what are we fighting for?

Possibilities for Decent Work, Unions and Rights in Africa

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Contents

I have been asked to speak today on the question of whether Decent Work is a feasible goal for unions in Africa – more specifically, in sub-Saharan Africa.

Decent Work, as defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) involves secure, productive employment based on adequate remuneration and core workers' rights, including to health, safety, freedom from discrimination, forced and child labour. It also embraces social security, including income protection – typically envisaged as state-run; as well as social dialogue, including social corporatism (or tripartism) between workers, employers and states, implicitly or explicitly seen as a means of achieving cohesion and consensus.[1] **The ILO champions Decent Work as a means to create a "fairer" form of capitalist globalisation.[2]**

To discuss whether Decent Work is a feasible goal in sub-Saharan Africa, it is important to look, first, at the ILO, and understand the origins and the limitations of both the ILO and its Decent Work agenda. Secondly, it is important to consider the factors that enable large-scale reforms under capitalism, and the extent to which these exist at present in sub-Saharan Africa and under the neo-liberal form of capitalist globalisation. This will then allow, thirdly, an assessment of whether Decent Work is a feasible goal for African unions, and, if so, how African unions might pursue this goal – a discussion that requires a rediscovery of the roots, achievements, experiences, and failings of African unions, as well as a serious engagement with African working class intellectual and organisational traditions.

Why Does the ILO's Decent Work Agenda Matter for African unions?

In the first place, **a huge number of African workers live and work in very poor conditions. Job security, useful work, protection, union rights and welfare would all represent major advances**.

The world economy has grown slowly and erratically in recent decades; there was a massive economic crisis in the early 1970s that devastated all countries and bankrupted states. Still, world output doubled from 1980 to 2002 alone.[3] **Economies in sub-Saharan Africa have done relatively well in recent years**: economic growth from 2001 to 2012 averaged 5.7 percent, the third fastest in any region worldwide.[4] After a long period of falling investment, foreign direct investment (FDI) flows into sub-Saharan Africa grew six-fold from 2004 to 2014, including substantial Asian, Brazilian and South African investment.[5]
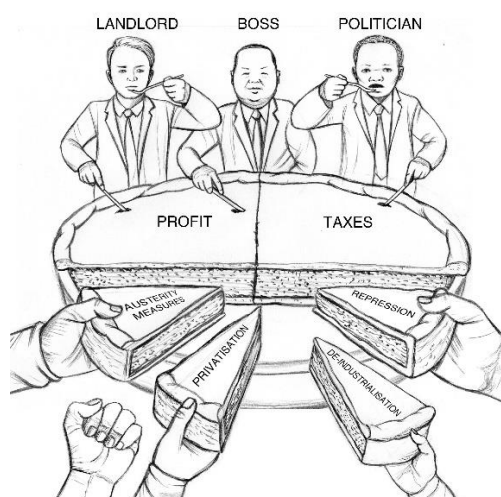
However, the benefits have not been shared. **The "pie" available to humanity is getting bigger all the time. However, the working class, peasantry and poor keep getting a small "slice" – in many cases, a shrinking "slice"[6] – despite the fact they provide the ingredients and bake the "pie."**

Two-thirds of people in extreme poverty live in Africa.[7] Some of the fastest growing economies, like Ethiopia, have some of the worst conditions and highest levels of poverty.[8] Nigeria – the eighth largest crude oil producer in the world and part of the OPEC group which sets world oil prices, [9] and in dollar terms the largest African economy – has overtaken India as the country with the largest number living in extreme poverty.[10] South Africa, which has the most developed economy in the continent, with a large financial and industrial sector and its own multi-national corporations, is the most unequal country in the world (besides Brazil), and has nearly 40 percent unemployment.

Other than faith-based organisations, **unions are the largest, most stable and most influential popular organisations in the world.** African unions have historically played a central role in struggles against exploitation and oppression, including colonialism, forced labour, dictatorships and Structural Adjustment Programmes from the 1800s onwards. Unions, even where weak, "continue to be one of the very few societal organisations in Africa with a sizeable constituency, country-wide structures… potential for mobilising members on social or political matters."[11] **Based at the point of production, unions can wield great structural power; able to build a base in the popular (dominated) classes, they are able to expand that influence through alliances and campaigns and can wield great influence. Unions can provide powerful pressure from below: they are the most potentially powerful of all popular class organisations.**

There is not only a long history of unionism in sub-Saharan Africa –with many impressive achievements, victories and lessons, but real potential to expand African unionism dramatically. Today African unions – despite all their weaknesses – have weathered the storms of recent decades. The ongoing survival of unions reflects their ongoing relevance. Their membership, in absolute terms, has remained stable, and in some cases even grown. There is no other way to explain the persistence and proliferation of unions under capitalism than the fact that workers have to organise on class lines to defend and advance their interests against ruling classes.

The size of the African working class – like the working class globally – has grown rapidly in recent decades. By **working class**, I do not mean only industrial workers, or blue-collar workers: I mean all those who, lacking means of production, depend on earning wages yet do not have control over their work, including their families and the unemployed. The other major class in the region is the **peasantry** —small farmers who are subject to the control and exploitation of other classes, the peasantry includes sharecroppers and labour tenants.

In most countries in the world, wages are now the largest single source of income for households (including rural households).[12] The number of employees in Africa has risen from 22 to 25 percent,[13] which represents only the working – as opposed to unemployed – section of the working class; this figure is an average: waged workers and their families, including the unemployed, account for well over 50 percent of the population in a significant number of African countries. The peasantry remains large in much of sub-Saharan Africa, it is declining in relative numbers –many peasant families also overlap with the working class, with family members working for wages elsewhere.

Africa's boom of the 2000s reversed some of the job losses and de-industrialisation of the 1980s and 1990s, and opened up new economic sectors. **The growing working class is present in the rural**

areas, and also increasingly concentrated in large masses, in urban areas. In West Africa, for example, the "supernova-like growth of a few giant cities like Lagos (from 300,000 in 1950 to 10 million today) has been matched by the transformation of several dozen small towns and oases like Ouagadougou, Nouakchott, Douala, Antananarivo and Bamako into cities larger than San Francisco or Manchester."[14] Here, families depend on wages, petty trade and self-employment, or a combination of these sources of income.

Here is a fertile field for unions. **If they can draw in the masses of unorganised (non-union) workers, and also find ways to draw in, or ally with, the masses of urban petty traders and self-employed, as well as the rural wage workers, and the peasantry, they can increase their influence exponentially.**

The Decent Work agenda is therefore clearly relevant to African unions and African workers. However, it is important to carefully consider which parts of the Decent Work agenda are useful for unions, what it lacks, and how it can be used – in part – by unions and the **popular classes** i.e. the working class, the peasantry and the poor generally.

A. OUTLINE OF THE MAIN ARGUMENT

I argue, first, that the ILO, itself, as an organisation, is unable to enforce its own Decent Work agenda. This is due to its aims, history, powers and structures. Second, it is important to carefully evaluate the Decent Work agenda. Sifting the wheat from the chaff, unions should critically appropriate the Decent Work agenda – adopting some parts, while rejecting others.

The valuable parts should be included into an autonomous class-based project of building democratic, bottom-up unions, critical thought, self-management and direct action by the working class, fighting for economic, political and social change; alliances between unions and other popular class formations and sectors, but independence from the state, including elections, parties and tripartism; finding ways to exercise more control over production, including union-supported co-operatives and non-profit union-run services, like medical clinics, to assist workers, potentially offer provide a self-managed alternative to state-run welfare, and demonstrate an alternative production model; international workers' solidarity, from below, as a response to neo-liberal capitalist globalisation; and, ultimately, a fight for a profound redistribution of power and wealth from the ruling classes, to the popular classes.

This project – building counter-power and a democratic, progressive counter-hegemonic project, or **counter-culture** – needs a careful evaluation of the scope for winning real reforms, an appreciation that diverse conditions need tactical and strategic nuance, and an understanding that it is only through powerful pressure brought to bear from below, that any gains can be won. Last, it needs to learn from African unions' histories, and working class intellectual and organisational traditions. The past provides an amazing toolbox for present struggles.

The Need to Critically Evaluate the ILO's Decent Work Agenda: What are Unions Fighting For?

In considering future options for African trade unions and the scope for their renewal and expansion, it is very important to **reflect on some of the limitations of the ILO's Decent Work agenda** – rather than see it as expressing the obvious, or even the most desirable, project for African unions.

