. Regulations were more strict for smaller trade unions; if a trade union had fewer than 500 members, then officials had to be actually employed in the industry. This prevented the development of trade unions by the 'union entrepreneur', as well as resulting in the loss of a number of trade unions. To reduce industrial unrest and presumably to subvert independent trade unions, the Government proposed that workers should participate in Works Councils. Some of these councils replaced the functions of the trade unions for a number of reasons, some being: a loss of leadership as leaders became "upwardly mobile", poor union management, a growing gap between the membership and officials, and the detention of leaders.

4.5 Experience in Zimbabwe

During the early colonial period, compulsory labour was introduced as a result of pressure from settlers, and was used in agriculture and the public service.

The natives here seem much more willing to work this year than they were last (year) [1896]. The chastisement meted out to other kraals of which they were certain to have heard, has no doubt greatly tended to make them better in this respect (*in* Phimister, 1978, p. 51).

Such policies were not really effective in satisfying the need for workers, especially on the mines, and so other methods were used to draw people away from their traditional way of life.

According to Wood (1987, p. 48), there are relatively more people in the wage economy in Zimbabwe than in any other country in sub-Saharan Africa, with the exceptions of South Africa and Namibia. Despite this, the level of worker organization is considered low. Reasons for the low level include the poverty of

the urbanized population, high rates of unemployment, the pattern of employment and discouragement by the authorities. At the time of independence about 29% of all workers in the industrial and commercial sector were union members. There was a clear racial differentiation in that whites were concentrated in relatively few organizations. More than a third of the white labour force was employed by the Government, municipalities, and parastatal bodies such as the railways.

(T)he majority of white-dominated unions tended to be parastatal unions catering for the higher grades. Other strategic sectors for white dominated unionism were mining, iron and steel, engineering, and printing. The form of unionism in each case varied according to how best to preserve the aristocratic stratum. Numerous other staff associations served the same purpose. Sometimes unions were even barred completely from an industry, such as motor and vehicle assembly, where this would keep a *bona fide* black union out (Wood, 1987, p. 54).

Black workers were generally employed in more diverse situations and frequently had "to battle against both white employers and white unionists" (Wood, 1987, p. 54). Another consideration was that the white unions were informally run and closely knit organizations which tended to 'dominate and atomize' the trade unions for blacks.

The period since independence is described by Wood (1987, p. 57) as a period of 'trade union weakness'. In an 'Interview with 8 workers in Zimbabwe - July 8th, 1986' (Kaplan, 1987, p. 26), there is an indication that the position of the worker has improved in areas such as discrimination and possibilities for advancement. However, the respondents stated that their real earnings had been higher and their union more able to act on their behalf in the period before independence. Wood (1987), illustrates this by showing that membership of what he calls 'non-racial independent' (in effect black) trade unions has increased sixfold in South Africa in the period since Zimbabwe's independence, whilst the trade unions in that country have

increased their membership only by a factor of three. This author states that "union organizational depth, unity and ideological coherence generally remained weak" in the period since independence (p. 81).

4.6 Experience in Nigeria

Forced labour was introduced to West Africa by the authorities, who soon found it to be ineffective (Mason, p. 74) and as a result introduced a poll or hut tax which had to be paid in cash which compelled those taxed to seek work in the wage economy.

According to Diejomaoh (1969, p. 170), it was the poor working conditions in the early colonial period which stimulated the formation of trade unions in Nigeria. Strikes were a common feature among workers even before the beginning of the century. This early protest action took place before trade unions were established. A militant Secretary of the Nigerian Railway Workers' Union said that,

We did not have an effective trade union organization in the 1920's, but we had a lot of Nigerian workers who thought and acted like trade unionists (in Diejomaoh, 1969, p. 171).

According to Damachi et al. (1979, p. 2), this early trade union development slowed down as the depression of the late nineteen-twenties ended.

In the period following independence, there was no compulsion on employers to recognize a trade union and the ultimate responsibility and approval of collective agreements rests with a government body. The general tone of industrial relations is one of antipathy towards organized labour. Unions tend to be small and 'in-house'. As a result union leaders can earn more by becoming union entrepreneurs; Cohen (1974, p. 120), reports a case of a leader who lead twenty eight unions at the same time.