Examined closely, **the ILO's Decent Work agenda is actually quite vague in some key areas** – for example, what is adequate remuneration, and who defines it? **Some of the agenda's goals are of questionable value** – state control of welfare, for example, as well as **social corporatism (tripartism)**, which involves institutionalised co-operation between union leaders, the state and organised business. **There are major issues missing from the Decent Work agenda**, among them, the question of how the great majority of ordinary people; that is, the popular classes, can secure real ownership and control of the economy and of society. Finally, the ILO's Decent Work agenda **lacks any serious consideration of what conditions are required to achieve the Decent Work goals**.

The Decent Work Agenda and the Question of the State

Generally speaking, the Decent Work agenda operates on the assumption that states can, and should, be used by the popular classes, and are substantively different from private corporations, that the problem with states is simply poor policy or bad leaders.

One example is the Decent Work agenda's support for state control over welfare systems. This is not weighed up in an examination of how **state-run welfare actually operates. It is usually inefficient, often inegalitarian, top-down, and is used to undermine popular systems of mutual aid; it fits into systems of patronage politics, promotes passivity and provides a means for wealth accumulation by elites in the state.**

States are, in fact, as undemocratic as private corporations; both are centralised organisations controlled by, and for, small elites, with most societies today ruled by small **ruling classes**, comprising economic and political elites. It is these ruling classes – politicians, senior state officials, capitalists, and landlords –that dominate the popular classes. As daily life across sub-Saharan Africa shows, the state itself is an oppressive force, based on violence, and a site of accumulation; it is not essentially different to capitalism in these respects.

Consider, for example, South Africa, which has the most comprehensive state-run welfare system in the continent. The Government Employees Pension Fund (GEPF), the main pension scheme for state workers, provides nearly 90 percent of the funds for the state-run Public Investment Corporation (PIC). The PIC is the largest fund manager in Africa, valued in 2017 at $148.2 billion, nearly half the size of the entire South African economy.[15] However, The GEPF's millions of members have almost no say over how the PIC uses the money, and fear of losing the pension is a powerful weapon in the hands of the state, the largest employer in the country. Instead, the PIC has used the monies to bail out the electricity utility ESKOM, a huge South African multi-national state corporation active in over 30 African countries.[16] This followed years of massive looting of ESKOM by powerful politicians and their capitalist allies. The PIC also holds a 30 percent stake in Lonmin, a multi-national private company (at whose Marikana platinum mine 34 strikers were shot dead by police in 2012) in which senior politicians hold shares.[17]

Rather than address such issues, the ILO's Decent Work agenda's faith in the state promotes solutions that allow this sort of elite control of resources; on the other hand, it remains silent on the how ordinary people can secure real ownership and control of the economy and of society.

Working Class Autonomy and Politics-from-Below

What this means is that some **parts of the ILO's Decent Work agenda are useful and necessary goals for unions** – specifically: productive, secure, dignified work, protected from direct coercion, danger and discrimination; basic rights; income protection; the right to organise and negotiate – **but other others parts need to be discarded** – specifically those that lead to entanglement with state.

Instead, **unions need to take on politics, and issues of policy – as well as a range of economic and social issues – but from a position of working class autonomy**: this means they need to remain independent and they need to operate in ways that win gains without sacrificing that independence, which in fact increases working class capacities and autonomy. However, this also requires the active participation of union members in the discussion, elaboration and struggle for these working class alternatives – a politics-from-below, rather than the official politics of parties and parliaments.

The Bakery, the Pie and the Slice

If the ILO will not deliver Decent Work, how can real reforms be won? There is very little serious discussion in the ILO's Decent Work agenda of the conditions under which working class people can win serious reforms, or of whether the best elements of that agenda are actually feasible under neo-liberal capitalist globalisation.

I address this by arguing that significant reforms to the benefit of the popular classes *can* take place under capitalism and the state, *but* only under very specific circumstances and for limited periods. There are a number of factors that enable such reforms, but the two most significant are the political economy, and the balance of class forces in a given society. Different class structures, historical paths, state forms and balances of power radically affect what is possible.

The scope for reforms depends on how much the ruling class can afford to concede – this is linked to the size and structure of the economy – **and how much it is compelled to concede** – that is, the balance of forces in society, above all between organised classes i.e., between the ruling classes and the popular classes (including the working class).
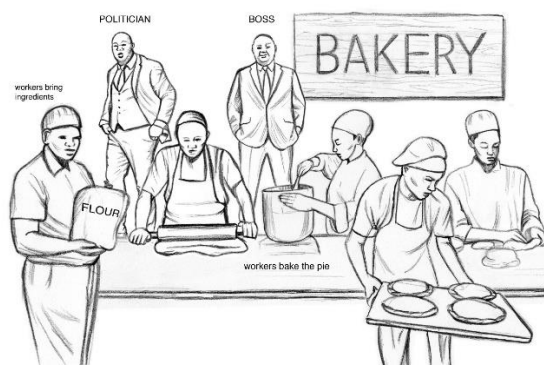
There is very little that the popular classes – the peasantry, the working class, and the poor generally – can do about the former, i.e. the size, to put it crudely, of the "pie" that can be divided. They do not control **the core administrative, coercive or productive means in society (to put it crudely, the "bakery,") which is in the hands of the state and the private corporations,** and should not therefore accept any responsibility for ensuring corporate profitability or managing the state.

The popular classes need to assert their autonomy, and develop an alternative economic and political project, involving a profound redistribution of power and wealth that will, in effect, enable the popular classes to control the "bakery," decide what it is baked, and reconstruct or replace or expand the "bakery" as needed.

In the meantime, there is a great deal the popular classes can do about the size of the "slice" of "pie" they receive. Applying this to unions, and Decent Work, the fact is that the workers and the poor in sub-Saharan African societies can only achieve substantial reforms through a careful, systematic upsurge of working class organisation, including trade unionism; building the counter-power that alone can compel change, i.e. winning more of the "pie," and also posing the possibility of taking control of the "bakery," displacing the ruling classes rather than choosing between sections of the ruling classes.

The More Effective the Struggle, the More Possibility of Gains

It is not possible to calculate in advance how large the "slice" will be. But three things are certain:
- First, **the more powerful the pressure brought to bear** – pressure based on popular education, organisation and mobilisation – **the larger the "slice" is likely to be**;
- Second, it is **only when the balance of class forces shifts in favour of the popular classes** that **reforms can be won**, not just demanded – and then defended and hopefully retained; and
- Third, while building counter– power from below is essential to winning reforms, successful **struggles improve the capacities, confidence, conditions and consciousness of the populace**.

A democratic structure and a culture of self-management, autonomy and mobilisation are both essential yet inadequate: building counter-power must be complemented by robust traditions of popular education, analysis, and debate, tolerant of difference and political pluralism, within and beyond the organs of counter-power such as unions. As a bare minimum, no official – hired or elected – should earn more than average workers' wages – all elected figures being subject to recall; union funds must be centred on building workers' counter-power; and all decisions, including financial, must be subject to discussion centred on duly constituted assemblies – which alone can produce binding resolutions. This is the only way of enabling the formulation of a democratic and progressive counter-hegemonic project – a **revolutionary counter-culture** – that proposes an alternative economic and political way of redistributing wealth and power to the popular classes.

In short, to win the best parts of Decent Work – and to win more than the Decent Work agenda – requires sustained struggle.

The More Bottom-Up and the More Strategically Astute, the More Effective the Unions

No matter the context, **organising, education and self-management,** both through the unions and within them in the form of organised rank-and-file driven union reform and renewal, **is the essential factor for change**.

This requires dealing with internal and external challenges and developing a **clear set of tactics and an overall strategy** for engaging with different sites of struggles, alliances with other popular constituencies and international solidarity. For example, many unions struggle to maintain internal democracy; for example, systems such as requiring candidates for union office to pay a deposit, obviously exclude many and running union activities without childcare facilities make it difficult for women to participate. Unions have the capacity to "mobilise international solidarity campaigns,"[18] but this has not progressed, even between African unions in neighbouring countries.

Unions are the Foundation of "Standard Employment," Not the Other Way Around

It is important here to **question the notion that union power rests upon the so-called "normal" or "standard employment relationship"**: this involves "continuous, regular and full-time employment with an identifiable employer,"[19] and also, in some accounts, a floor of basic conditions of protection, wages and hours, by law or collective agreement. [20] Yet this so-called "standard employment relationship" is not standard at all. It has been fairly rare under capitalism, while unions have been ubiquitous.

Where it has existed, it is the *product* of strong unions, not their *foundation*. In sub-Saharan Africa, as elsewhere, it was ordinary workers, through unions above all, that demanded – and sometimes won – secure and full-time work, with set basic conditions and rights. In Europe, it was through general and industrial unions that organised the masses of day labourers and other precarious workers as well as the unskilled (including in the so-called service sector), that workers made some progress towards the so-called "standard employment relationship": These unions – some anarcho-syndicalist or revolutionary syndicalist, some social-democratic, some completely "economistic" and some Communist – fought and, even in the face of massive counter-attacks by capital and the state not to mention chronic unemployment, won massive gains in job security, higher wages and bargaining rights.[21]

The more effective the unions, the greater the chance of gains. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa from the European colonial period onwards, progress towards better conditions has *depended* heavily upon workers' struggles. The British and French empires and, to a lesser extent, the Belgian, introduced major labour reforms, and drastically reduced the use of forced labour in direct response to a massive wave of strikes and urban riots beginning in the mid-1930s.[22] Wages across sub-Saharan Africa rose significantly in the 1950s and early 1960s when unions were powerful, autonomous and militant. Then they fell from the late 1960s, as post-colonial governments attacked independent unions, and tried to bring unions under direct state control. In other words, we cannot simply blame neo-liberalism for worsening conditions: changes depend on the balance of power between classes and how effectively the working class – and the popular classes more generally – organises and what it fights to achieve.

This means that **workers' organising, self-activity and self-management is the key to any real changes,** and it carries within itself the seeds of a new society. Union work – economic, political and social – is what makes any progress towards a Decent Work agenda possible, and union work can also play a central role in moving well beyond that agenda.

Working Class Globalisation

While unions have a long history of successfully organising vulnerable, oppressed workers – even under the harshest colonial conditions – many struggle today to include these workers. There are, however, some very inspiring success stories in recent years, such as efforts to organise security guards in Kenya, textile workers in Nigeria, drivers in Uganda[23] and retail workers in South Africa: unions seriously need to start to learn from past and present successes.

While capitalism is global, much of the working class movement thinks in terms of country-level solutions, rather than fighting for an African – let alone an international – minimum wage and working conditions. This requires sharing successes and resources, building an internationalist class consciousness, active solidarity in struggles across borders, fighting national, racial and religious prejudices, and effective union bodies that span multiple countries.

This globalisation-from-below also requires a serious criticism of **nationalism** –the idea that all people in a given country must unite, for the common good, and use the state to express this national interest. Nationalism's focus on the state is one of its key problems. While nationalism played a relatively progressive role in the anti-colonial struggle, it revealed itself in the post-colonial period as a tool of the emerging national ruling class, first in the period of state-led development, and second, in the period of neo-liberalism.

The Need to Reform and Renew Unions

Independent rank-and-file groups that overlap with, but are independent of, the formal structures of the unions are essential to union reform and renewal. Union reform and renewal also requires **forming alliances** between unions and other popular class organisations and constituencies, and expanding the scope and repertoire of their aims and actions. This includes working with Labour Service Organisations, although care must be taken to ensure that the autonomy of unions – and of the working class and the popular classes generally – is maintained. Independence is a precondition for internal democracy in unions.

A renewal, revival and expansion of unions also require addressing a number of key weaknesses within them, amongst others:
- Limited workers' control;
- Bureaucratic inertia;
- The low priority given to education beyond the immediate practicalities of administration and operations;
- Neglecting to develop critical thinking and class consciousness as the basis for creative responses and deep changes in the allocation of power and wealth;
- In most cases, the lack of a real vision for transforming society in the interests of the overwhelming majority;

- Entanglement in the state – including the parliamentary system and in tripartism, as well as the problems created by state-run welfare systems; and
- The lack of analyses of the relationship between capital and the state in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Need to Open the Toolbox of Past Experiences

Obviously I am placing a lot of **faith in the union movement**; I am rejecting the idea that unions' day has passed – as well as arguments (from both the right and the left) which see unions as an obstacle to something better. Let me stress that the history of African trade unionism is not the history of a marginal, new or fragile force.

A historical perspective reveals remarkable and innovative practices and actions in the past, including the important, if uneven, role of unions in national struggles against European colonialism. Long traditions of political yet independent unionism exist in many countries, during and after European colonialism.

Unions have played a key role – despite often only representing a small part of a small working class – in championing a broad set of popular demands and struggles, including those of the unemployed and self-employed, during the post-colonial period. Some unions have pioneered the development of radical, innovative popular ideologues and counter-hegemonic outlooks and also played an ongoing role in fighting for major reforms in many countries. Unions in Africa (as indeed, elsewhere) have never simply been movements of blue-collar industrial workers, but involved workers in the so-called service sector – for example, dockers, drivers, post office workers, railway workers and teachers – and in some cases, unions also successfully organised workers on plantations.

Ongoing and sometimes profound efforts have been made to push the frontiers of control of work and move towards workplace democracy. Lessons can be learned from efforts to go well beyond what the ILO and the Decent Work agenda suggest. There are important African experiences of, for example, seeking – and in some cases, achieving – control over production itself. These include efforts to use works councils and workplace occupations to establish effective union-based co-operatives and union-run services, like clinics.

Therefore, **we need to systematically learn from African union experiences** and histories. We need to revisit that history, and learn how the unions managed to build a mass base amongst casual workers, on farms, in industry and the service sector (including within the state), rather than assume that the problems are new. We need to rediscover and learn from African labour and left traditions, and recall the anarcho-syndicalist, Marxist, social-democratic and popular anti-elite traditions of the African working class, rather than reduce African union history to an undifferentiated label of nationalism and/or economism.

Union Weakness: It's Not Just About the Economy!

Obviously neo-liberalism and a neo-liberal form of global integration, has huge effects on unions. Overall, **neo-liberalism has damaged unions** by proliferating precarious employment and cutting jobs through fiscal austerity, privatisation, de-industrialisation and workplace and corporate restructuring. It is, however, important to emphasise that the problems in African unions should not

be ascribed to the acceleration of neo-liberalism and capitalist globalisation in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1980s.

The most important post-colonial factors were sustained campaigns by political parties and states to control unions – using a mixture of outright repression, stultifying legislation and the co-option of union leaderships – to impose **state-run, authoritarian corporatist systems**. These involved unions (usually pre-existing) being put under direct state control by law, often as wings of nationalist ruling parties, creating a corporatism in which state-unions– not truly independent unions – participated. **The idea was that unions would serve as state agencies to control rather than defend workers**. In the name of national unity, import-substitution industrialisation, or anti-imperialism, unions were gutted. Rather than links to the nationalist political parties strengthening unions or giving them influence in the state, they weakened unions, and gave the state influence over them. (In countries where Marxist regimes were established, an even more extreme model was established: state-run unions were used to convey government orders to workers; there was no corporatism, as there was no body of employers separate to the state, which owned almost all means of production).

The programme of seeking control over unions had negative effects on union democracy, but it **rarely succeeded**. Unionised workers continued to rebel, especially at the local level – strikes remained a fact of life in the 1960s and 1970s – and unions were increasingly wrested back from the state machinery.

Winning Battles, Losing Wars: The Need for Strategy and Vision

When neo-liberalism – largely adopted in Africa from the 1980s onwards – began, it did not lead in a straight road to union decline. To the contrary, the core response of many sub-Saharan African unions to neo-liberal reforms and Structural Adjustment Programmes was not inertia nor collapse, but a central role in a series of relatively successful struggles for democratic reforms in the state in the 1990s and 2000s. It is true that the new, more open political environment was accompanied by an *acceleration* of neo-liberalism, which was embraced by the new governments.

But this outcome was not automatic: **unions enabled it by failing, in most cases, to develop viable alternatives** to neo-liberalism and, in some cases, by establishing broad political parties which they did not control and which soon embraced neo-liberalism. The new parties used the unions to build a countrywide base, absorbed union monies and personnel, and acted as a road into state power for a small elite. They caused serious damage to unions by promoting neo-liberalism, seeking to use and control unions by drawing union leaders into the state machinery. Unions often split as a result; meanwhile the dismal outcomes of these great struggles demoralised many ordinary workers.