Diejamoah (1979, p. 183), describes a strategy used by the trade unions in wage bargaining which indicates the primacy of employment in the public sector. The Government will establish a Commission to set wages in the public service in response to political activities of the unions. The trade unions then attempt to obtain equivalent improvements for their members in the private sector. Some idea of the extent of the industrial process in Nigeria is given by the estimate in the *Third National Development Plan 1975 - 1980* that in 1980 less than ten percent of the labour force would be in wage employment, a figure of less than three million (Diejomoah, 1969, p. 170). In 1975, this same author reports that about 28 million people were in 'gainful employment', whilst only one and a half million were employed in the modern (industrialized) sector of the economy. Of this latter figure, 37 percent were employed in 'services', most of whom were presumably in government posts, and 22 percent in the manufacturing sector (p. 196).

4.7 Experience in Tanzania

In Tanzania there was no form of institutionalized industrial relations until 1947. There had been strikes in that year and in 1939 which spread beyond the original workplace and workers, resulting in severe disruption. The authorities appointed a British unionist in 1947 as a Labour Officer, who was involved in the formation of a Dockworkers Union. At this time a number of small trade unions were formed which were initially repressed by the government. Acceptance by the government occurred in 1953, followed three years later by the unions establishing a federation. The trade union movement was discouraged from becoming involved in politics. Despite this, there was harmonious cooperation between the political and trade union movements in the years before independence.

Following independence the relationship deteriorated, largely due to the reluctance of many trade unionists to being co-opted

into the political structure. Friction between those who were willing to be co-opted and those who resisted caused the attenuation of the trade union federation and strengthened the ability of the government to co-opt the trade union movement (Mihyo, 1979, p. 245). In 1964 the Government established an organization which was a synthesis of the federation and individual trade unions; it was a single trade union with powers and functions far wider than the previous federations and was affiliated to the ruling party. The government saw it as a means of administering organized workers and at the same time avoiding the confrontationist approach of the previous federations. The government had the power to appoint the leadership, so in effect the new organization was seen as one of the "institutions for national development" (Mihyo, 1979, p.250).

The structure of the new union was that departments were set up which corresponded to the former unions, and divided into districts and regions. Plant level bargaining was consolidated into the new districts which 'compressed' union activities and presumably reduced the role of union activists.

Further co-optation took place in 1977 when the political parties in Zanzibar and Tanzania united. A new trade union organization was established with the following objectives and functions:-

- * Interpretation of party policy to the workers.
- * Ensure that party directives are complied with.
- * Protect and defend party policy against those opposed to Ujamaa (Tanzanian socialism).
- * To promote workmanship, love of work, and pride in vocation.
- * To promote education and creativity.

- * To ensure workers are performing their duties and reaching their targets.
 - * To ensure that workers promote development of the nation in the framework that 'a socialist nation is one of workers and peasants'.
 - * To develop self confidence among workers.
 - * To cooperate with Government in ensuring the provision of essential services to workers.
 - * To protect workers' rights and dignity by improving wages and conditions of employment.
- (Mihyo, 1979, p. 252).

This is probably the most ambitious attempt in Africa to incorporate the trade union movement into the government. It was based on a totally unitarist concept of the relation between employees, employers and government. The failure of the Ujamaa framework in later years has been recognized, and is probably not unrelated to the failure to recognize that there are valid differences between sections of society and that these differences are better managed than ignored.

5 TRADE UNIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Mdhluli (1933, p. 23) in an essay entitled 'The Development Of The African' indicates the successes of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (founded in 1919) which, "Like a vast conflagration... spread all over the Union". He also points out that its shortcomings resulted in its split into two divisions. According to Bonner (1978, p. 115), "by 1931 it was more or less a spent force". This is the first example of the splitting and demise of a trade union for black workers in South Africa.

When discussing the trade union movement in South Africa both then and now, "one is compelled to speak of either black or

white trade unions instead of the trade union movement generally" (Ncube, 1985, p. xiv). The largest grouping of trade unions, the Congress of South African Trade Unions, has a non racial constitution but very few non-black members, whilst the other federations are racially exclusive. Thus the trade union movement still essentially reflects the racial composition of the country.