So, in addition to the *organisational* weaknesses bequeathed by the era of nationalism and state-corporatism (or Marxist regimes, where unions were reduced to transmission belts for the state), and reinforced by neo-liberal economic restructuring, there were also serious *political* weaknesses – specifically, unions lacked a clear alternative.

Unions were king-makers, not kings. They played a key role in opening up democratic space for popular organising, but that space was captured by small elites; these elites rode the popular movements into political office, from where they enriched themselves and their class and continued the neo-liberal attack on the African popular classes.

Unions, therefore, need to have clear tactics and strategy, which go beyond simply fighting around incomes, repression and discrimination – as important as these are. They need tactics and strategies that build a road between immediate struggles and a larger vision of profoundly changing society, from below. This requires building the counter-power of the popular classes on a broad front and aiming for a profound redistribution of power and wealth *directly* to the masses. Otherwise, we will simply repeat "the errors of the past years, the error of putting our fate into the hands of new masters," political parties and the wealthy and influential; we need "to take our destinies into our own hands, to conduct our lives in accordance with our own will."[24]

The Importance of Context: Diverse Conditions need Tactical and Strategic Nuance

While it is important to develop effective tactics and strategy, it is important to **avoid a "one-size-fits-all" approach**: any discussion of unions in sub-Saharan Africa needs to be very mindful of the great diversity in this huge region. It has 47 recognised states – around a quarter of all states worldwide – and almost a billion people; it is economically and politically diverse, and highly uneven.

This diversity is downplayed by both pan-Africanist and European imperialist narratives, which present the region as relatively homogenous, whether culturally, economically, historically or racially.[25] The same **tendency to simplification** can be found in many Marxian and World Systems approaches, which present Africa basically in terms of variants on the theme of a shared, and ongoing experience of subordination to Western imperialism.[26] It can also be found in political analyses that make sweeping generalisations about, for example, the features of "the" African state.[27]

The diversity is undeniable and it is very important for tactics and strategy. South Africa, for example, was created as a self-governing British Dominion in 1910 on the basis of white supremacy, attracting, for many years, more FDI than the rest of the continent combined, and underwent extensive inward-industrialisation, with an almost complete **proletarianisation** (the process whereby people are forced to depend on wage labour) and a decline of agriculture to less than ten percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Today it is an upper-middle-income country, where massive inequality co-exists with integration into the global economy, not just through raw material exports, but also via locally-owned private- and state-owned multi-national corporations and a large financial sector. By 2012, South Africa held the fifth largest stock of FDI in Africa.[28]

Ethiopia (formerly Abyssinia), by contrast, remained largely independent of European colonialism: from the 1850s its emperors re-established their rule over restive provinces and, from the 1880s, also expanded the empire's borders into completely new territories, retaining most of this territory into the 1990s.[29] Ethiopia perpetuated slavery into the 1940s and a feudal system into the 1970s, when a revolutionary Marxist regime was established. Compared to South Africa's dismal economic performance, Ethiopia boomed in the 2000s, but this was based on agricultural exports (and extensive privatisation), in the context of a countryside largely populated by peasants.

These may be extreme cases, but they point to **the need for caution when making generalisations**. While all sub-Saharan African countries are integrated into the global capitalist economy, they are integrated in different ways and have very different class structures, historical paths, political economies and state forms**.** Neo-liberal integration itself takes a range of forms at the local, national and regional level. For example, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which

includes most African states south of the equator, has taken large steps towards a regional free trade zone – dominated by South Africa – since 1997. There is now a separate Southern African Customs Union, a Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, an East African Community, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and, from 2008, moves to create an African Free Trade Zone.

These examples also point to the need to consider inequalities of power and wealth not only *within* African countries, but also *between* African countries, including the existence of regional hegemonies like South Africa – which in the 1990s accounted for almost two-thirds of the GDP of sub-Saharan Africa.[30] Other countries widely considered regional powers include Egypt in the north and Nigeria in the west. FDI is also wildly uneven: 15 countries received 80 percent of all inward FDI flows into Africa in 2012.[31]

Overall, given these differing scenarios, **there can be no single "African model" (or "Southern model") of unionism**: care must be taken to study specific national contexts, and to use this to develop nuanced tactics and strategy.

The Problem of Social Corporatism (Tripartism)

As argued earlier, **involvement in the state – in the form of links to political parties and parliamentary politics, of state-run, authoritarian corporatism, and of – has cost unions a great deal and delivered no gains**. Involvement in the state in a different way – through tripartism, as advocated by the Decent Work agenda – also needs to be viewed very critically. Careful consideration needs to be given to its actual record in Africa, where it is by no means rare, and elsewhere; it is useful to revisit the debates on this system, in the labour, left and mass media.[32]

State corporatism was specifically designed by post-colonial governments to control workers across much of the continent. Tripartism, by contrast, was often championed by workers' movements from the late 1980s onwards. Unions saw it as a means to give organised workers a direct say in the law as well as in economic and social policy and, in this way, to deepen democracy. In South Africa, for example, workers demanded tripartism, including during general strikes.[33]

From the late 1980s onwards tripartism emerged in a number of African countries – notably in Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa; more sporadically in Zambia and stillborn in Zimbabwe – but has failed to deliver influence for unions.[34] Sophisticated union proposals for an alternative growth path were side-lined,[35] whilst most union demands and complaints fell on deaf ears; union resources and decisions were moved away from ordinary workers towards technocrats and full-time officials; and the system helped incubate union bureaucracy. **Rather than expand working class power, it contained it**. This has been true of both strong institutionalised tripartism, as in South Africa, or weaker, more advisory forms, as in Zambia. This does not mean that there have never been any gains through tripartism – simply that the costs vastly outweigh the benefits.

Therefore, **tripartism is a threat to strong unions**. It weakens the democratic culture and ethos of self-activity and direct action that forms the very foundation of union power, side-tracking unions into a problem-solving project in capitalism. Entanglement with the state machinery – whether through state controls over unions through state-run, authoritarian corporatism, through alliances with political parties, as seen in the immediate post-colonial as well as in later pro-democracy movements, and through tripartism – damages unions. Unions can, instead, win political battles through their own direct action, and through alliances with other popular forces.

Here too, the traditions and history and experiences of African labour and the left movements therefore provide powerful lessons and rich resources for a renewed unionism. Above all, the long-term trajectory of African unions highlights the importance of unions engaging in political issues and challenging states, while steering clear of political parties and involvement in state government, as the basis for both reforms and more radical changes.

Conclusion: A Project to Challenge the Deep Class Structures of Power and Wealth

In closing, I argue that **it is useful for unions to critically appropriate parts of the Decent Work agenda** – productive, secure, dignified work, protected from direct coercion, danger and discrimination; basic rights; income protection; the right to organise and negotiate. Also, in some cases, it is **useful to make complaints to the ILO** as a means of defending workers and unions, but at the same time to **steer clear of the Decent Work agenda's more problematic features** – easy assumptions that Decent Work is compatible with capitalist globalisation, assumptions of social partnership, promotion of tripartism and state-run welfare– and to be aware of its silences.

No use of elements of the Decent Work agenda, or of the ILO system, should be a substitute for worker organising. Here we need to seriously engage with the view from below, and seriously engage with working class intellectual and organisational traditions and the lessons of past experiences. This also means seriously engaging with the rich body of debates and perspectives that exist in union and leftist newspapers and bulletins, but which rarely makes an appearance in academic and policy discourses.

Moreover, the use of elements of the Decent Work agenda should be supplemented with **a project to challenge the deep class structures of power and wealth**. No set of reforms is permanent under capitalism; even the most dramatic reforms ever experienced – the Keynesian welfare state in the Western countries, from the 1930s to the 1970s –has proved transient. It is necessary, then, to consider the means and ends of making more fundamental, deep-seated changes that can enable new, democratic societies, freed of economic and social inequalities and including economic democracy; **societies in which working and poor people are the main beneficiaries – rather than the main victims – of economic development**.

Now, let us unpack these arguments more fully.