5.1 The first big black trade union

Although the first unions in South Africa were craft unions in the British mould which became ethno-centric, the first union for blacks was the Industrial Workers of Africa, founded in 1917. This was modelled on the American movement Industrial Workers of the World, known as the Wobblies. Two years later the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union, for black and coloured dock workers was established in Cape Town. Its development was promoted by a white socialist politician, A F Batty, and led by a Malawian, Clements Kadalie (Ncube, 1985, p. 28). Until the recent growth of the National Union of Mineworkers, it was "the largest union ever to have taken root on the African continent" (Bonner, 1978, p. 114). With the exception of mine workers its membership came to include workers from all trades and industries. As it developed, it was subject to (often brutal) opposition from the authorities and white trade unions (Ncube, 1985, p. 87). Despite having eventually nearly a quarter of a million members, it failed to establish a political voice externally. Internally it suffered from divergence of left wing and right wing politics and "financial instability, personal conflicts, weakness of central organization and so on" (Bonner, 1978, p. 115).

A Scottish trade unionist was brought in to reorganize the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union such that it would conform with acceptable trade union practice. By then it was "totally mismanaged, corruption and the abuse of power were rife

amongst officials and leaders alike" (Ncube, 1985, p. 48). Eventually, Kadalie split from the union to form another union, leaving the Scottish unionist to sort out the union's debts. Roux (1964, p. 196), concludes that, "persecution helped to kill it; but the force of internal disruptions were a more fundamental cause of its collapse". An observation by Bonner (1978, p. 118) that may be relevant to the union's demise, is that it was led by outside middle class leaders who relied on charismatic leadership, rather than, as in the European tradition, developing out of the working class itself. Given that the concept of a working class is probably inapplicable in Africa (see section 2), there must be some other mechanisms by which trade unionism could emerge in Africa.

The value of this brief introduction to the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union is that it illustrates the importance of basic managerial activities within a trade union and the consequences of the inadequate management of its affairs. The Industrial and Commercial Workers Union, although it disappeared, served as an important stimulus to further trade union developments and as a training ground for trade unionists.

Since South Africa is so much more industrialized than other countries in Africa, many writers on trade unions in South Africa have tended to look to the experiences and literature which have come out of the more developed nations. This was perhaps explicable, and tenable, only for so long as South Africa was aligned in its development to the needs of its trading partners in the West, which is no longer the case.

5.2 Promoting trade unions for blacks

In the early years of this century close contact between black and white unions was encouraged by many white unionists. In 1929 the South African Trade Union Council recommended that

affiliates should recruit all workers regardless of race or colour, or should develop (racially separate) parallel branches in the same union. However, prevailing economic conditions were such that trade union development went into reverse.

Not all the non-black promotion of trade unions for blacks relied on charisma. Max Gordon was the secretary of a federation of seven black trade unions in the late nineteen-thirties. He was able to promote union organization for blacks, mainly in industries which already had successful registered unions, by effectively satisfying some of the workers' needs.

Gordon worked within the wage determination system by making representations on behalf of the members, and was only able to succeed because of the cooperation he received from the Department of Labour (Stein, 1978, p. 144).

However, even this success must be seen in the light of a black trade union membership on the Witwatersrand of only about 20 thousand. The support received by Gordon from the Department of Labour was in keeping with the vision of industrial relations expressed by the Secretary of Labour in 1929,

we have madly gone out of our way to unsettle and alienate a people without whose goodwill our future is dark indeed (in Stein, 1978, p. 144).

In addition, the Government had a policy of increasing wages for unskilled work in order to persuade whites to perform unskilled work. Thus black trade union members benefited from higher wages only partly as a result of their trade union membership. The reasons which had retarded the trade union movement in the depression were reversed in the more active economy of the war years of the nineteen-forties. The movement of blacks into industry was further enhanced by the need to replace those whites serving in the armed services. Although trade union membership increased in the war, industrial relations were

generally conducted in a cooperative manner.

5.3 Retarding trade unions for blacks

With the ending of the Second World War much changed. Trade union activism increased, provoking the authorities to declare striking by black workers illegal in terms of wartime regulations. Concomitantly, circumstances changed; whites returned to the labour market, boom turned to recession, blacks' membership of unions decreased, and a pool of unemployed industrial workers was created. The result was the virtual demise of the African trade union movement in the early nineteen-fifties.

The Botha Commission of Enquiry on Industrial Legislation was set up in 1948 and reported in 1951. Its recommendations were aimed at, "containing, and controlling the power of African trade unions...(by means of) limited recognition and severe controls", (Ncube, 1985, p. 78).

The result is common knowledge. Until the 1973 strikes in Durban, black trade unionism was dormant. Although the strikes themselves were notable for their spontaneity, effectiveness, peace and absence of trade union involvement, they presaged a new era in South African industrial relations and trade union development. Racially mixed unions were frowned upon. Disorganization of black trade unions was manipulated by, among other measures, the removal from office of key union leaders by Ministerial decree. An alternative to trade unions was established in 1953 by the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Bill which, the Minister of Labour claimed, would provide a way for the grievances of blacks to be handled and so diminish the appeal of trade unions for black workers.

It should be noted that, although the Minister thought that they would 'die a natural death', trade unions for blacks were not

banned. According to Ncube (1985, p. 84) black trade unions were progressively destroyed by government and employer moves, although perceptions on this subject vary. In more recent times, Green (1986), states that:

Although the authorities have stated that no-one has been detained for union activities, there are many workers and trade unionists who are sceptical of this claim (p. 75).

5.4 The modern era

The modern era in industrial relations in South Africa started in 1973, when the wave of spontaneous strikes in Natal prompted the appointment of yet another Commission, the Commission of Inquiry into Labour Legislation, under the chairmanship of Professor N. Wiehahn. The results of this Commission were to have far reaching consequences for the relationship between employees and employers in this country. For the first time there was an unequivocal understanding that the institutionalization of collective bargaining for all workers is in the best interests of the economy as a whole.

The impact of the 'new labour dispensation' has yet to be fully evaluated. In view of the fact that South Africa is still developing its industrial relations system, no final evaluation can be undertaken. One form of analysis could be to look at the way the reactions of the business community and managers to the changes have developed over time. The initial impact of the changes was that managers could no longer hide behind the government in their rejection of trade unions for black workers. As mentioned above, trade unions for black workers were at no time prohibited, yet they were almost totally rejected by managers. Within a short time of the new labour dispensation many trade unions were recognized by newly pragmatic managers who matured rapidly in the new industrial relations environment.

The demise of the formerly dominant federation, the white led

Trades Union Council of South Africa, virtually coincided with the emergence of the black led Congress of South African Trade Unions, probably the largest trade union federation in Africa. This federation has a policy of a single union for each industry. In order to implement this policy a number of unions which affiliated with it agreed to merge themselves into new trade unions. The difficulties involved in these amalgamations are, in some cases, presenting a threat to progress in the industrial relations system. Some trade unions have dissipated a great deal of their energy in attempting to determine the nature of the new union. This has been more likely to occur in unions whose constituent parts were geographically spread out or whose leadership was undetermined.

6 REFLECTIVE ORGANIZATIONS

The trade union is an independent organization which displays many characteristics in common with other organizations. The concept of independence is generally considered essential in order for the union to be able to function effectively. At the same time this must be seen as a limited independence, as witnessed by the progressive destruction of the trade unions and trade union organizations mentioned above (see section 5.1.3). This destruction, according to a number of writers, came about as a result of deliberate business and government actions within an unfavourable environment, as well as through internal deficiencies (Friedland, 1969, p. 8; Ncube, 1985, p. 196; Roux, 1964, p. 196).

6.1 Recognition required

The experience of Max Gordon, who took advantage of the administrative procedures of wage regulation, as well as trade unions in the post-Wiehahn period, are further instances in which trade unions were effective to the extent that they

reflected events in their environment. Trade unions which were well organized but had no recognition from employers were effectively precluded from achieving anything on behalf of their members. This was the case in South Africa in the period between the 1973 strikes and the legislative changes which followed the Wiehahn Report (Friedman, 1987, p. 86). The distribution of trade unions according to the racial composition of the country is yet further evidence of their being reflective organizations. The tightly-knit trade unions for whites in pre-independence Zimbabwe reflected their social, employment, and residential lifestyle (see section 4.5). The legacy of violence surrounding industrial relations in this country (Shane, 1988) has certainly been reflected in the way trade unions have developed.