B. DECENT WORK AND THE ILO: THE AGENDA, ITS STRENGTHS AND ITS LIMITATIONS

Let us first deal with the issue of the Decent Work agenda in more depth. The ILO adopted Decent Work as its core project in 1999, viewing it as essential to creating a fairer form of capitalist globalisation, as well as key to the renewal of a declining ILO.[36]

Ambiguities, Silences and Limitations of the ILO Project

For the ILO, Decent Work involves secure, productive employment based on adequate remuneration and core workers' rights, including to health, safety, freedom from discrimination, forced and child labour. It also embraces social security, including income protection, typically envisaged as state-

run; and social dialogue, including tripartism, between workers, employers and states, implicitly or explicitly as a means of achieving cohesion and consensus.[37] Viewed more closely, **this definition is quite vague in some key areas** – for example, what is adequate remuneration, and who defines it? – **and also quite silent on a number of central concerns** raised by union and other workers' movements – notably, issues of control over investment decisions and production processes.

The ambiguities and silences, and the assumption that the modern economy must be based on a divide between a majority, which labours for others, for wages, and small economic and political elites, which own and make decisions – can be understood when it is recalled that **the ILO is a tripartite international institution, involving capitalists, states and unions; it is connected to the United Nations (UN) system**, which is a multi-lateral body of states, intended to secure development and peace worldwide. The ILO was formed in 1919, to promote cross-class consensus, dialogue and reform.

The ILO has always had very real limitations, which limit it to modest reforms, and modest successes. It is a social corporatist (or tripartite) body, closely linked to efforts to prevent economic and social conflict taking place on a dangerous scale. As such, it necessarily views problem-solving and policy-making as taking place within the framework of capitalism. This means, firstly, that **it has to accommodate the interests of employers and authorities, not just workers**. Secondly, like any corporatist body, it **accepts a very unequal situation**, in which unions – representing tens of millions of workers, the tip of a vast and ever-growing global working class – have just one third of seats, while organised business and states – representing tiny but mighty economic and political elites – get two thirds. Thirdly, **its corporatist and consensus-seeking framework naturally makes these elite interests very central indeed to any outcomes**.

In short, the ILO assumes the "bakery" should stay in the hands of its current owners, and hopes to peacefully create a situation where the working class can have a bit more of the "pie," but without having a say in its recipe.

The ILO, Tripartism and Its Limitations

The very system of including these elites, and accepting them as social partners, entails accepting the core features of the existing social order; i.e. **the ILO approach is not a neutral, technical solution but clearly located in a tripartite reform project**. It is based on the highly contentious idea – sometimes openly expressed – that tripartite representation does not represent "distinct class interests, but rather distinct social functions."[38] Its vision of welfare reform has consistently fostered state-run welfare systems, positioning the state as a key agent in social reform and democracy, rather than promoting alternatives like worker-based mutual aid. Its model of worker representation stops at workplace co-determination and tripartism.[39] To return to our metaphor, **the working class can have some say over how the "pie" is baked, but not why it's baked, whether it should be baked, whether another recipe is possible; it can work with the owners of the "bakery," but they retain the final say in all matters**.
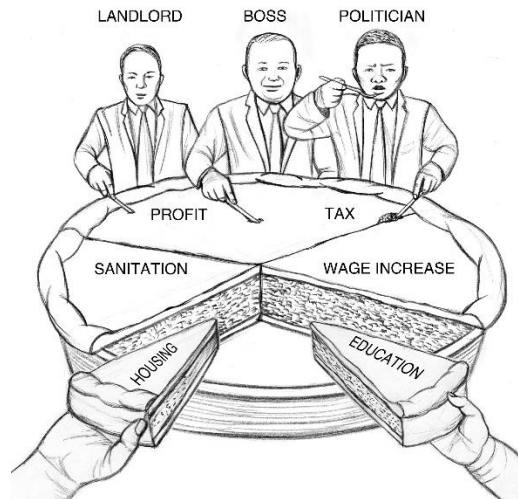
There is nothing to stop the ILO *considering* radical changes in the political economy, a new type of society, or a profound redistribution of power and wealth. It simply cannot *adopt* such positions and survive as it is, nor can it make them binding on any constituent group. **In order to operate, it needs to bring together employers, states and unions**. To ensure that key governments joined, states are encouraged, but not required, to adopt ILO conventions. Many ignore the main conventions, like the United States of America, which rarely ratifies them.[40] Some conventions have less than ten signatory countries.[41]

To keep states on board, **ILO commitments to "international minimum standards" are flexibly applied**. For example, the ILO's minimum wage fixing convention does not prescribe a minimum wage system, or a minimum wage level, but leaves decisions to states "in consultation" with "social partners."[42] For the same reason, the ILO has preferred to admit highly repressive states, rather than alienate them;[43] members today include the People's Republic of China and the Kingdom of Swaziland. Before the 1990s, it is doubtful whether more than half the ILO member states permitted free trade unions for most of their populations, let alone provided for tripartism or extensive social welfare.

Why Does this Matter for African Unions and African Workers?

First, the ILO is a fundamentally weak organisation. Within it, the balance of power is heavily tilted against organised workers. It is extremely distant from most workers, with worker representation in the ILO mainly confined to a tiny number of full-time union leaders, many of which are not operated under clear mandates from the workers. European and American Unions helped initiate the ILO, but union hopes that the ILO might be a sort of global parliament, in which workers had half the seats, have never been achieved.[44] Overall, this means the ILO is far away from the realities of the African workers, which is why most unions in sub-Saharan Africa do not see the ILO as an important ally – and they are right to be sceptical. The ILO has never been able to make the so-called "standard employment relation" a global reality. This is because **the ILO is a compromised and limited body**, unable to force member states to adopt its conventions, unable to systematically monitor whether conventions accepted by states are actually applied on the ground, and unable to do much to sanction states that break the rules.

Second, there is good reason to be sceptical of ILO agendas like Decent Work. These are in line with the ILO effort "to prove to the workers of the world that the principles of social justice might be established under the capitalist system."[45] They are shaped by the ILO's project of compromise and conciliation.

Decent Work, as understood by the ILO, emphasises improved conditions, but in a way that appeases employers. For example, the Decent Work agenda stresses *job creation*, but then it makes jobs dependent on private capitalist profits, by creating "opportunities for investment" and "entrepreneurship"; *social protection* is presented not just as assisting workers, but as making workers more productive, healthier and motivated; *social dialogue* is presented as protecting workers as well as reducing conflict, disruption and strikes at work, as desired by employers.[46] While it talks about securing guaranteed *rights at work*, including representation and participation, it is silent on the right to directly and democratically control the workplace, to have a say in what is produced; it favours a situation where workers, the majority, have less say than employers, a tiny minority.

It is a package of reforms within capitalism, based on finding areas of common interest. The Decent Work agenda aims to reform capitalist globalisation. It is not neo-liberal, because it aims at imposing limitations on corporations, and states, and on giving workers – and unions – rights in labour markets and workplaces that contradict free markets, and more influence on government through tripartism. It has provided some support for unions, such as to the Global Labour University project, with an eye on unions playing a role in tripartism: GLU aims to "increase the intellectual and strategic capacity of workers' organisations and to establish stronger working relationships between trade unions, the ILO, and the scientific community."[47]

Thus, **the ILO today tries to balance competing interests**, within the framework of capitalist globalisation, and remains enormously influenced by states. The ILO rejects crude neo-liberalism, which would destroy both the ILO project, including the ILO conventions and the ILO's tripartite agenda, and the ILO as an institution, but cannot go beyond this.

C. REALISING (SOME) DECENT WORK: CONDITIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The ILO Cannot Enforce the Decent Work Agenda

Leaving aside, for now, the ambiguities, limits and silences of the ILO's Decent Work agenda, one thing is clear: **the ILO simply does not have the power to enforce Decent Work**; this is despite the fact that it is the only UN agency in which the popular classes – represented here, by unions – have a direct say. It lacks the power to enforce its conventions, or monitor their implementation, especially in highly repressive contexts.[48] It lacks the economic instruments of multi-lateral bodies like, for example, the World Bank, and the ability to impose serious sanctions, and it has been repeatedly marginalised in the past.[49] **Its corporatism is of the weakest type.** The ILO is not able to undertake binding peak-level centralised bargaining of the type that can sometimes be found at the national level. **What the ILO does, and does well, is advocacy** – for example, promoting the Decent Work idea – and research – for example, monitoring global wage levels. **It can provide unions with some powerful arguments for reforms, and a certain legitimacy in demanding these reforms, but not much more.**

Not only is the ILO not able to do much more than bring moral pressure to bear on the powerful to adopt the Decent Work agenda, but that agenda, as shown earlier, is compromised by its attempt to balance contending interests, its acceptance of the basic framework of capitalism and the state, rather than open a discussion of more democratic and egalitarian alternatives, and marked by a mixture of undeniably positive proposals (like dignified labour) with more questionable ones (like support for tripartism and state-run welfare).