6.2 Trade unions - autonomous or independent?

In a sense, then, perhaps the term autonomous is a more accurate representation of the trade union than independence. The relative lack of independence of trade unions can easily be ignored, although most agree that they cannot exist in their present guise without the employers with which they have contact. This is a complicating factor when developing a conceptualization of trade unions in Africa, since the growth of the union movement has coincided with limited industrialization based on a tradition of mutual responsibility. In most cases, a trade union is judged effective when it achieves a relationship with an employer, has sufficient members to be credible, and achieves some benefit for the members. Rejection by the employer of attempts by the trade union to gain formal recognition may be used strategically by the union to legitimize itself in the eyes of potential members, for example by organizing a strike. This is a factor that trade unions are aware of and one on which little is to be found in the industrial relations literature.

6.3 Reflective structures

Another pointer to the validity of trade unions as reflective organizations is that trade unions themselves develop structures which are parallel to the organizations with which they are in contact. This is a difficult factor to elucidate as they will also develop in response to its membership, which in turn cannot be separated from the work that they do and the organizations which employ them. An example of this is given by Gertzel (1979, p. 325),

The structure of the industry to a considerable extent influences union organization. MUZ's [Mineworkers' Union of Zambia] organization follows the organization of the mines, with a network of shop stewards in each mine department ..., and with the structural advantages of the industry and its long experience it is still the most formidable union. Similarly, the ZRAWU [Zambian Railway Workers' Union], with twenty-five branches at the main railway centres, benefits from the railways structure.

6.4 Reflective views

Research also indicates that members often express similar views on their membership of the trade union as they do towards their jobs. One of the problems of employment in Africa is that many workers have an instrumental view of their work relationship. (see Introduction). Onyelemukwe (1973, p. 90), reports on workers who expressed similar instrumental views of their membership of the trade union. In a similar vein are the attempts by the Congress of South African Trade Unions to develop a single union for each industry, a policy which is parallel to the concentration of business ownership and public sector control in the South African economy. Using an alternative simile, Human and Rajah (1984, p. 18), conclude that "the trade union movement appears to follow the contours of capitalism in a society".

The trade union is an example of a totally political organization whose very existence depends on the political aspirations of its membership and leadership and in which day to day activities will be predicated on political influences and considerations. Pennings and Goodman (1980, p. 190), discuss this in terms of constituencies representing groups with common interests, internal or external to the organization, which promote their interests. Bacharach and Lawler (1980, p. 1), consider that,

Corporations, universities, and voluntary associations are arenas for daily political actions... (and) that organizational life is dominated by political interactions; politics in organizations involve the tactical use of power to retain or obtain control of real or symbolic resources.

This does not, however, explain what is meant by the effectiveness of a trade union. It is apparent that deciding upon the effectiveness of a trade union (or indeed any organization) is a political decision, and depends upon the constituency making the decision. This suggests that there is no single way of determining, the level of effectiveness of the trade union. Busch (1980, p. 11), asserts "that unions do best when they seek 'more now' ". The trade union which achieves the most for its members within relevant constraints such as time will be the one to survive. This same author points out that the poor have more pressing needs which need immediate improvement (p. 11).

7.1 Trade union strength and trade union power

Wood (1987, p. 84), differentiates between union power *vis a vis* those organizations with which it must interact, and the strength of the union in terms of its ability to organize itself and its members. He considers that strength is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a trade union to exert power, that

is, to become an effective organization. The 'strength' to which this author refers could be translated into the management of the trade union internally and 'power' to its ability to be effective in satisfying the needs of the membership. Human and Rajah (1984, p. 18), consider that effectiveness will depend on the power which the trade union can exert, which in turn is dependent on its being able to stabilize the membership and leadership.

7.2 Legalistic industrial relations

Trade unions and the industrial relations system develop in concert with the needs of the society in which they are to be found. It is not surprising that a legal approach is often adopted by the host society in promoting or controlling industrial relations. Onyelemukwe (1967, p. 153), suggests that the development of industrial relations systems along rigid legalistic lines may miss the point that industrial relations is about the relationship between people in industry, and treat the regulatory functions as ends in themselves.