It is also incomplete, lacking a serious consideration of the question whether the Decent Work agenda, however modest it is, is compatible with capitalist globalisation – or, to put it another way, whether a non-neo-liberal form of capitalist globalisation is likely. Nor is there much real consideration of what the conditions might be for the popular classes to win substantial concessions in the current period. **There is a significant shift in the balance of forces, in many countries, in favour of the ruling classes. The development of capitalist globalisation is associated with enormous pressures for cost-cutting and tends towards a low-wage system;** is based on extreme economic unevenness between and within countries; and is marked by a shift rightwards in politics as the hollowness of parliamentary democracy and mainstream parties becomes glaringly evident, with much of the left in crisis.

Some Problems the ILO Approach Creates for African Unions

The ILO approach creates two key problems for African unions. First, the Decent Work agenda **assumes capitalism and the state are basically acceptable systems**, which simply need to be reformed to work better and more fairly. This completely closes down key questions – over who controls and owns the economy, which classes the state benefits, and whether the economy should, in fact, centre on production for the profit and power of the few – while ignoring major, built-in problems with both capitalism and the state – for example, their demonstrable inability, for any sustained period of time, to eradicate poverty, create pleasant work, or unify people.

Sub-Saharan Africa has been deeply integrated into global capitalism for well over a hundred years – in some cases, much longer – **yet massive inequality, poverty and misery persist, despite economic growth** and notwithstanding economic and political reforms. Why, then, should capitalism be regarded as the obvious solution? To put it another way, **the ILO assumes the way that the "bakery" is run is fine; the problem is the "bakery" might not deliver much of a "pie" for hundreds of millions of people**.

Neo-liberal Capitalist Globalisation, the Race-to-the-Bottom and the Conditions for Reforms

Second, there are very good reasons to believe that capitalists and states have very little reason to willingly adopt the Decent Work agenda in the era of neo-liberal capitalist globalisation. **Production for profit and power is still "the order of the day"** and "the motivation behind many of the changes" that have taken place in the global economy. [50] It is important to note here that there remain major constraints on what capitalism can do: it is far less mobile than often assumed; it is deeply shaped by national economies, and capitalism develops extremely unevenly; states are central authors of the current global economy, not simply powerless victims.[51]

There is, however, an ongoing process of integration, and it is marked by a "race-to-the-bottom." **Mass unemployment, globally and within countries, [52] large national and regional pools of low-wage labour, and mass migrations of cheap labour within and between countries, the repression of workers and unions, the deliberate promotion of conflicts within the working class, and growing possibilities for relocating production, are used to drive down workers' wages and conditions everywhere**.[53] For example, the existence of a massive low-wage, non-union Chinese industrial working class – created by a brutal state dictatorship, funded by massive foreign direct investment (FDI) – undermines labour standards worldwide.[54] While pressure from workers has led to some reforms in recent years, the overall trend – which accelerated with the global financial crisis of 2008/2009– is to continue the race-to-the-bottom, and to institute massive austerity.[55]

Smaller capitalists are pushed to drop prices to survive, and usually do this by attacking workers. Just as capitalists compete with each other, states also compete in the inter-state system. Poorer states seek more resources, and one result is that they try attract FDI; in the current context this usually means doing so by pushing wages *below* Chinese levels. For example, Asian countries like Bangladesh compete by paying wages four times lower than those in the Chinese garment industry.[56] This, in turn, creates more pressure to push down Chinese wages, and so the race continues.

Capitalist development in sub-Saharan Africa is deeply shaped by these pressures. Sub-Saharan Africa attracts only a tiny amount of global FDI, much of which goes to South Africa,[57] and much of this FDI goes to low-wage mining and manufacturing operations. Facing cheap Chinese imports, Nigerian and South African firms in clothing and footwear have either closed or cut the workforce, and gutted wages and conditions in various ways.[58]

The point is that **there is no reason to believe that employers** – including employers in sub-Saharan Africa, including states – **will *willingly* adopt any part of the Decent Work programme**. A basic ILO assumption that capitalists and states have a real *interest* in promoting Decent Work – and reforms to the benefit of the working class generally – is simply false in the era of neo-liberal capitalist globalisation.

Decent Work Agenda: Worth Nothing without Massive Pressure from Below

The Decent Work agenda will make no progress at all in sub-Saharan Africa without massive pressure from below – and this requires renewing, reviving and expanding unions. However, the scope for reforms is very limited in the current period, given the pressures for a "race-to-the-bottom." The ILO assumption that capitalism can always concede significant reforms ignores the fact that capitalism and states are, at present, locked into waging a class war from above. Even major reforms achieved by the working class and the unions in the past are everywhere being destroyed. To go back to our metaphor: **the general trend in the current period is to take as much "pie" as possible from the working class, to do as much as possible to stop the working class demanding or getting a bigger "slice," and to think the owners of the "bakery" will suddenly stop acting in this way is not very realistic**.

This suggests that the existing system is not compatible with a genuinely democratic and egalitarian society. **It is therefore essential to start to think clearly about making fundamental, deep-seated changes in society**. This means thinking beyond capitalism and the state, and linking immediate

struggles to a more ambitious long-term project that will enable a massive redistribution of wealth and power to the popular classes. The major forces riding storms of neo-liberal capitalism are the crudest forms of identity politics, nationalist and other right-wing demagogy, and right-wing religious fundamentalisms. Much of the left is paralysed, dissolving into post-modernism, or even – as in the United States – championing free trade. This needs to change, with a project to change society, for the better, from below. In other words, **it's time to start thinking about how the "bakery" can be put under more democratic control, provide enough "pie" for all, and how to make sure the "pie" is shared a lot more fairly.**

Here, the limits of the Decent Work agenda are clear: it assumes the existing system simply needs some modification; it closes discussion of key questions, such as who controls production; and it promotes measures, such as tripartism, and state-run welfare, which weaken working class movements and benefit powerful ruling classes. Indeed, while the Decent Work agenda has social-democratic sympathies, its push against the neo-liberal form of capitalist globalisation is disconnected from posing a concrete alternative socio-economic model.

Instead, the ILO concedes, Decent Work can appeal to states precisely because it is "a flexible concept which can be adapted to the aspirations of different actors."[59] Likewise, the Decent Work agenda in fact accepts flexible labour, in place of the "standard employment relationship": "Safe and motivating working environments and mutually beneficial flexible work organization improve the competitiveness and productivity of enterprises, while affording workers a fair share in the benefits of increased productivity."[60] The ILO admits the global pressure on wages and working conditions, stating: "Policies must be tailored to the specific needs of a country," and "national development frameworks."[61]   Beyond this, the ILO project rests on faith that there is a "continuing commitment of policy-makers worldwide" to minimum wages– indeed, a "renaissance of minimum wage policies" – and growing steps to protect the most vulnerable workers, "heightened awareness" of the moral and economic benefits of safe workplaces, [62] and "renewed belief in the need for regulation" of markets, and faith in the ILO.[63]

What has Made Significant Reforms Possible in the Past? A Western Example

In place of these sorts of vague hopes, a serious consideration of the prospects for the popular classes winning substantial concessions in the current period – let alone moving society towards a different form of globalisation – also requires an analysis of what has made significant reforms possible in the past. Here, it is useful to engage the social science literature that examines which factors enabled major changes to the benefit of working and poor people.

This literature is large, so I will focus on **one key example: the rise and fall of the Keynesian welfare states** of Australasia, Japan, North America and Western Europe from the 1930s onwards. These involved **the most dramatic reforms ever experienced under capitalism. They did not abolish capitalism, but they certainly managed, at least until the late 1970s, to reduce income inequality and largely eradicate absolute poverty through active labour market policies, extensive social welfare, almost full employment, and rising real wages**. This model retains a great appeal for many people today but, as I will argue, it is **no longer feasible**.