7.3 Trade unions - an inverted hierarchy

As an organization the trade union, when viewed hierarchically, is opposite to most other organizations with which it has contact. Instead of having a numerically small directorate controlling the activities a large number of subordinates, in the union the activities of a small number of executives are controlled by a numerically large membership. Hence, to assess the effectiveness of a trade union it is necessary to consider the different constituencies which co-exist within the trade union, each having its own criteria of effectiveness. Some of the constituencies to be found are:

members
shop stewards

executives
employees of the union
managers and supervisors
directors of organizations
political parties
governments

It should be noted that the needs of these constituencies may range from being totally congruent to being mutually exclusive. In addition, this relationship varies according to time and circumstance. Events within the trade union are not independent from other aspects of industrial relations, the rationale for which is to develop a milieu in which conflicts of interest are institutionalized. One of the means by which this is done is to diminish the parties' areas of mutual exclusivity. When considering the effectiveness of trade unions, these different constituencies must be taken into account. Equally, each constituency must consider for itself what exemplifies an effective trade union.

7.4 Management of trade unions

Within the trade union, the leadership must also perform the managerial functions necessary to meet its obligations to the various constituencies. There appears to be a fair amount of criticism, (particularly among African writers) of the style of management brought to trade unions by their leaders. In Nigeria, Diejomaoh (1979, p. 181), discusses the findings of a number of researchers that many leaders fail to run the unions in a satisfactory manner, with mismanagement of funds and decision making based on ethnicity being mentioned in particular. The single union organization established by the government in Tanzania resulted in problems common to other organizations such as slow decision making, increasing bureaucracy, concentration on elite elements in the union (e.g. urban members) and

inappropriate allocation of funds.

Cohen (in Diejomaoh, 1979, p. 171), discusses the lack of trust by union members in their leaders. A result of this is the reluctance by members to pay their subscriptions, so restricting the ability of the union to make benefits available. At the other end of the scale is the observation by Mihyo (1979, p. 245), that the individual position of trade union leaders relative to the rank and file could be strengthened when funds were obtained from international trade union organizations.

As an organization, the trade union is subject to problems common to other organizations. Communication may be subject to interruption, members not even knowing the name of their leaders (Diejomaoh, 1979, p. 182). The difficulty of obtaining leadership of trade unions is well illustrated by the trade union entrepreneur discussed in section 3.6.

In Kenya, it was stipulated that officers of a trade union must be "employees of an industry or occupation in which the union is directly employed". The secretary, excluded from this provision, was subject to literacy provisions (Iwuji, 1979, p. 216). There are problems in stipulating literacy qualifications for trade unionists, since many who have been successful have not been educated. On the other hand there are many aspects of trade union activity for which a high level of literacy is a distinct advantage. In terms of building union strength, there can be little argument that literacy skills are necessary for the managerial function within the organization.

This report has considered some aspects of industrial relations in sub-Saharan Africa with the purpose of developing the idea that South Africa's context is that of industrialization in this region. The following concluding comments will transfer the discussion to focus on the future development of trade unions in South Africa.

8.1 Industrial development

One of the difficulties in reviewing industrial relations in Africa is that, in most instances, countries have not succeeded in their aim of post-colonial development and industrialization. This lack of development is reflected in the shortcomings of trade unions in Africa as well as in the fact that the concept of the worker is still emerging. For those who are part of the wage economy, a large proportion is employed in the government bureaucracies.

Some of the blame for this lack of development may be due to an import of a different nature. It has been a consistent aim in Africa to keep the earnings level of workers low, often on the advice of foreign advisors. The rationale has been that this would ensure that the products of Africa would remain competitive on world markets. The actual result has been that Africa has grown more dependent on foreign aid for its survival, whilst exports are still largely raw materials at progressively lower real prices. Such a strategy requires that the efforts of conventional trade unionism should be thwarted. In this area, at least, governments have succeeded, to their own countries' disadvantage. The notable exception in Africa in terms of successful industrialization has been South Africa. In order for this success to be consolidated in the future it is suggested that effective trade unionism be recognized as synergistic with industrial development and that cooptation and subversion of

trade unions is associated with retarded development.