It is important to stress that the achievements of the Keynesian welfare state marked a major break with the extensive unemployment, low wages, and slums that characterised much of the West until

the 1940s. *This* was the Europe of Great Depressions – one in the 1870s/1880s, one in the 1920s/1930s – and large-scale war – notably, the driver of the World Wars of 1914-1918, and 1939-1945. It was also characterised by massive, bitter class struggles – a grim period for the working class, described in books like Jack London's 1902 *The People of the Abyss*.[64] **It is easy to forget that Western Europe was then a net exporter of immigrant labour – rather than, as today, a recipient**. Before this time around 72 million emigrated from the 1840s to the 1940s – a significant number as formally or informally indentured, or otherwise unfree, workers,[65] often as cheap labour. In Brazil, European immigrants accepted lower wages and worse conditions than former slaves.[66] Death rates in European slums were high: in Ireland, they reached 22.3 per thousand,[67] comparable to India.

It is hardly surprising that, in *this* Europe, **working class and popular movements often took a radical, even a revolutionary form**. Social-democratic parties, based in the working class, and backed by large unions, formed governments from the 1910s onwards in, for example, Britain, Germany and Sweden, and played an important role in coalitions elsewhere, such as France and Spain.[68] The rival anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist current dominated union movements in France, Portugal and the Netherlands (briefly), and Spain; powerful minority anarcho-syndicalist currents also emerged, like the Italian Syndicalist Union (*Unione Sindacale Italiana*), at 800,000 in 1920.[69] Spain's gigantic anarcho-syndicalist National Confederation of Labour (CNT, *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo*), which was in a cycle of uprisings, led the Spanish Revolution in 1936 – "'the greatest experiment in workers' self-management Western Europe has ever seen.'"[70]

Inspired by the Bolshevik victory in the Russian Revolution, new Communist Parties were established from the late 1910s, and saw the big breakthroughs from mid-1930s: the French party doubled, the British and Italian parties grew four-fold, the Austrian and Belgian parties grew ten-fold; and in the Nordic countries, Communist Party votes grew three- to twelve-fold.[71] Revolutions and attempted revolutions swept Japan and Western Europe before the 1940s: key examples by the left-wing (including by anarchists and Marxists), include Finland, Germany, Italy, Portugal, and Spain; key examples from the right-wing, include the authoritarian and fascist uprisings of, for example, Germany, Italy, Japan, France, Portugal and Spain.[72]

It is also important to stress that **the mass unions linked to these various currents played a massive role in mobilising workers,** and in making progress towards what was later called the so-called "standard employment relationship," winning wage gains, more job security and collective bargaining.[73] Social-democratic unions consistently demanded job security, bargaining rights, and protection for women and children. Accounts of anarcho-syndicalism and Marxism tend to stress their ideologies and most dramatic activities. Much, however, of their activities involved concrete actions to improve working class conditions. While anarcho-syndicalists rejected parliamentary politics and parties, as well as tripartism, they insisted struggles from below, for immediate economic and political reforms, were essential foundations for the future union-led revolution to which they aspired.[74] Many struggles by the revolutionary National Confederation of Labour (CNT, *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo*) in Spain, for example, centred on working hours, prices, wages, and rights. [75] Most Communist Parties prioritised union work: in Britain, for example, they played a key role in the 1926 general strike and the miners' union.[76]

With the rise of the Keynesian welfare state in much of the West,[77] some of the drivers of this unrest faded. **Unemployment largely disappeared from the 1950s** (and in many countries, the unemployed received substantial payments). There were massive investments into education, housing and sanitation. Substantial areas of life were "de-commodified" – basic health care, higher education, for

example – in that they were provided regardless of ability to pay.[78] By the late 1980s, income transfers through methods like social welfare, came close to 30 per cent of the joint Gross National Product (GNP) of Western countries,[79] some funded by heavy taxation on the profits and the wealthy, some by taxation and compulsory insurance schemes for the working class. **Overall levels of inequality declined: the working class became richer and the income share of the ruling class declined**. For example, in the United States of America, the income share of the top 10 percent fell from nearly 50 percent around 1928, to 33 percent in 1977.[80]
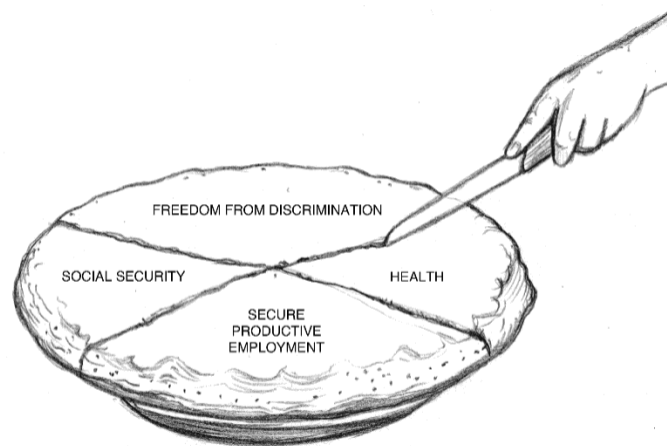
The working class, to return to our earlier metaphor, certainly got a much larger "slice" of the "pie" than ever before.

The Limits of Even the Grandest Reforms

None of this means that Keynesian welfare states abolished class and other forms of inequality. For example, universal unemployment insurance systems linked benefits to prior earnings, meaning that inequalities of pay were maintained.[81] Free, state-funded university effectively amounted to a hefty subsidy for professional and other "middle class" strata and the upper class – the layers that could most afford university fees – because working class students remained, for various reasons, a minority. Intergenerational class mobility improved, but was always limited. There were a number of significant limitations in the Keynesian welfare state – for example, it could be used to reinforce traditional gender roles, with women responsible for housework while men were the primary bread-winners.[82]Income inequality declined but not beyond a certain point. For example, the social-democratic Swedish Trade Union Confederation (*Landsorganisationen i Sverige*, LO) reported in the late 1960s that there been no marked change in income distribution since 1948, that people with low incomes had increased, and that there was a growing concentration of wealth.[83]

Actual control over major decisions always remained vested in small, overlapping economic and political elites. Democratic control of production and daily life was always very limited. Much of the income of the upper five to ten percent arose from their control of the means of production – including power over key investment decisions, the aims of production and the work process – as well as over administrative and coercive systems, including those vested in the state.

When we move from examining incomes – understanding class through life chances – to examining the *sources* of income inequality in differential relationships to the means of administration, coercion and production – understanding class through the structural inequalities that generate life

chances – a very striking picture of the Keynesian welfare state emerges. Looking at inequality in terms of wealth – ownership of capital and assets –wealth inequality in the United States actually increased in the 1950s, while in Britain, one percent of the British population owned 42 per cent of all personal net capital, and five percent 67.5 percent.[84]

The ongoing power of small, overlapping economic and political elites, or ruling classes, helps explain why much of the initial critique of the Keynesian welfare state came from the left – rather than the right – with an upsurge of radical and left-libertarian currents "grounded in feminist, environmentalist and decentralist concerns."[85] Notable examples were the 1968-1976 "reform offensive" of the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (*Landsorganisationen i Sverige*, LO), which included a push for co-determination and collective share ownership of industry through wage-earner funds,[86] and the efforts of cross-union shop-stewards' committees in Britain to promote worker-led restructuring of industry.[87]

Although the working class got a much larger "slice" of the "pie," it never controlled the "bakery" or made decisions about what sort of "pie" would be baked.

The Importance of Unions and Working Class Struggle

The Keynesian welfare state was, in short, a class compromise within capitalism, not a steady progress beyond it, as left social-democrats anticipated. What made the profound yet limited changes of the Keynesian welfare state possible? And why did this system collapse so rapidly – not as dramatically, perhaps, as the Marxist-Leninist regimes, but just as decisively – from the 1970s onwards?

There is an extensive literature on this topic, but several key factors stand out:

First, there was significant scope for compromise due to high and unprecedented levels of economic growth– the so-called "Golden Age" of capitalism, from the late 1940s to the early 1970s – along with rapid rises in productivity. This generated high levels of tax revenue, enabled substantial real wage increases and reduced unemployment, all of which made massive welfare possible. In other words, **the "pie" was much larger than before, which allowed the working class to get a much larger "slice," which still left those who ran the "bakery" with more than enough "pie" of their own.**

Second, there was enormous pressure from below for the reforms. The mass strikes, revolts and instability of the period from the 1910s to the 1940s, including during the latter part of the Second World War (1939-1945),[88] was reflected in a sharp upsurge in support for social-democratic and Communist parties. The British Labour Party, for example, won it's largest-ever vote and the Communists and social-democrats an absolute majority in France in 1945. Large sections of the ruling classes clearly believed that if the people were not given reforms, they would make revolution.[89]

The Keynesian welfare state was the massive compromise that resulted. **While there was not much the working class could do to make sure the "pie" grew, and while it never got control of the "bakery," it was able to make it very clear indeed that it would accept nothing less than a much**

bigger "slice"; the ruling classes, in turn, hoped this would appease the working class enough to prevent it seizing the "bakery" itself.