8.2 Use of alien models

Even though it has been argued that the trade union is not an alien concept to Africa, the contrasts with the developed economies of the world are such that African industrial relations should not be analysed by means of alien models. Some of the writing on trade unions in Africa has been flawed because inappropriate frameworks have been used in research. In many cases there are definite similarities between the industrial relations systems of the independent country and its former colonial power. These similarities may have served to confuse the observer as to the structural differences which exist in the countries. It is not only researchers who have made this mistake. For example, the unsuccessful approach adopted in Tanzania was partly due to a failure to appreciate the nature of its society.

The development of trade unions in South Africa should be understood in the context of Africa, noting at the same time that there are significant contrasts with other African countries. The greatest of which concerns the level of industrialization which has been achieved. If the models of the West are inappropriate for the rest of Africa, then equally the models of Africa must be adapted for South Africa.

8.3 Violence as a factor in trade union development

Researchers in the field of industrial relations in this country cannot ignore the reality of violence. It has affected most of those involved in industrial relations; in some cases it has been used deliberately for strategic reasons and in others it has been the unwanted result of circumstances. Whatever the reasons, the experience of violence is part of the collective memory of the actors in industrial relations and will need to be

managed in the future (Shane, 1988).

8.4 The growth of trade unionism and adversity

There is a fairly consistent finding that trade union growth has taken place in response to economic adversity. In the South African experience, poor economic circumstances have also coincided with reversals in the fortunes of the trade union movement.

8.5 Race and industrial relations

The divisions which exist in society have been consistently reflected in the way trade unions have been segmented. In South Africa this has been accentuated because the strong racial divisions have been used to increase the divisions based on skills. With the changing demographic nature of South Africa this divide will need to be bridged in order for organized labour to succeed in institutionalizing conflicts of interest to the benefit of workers.

8.6 Literacy

Trade unions need people with suitable skills in order to function effectively. Aside from the many personal attributes which go to make up 'the suitable person', there is the need for literacy not only in that person's mother tongue but also in a common language. The many languages which are spoken in Africa results in problems of communication within countries and is probably one of the contributory factors to the lack of development in Africa. For South Africa it is probably a factor which is retarding further development.

The changes which have occurred in South African society have been reflected in the trade union movement. A good example is that the dominant trade union federation in South Africa (Confederation of South African Trade Unions) is a new one and is led by blacks whilst the one which was dominated by whites (Trade Union Council of South Africa) has been disbanded. The reduced availability of white workers as the source of skills, stemming from demographic changes, has resulted in a changing composition of South Africa's workforce. Since there are indications that many of the unions which are actually involved in collective bargaining have limited resources compared with the managements with which they are in contact, the role of the federations has expanded. Due to the growth of trade unions in the marketplace some employers have recognized the need to develop managers with the skills necessary to handle industrial relations in a professional manner. Such efforts require that trade unions respond reciprocally whilst determining their role in the industrial process of which they are a part.

Comment such as this cannot be divorced from the situation in which South African trade unions find themselves. For example, the corner-stone of effective trade unionism is the ability to maintain membership and financial records, a task which has probably been made difficult by the double handicap of a lack of expertise and violation (legally and illegally) of trade union premises. The rapid rate of growth of some trade unions have paradoxically retarded their long term growth as there are indications that some trade unions have been unable to provide adequate service to the membership. Trade unionists have earlier examples of trade union development in which the energy generated by rapid growth has been dissipated in internecine conflict. In view of the relationship between industrialism, growth in employment, and trade union membership, it is suggested that trade union leaders who recognize the reflective

nature of their organizations will be more likely to exert some control over the nature of future development.

Without industrial development there will be no growth potential for trade unions and no members, that is workers, to be protected. All parties involved in the productive process, whether on the labour side or the employer's, will become more effective if they acknowledge that industrialization in South Africa is a synthesis of the Western experience and African context. It is suggested that the turmoil in which this country finds itself may be part of the process by which this synthesis is becoming consolidated.

8.8 A future research perspective

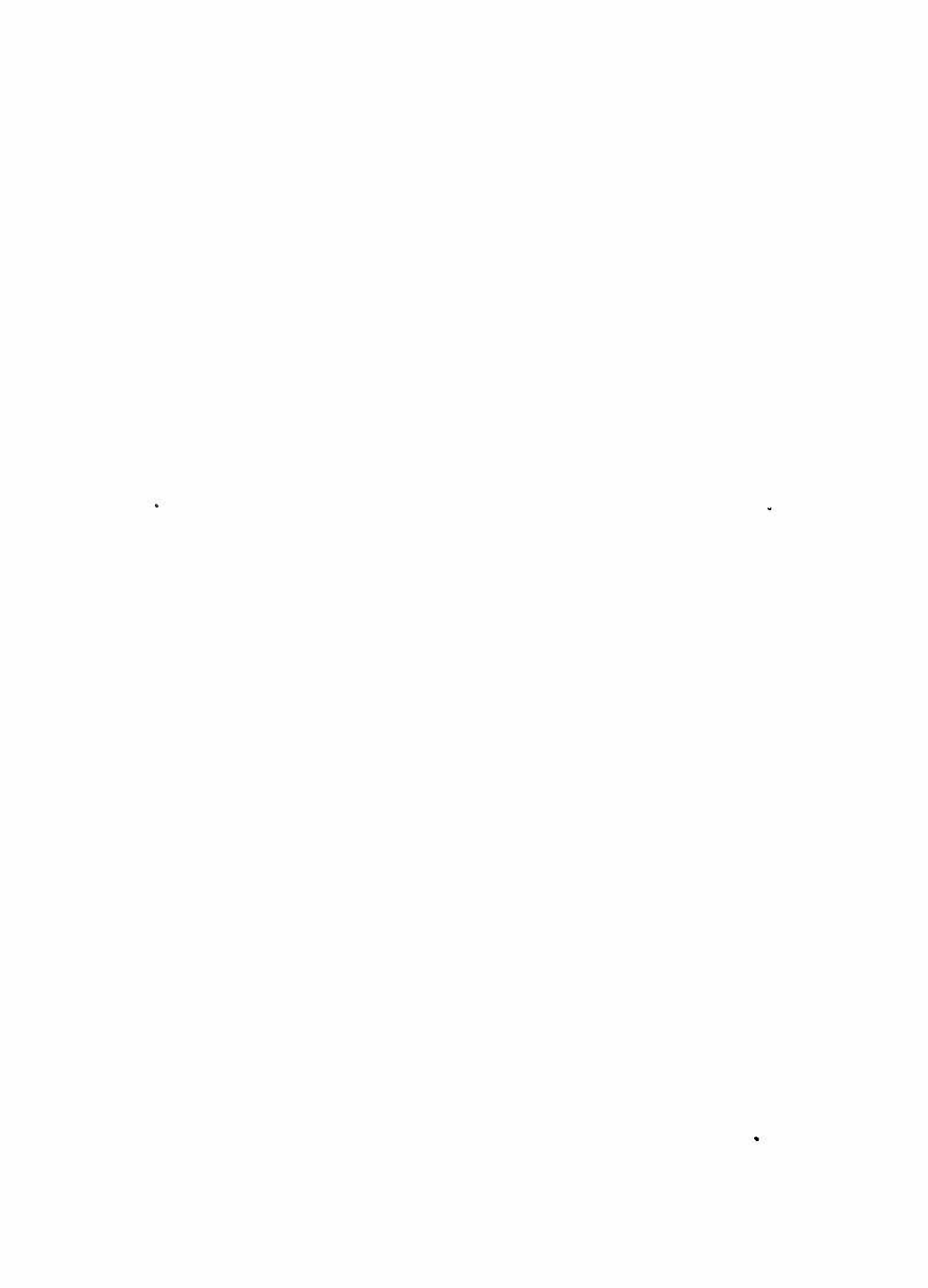
The synthesis of the Western experience and the African context suggests that researchers in the field of industrial relations are faced with the challenge of making effective use of a unique 'laboratory' of development. Research on South Africa's industrial relations should be more than of academic value to a small group of *cogniscenti*. Managers, entrepreneurs, trade unionists, employees and many other groups can benefit from the expertise of researchers. What is needed is research which addresses those needs as part of the research design.

The obstacles to conducting research into industrial relations cannot be ignored. Frequently researchers receive cooperation based on their perceived views or stance or those of the organization to which they belong. This response is occurs across the political spectrum. As a consequence researchers are limited in the sources and range of data available to them. In view of the function which industrial relations research could serve in South Africa, steps should be taken to overcome obstacles. One approach could be the establishment of a body which would facilitate communication between all researchers, regardless of their background.

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