Many of the core features of Keynesian welfare state core had been developed in the 1930s – for example, the 1933 New Deal in the United States and the 1938 Saltsjöbaden agreement in Sweden – but the system was generalised from the 1940s. It involved Keynesian demand-management methods, which overlapped with extensive state welfare systems; this is in turn assumed relatively closed national economies. In some cases, it also involved active labour market policies, policies for ongoing productivity improvements, and systems of co-determination and tripartism.

Third, **it was not the election of social-democratic or Communist parties or the rise of the working class vote that explained the rise of the Keynesian welfare state.** The same basic policies were adopted – in some cases, initiated – by the main conservative and centre-right parties, and changes of government had little effect before the 1970s: the system was accepted by all major parties, United States President Richard Nixon reputedly saying "We are all Keynesians now."[90] Nor should the Keynesian welfare state, or working class gains under it, be credited to tripartism, since the Keynesian welfare state often preceded the establishment of tripartism, while some significant Keynesian welfare states, like Canada, lacked tripartite systems. There was also nothing inherent in the "needs" of capitalism that explains the Keynesian welfare state: it is perfectly possible to have a militarist, dictatorial Keynesianism, as demonstrated by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy from the 1920s.

Fourth, the relatively progressive and redistributive forms seen in the Keynesian welfare state, the extent of the reforms it involved, and the consensus the system had was due, above all, to the fear that Western ruling classes felt. It was through the power of the working class, and its allies – usually small farmers (peasants), sometimes "middle class" professionals – as demonstrated through direct actions such as strikes and mass organisation, especially through unions – that the scene changed. Without massive working class pressure, the main progressive and redistributive features of the Keynesian welfare state – indeed, the Keynesian welfare state itself –would never have appeared. **Never underestimate the power of a unified working class, including powerful unions, and of collective action.**

What undermined Significant Reforms Possible in the Past? A Western Example

Conversely, once these conditions broke down, the Keynesian welfare state did too. There was a **global economic crash in 1973** – a new Great Depression (although not named as such) which undermined the great compromise. Efforts to revive economies using Keynesianism failed. To go back to our metaphor: **the "bakery" was in trouble and the "pie" was getting smaller**.

This was partly because capitalism itself had changed in the meantime. **The Keynesian welfare state was a *national-level* compromise, which gave large, national firms industrial peace, a large customer base and healthy, educated workers. By the 1970s, the major firms in the West had evolved into multi-national corporations that did not need – and did not want – the old compromise**. They found the regulations and costs of the Keynesian welfare state a hindrance to their efforts to adjust to the capitalist crisis, and **they saw their future in low-wage production for global markets, rather than high-wage production for national markets**.

Overlapping economic and political elites, who had always retained control of the key levers of power, **abandoned the Keynesian welfare state in favour of what we now call neo-liberal capitalist globalisation**. Left parties, including social-democrats, increasingly accepted the new order of things, either under pressure or because they were so heavily integrated into the ruling classes that they were willing disciples; they jettisoned state intervention, redistribution, unions and, in most cases, class politics in favour of free markets, welfare cuts, flexible labour, higher prices, cost recovery and weaker unions. Neo-liberalism had replaced the Keynesian welfare state as the new "common-sense" of the main parties of left and right. Left parties quietly metastasised into neo-liberal parties, hardly different to those on the right – like the British Labour Party under Tony Blair, or the Democrats under Bill Clinton. The new period involved sharply reducing the size of the "slice" of the "pie" that the working class got.

And what about the working class? It had lost the power that forced major reforms; it no longer instilled fear into ruling classes, which had become far stronger with the rise of the multi-national corporation. **The power and pressure of the working class had, in fact, declined under the Keynesian welfare state.** Long years of involvement in tripartism and with political parties had enfeebled many unions, bureaucratising them, and displaced their activities away from struggle and into boardrooms. **The gains the working class made came at the cost of working class autonomy.** Union leaderships were increasingly integrated into systems of centralised bargaining and/or tripartism. "It is no coincidence that those societies most commonly listed as corporatist – Austria, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands – contain the most highly centralised union confederations in the Western world."[91]

The parties of the left became integrated into the capitalist state as a basically statist vision of change came to predominate. Working class politics – which had become structured around politics at the national level and national-level class compromises – was generally unable to deal with problems that could not be solved at the national level, such as a global economic crisis and the globalisation of capital. While Western ruling classes went increasingly global, Western working class movements tended to remain decidedly local. **While the working class was very unhappy to see its "slice" or the "pie" getting smaller, year on year, and resented the increasingly visible gluttony of the owners of the "bakery," its ability to demand a larger "slice" – let alone threaten to seize the "bakery" itself – had declined dramatically.**
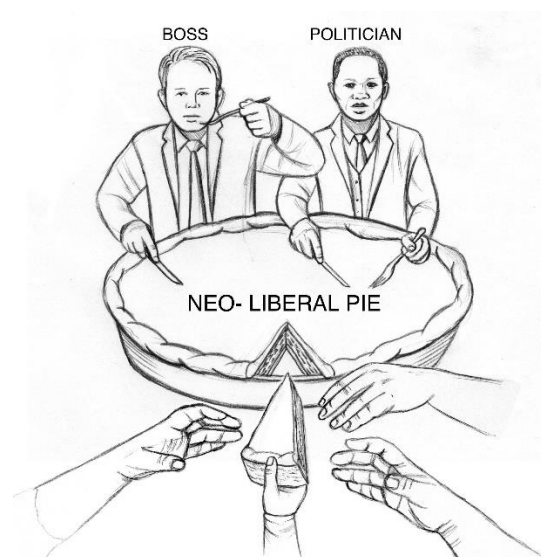
Conclusion for This Section

The key factor that has enabled working class people to make major gains is the massive pressure they are able to exert on ruling classes. While Western experiences like the Keynesian welfare state may seem far away, in terms of place and time, they underline the point that victories won by the working class are not dependent upon which party is in power, but on the strength of the people. They also show that **immersion into the political party system and parliament, and into social corporatism (tripartism), saps the strength of the working class. Reliance on state-run welfare systems, too, creates serious problems.**

Powerful working class movements – especially unions – are the key factor in winning substantial reforms under capitalism, while involvement in tripartism and in electoral politics is both unnecessary and undesirable. As this section has shown in its discussion of the limitations of the Decent Work agenda and the rise and fall of the Keynesian welfare state, what is possible depends a great deal on the form of capitalism at a given time. **In the era of neo-liberal capitalism the battle for reforms will require serious organising and action – especially by unions – as well as serious consideration of the need to fight for deep changes to transform society in the interests of the immense majority.**

D. AFRICAN UNIONS: PASTS, POWERS, POTENTIALS

Earlier, I provided a partial overview of the history of African unions, and argued for the need to take the history and experiences of African labour seriously in considering the future. In this section – the last – I develop this argument more thematically**, examining the successes and the failings of the union movement in sub-Saharan Africa.**

Class Struggles in Africa before European Colonialism

Unions in Africa date back to the late 1800s; strikes by wage workers can even be traced back to the 1700s in some cases. But unions, as organisations of working people, are themselves a recent expression of a longer struggle by the common people – the popular classes – to improve their lives, assert their power, and defend their rights and dignity, going back well before modern European colonialism.

We know relatively little about the long history of class struggles in Africa, because of relatively limited research into the history of Africa's labour and left movements, especially for the period before European colonial domination. Research on sub-Saharan African history tends either to present a simplistic image of a classless, egalitarian, harmonious, static, village-based world – an idea shared by many European colonialists and African anti-colonial nationalists – or a story of mighty emperors, kings and states. In both cases, class conflict is seen as something fairly new, beginning with the external European intrusion, or class and capitalism as something purely Western.

However, as African scholars on the left have pointed out, notions of a timeless, universal African culture and social order ignore difference, conflict and change and reproduce key elements of colonial racial thinking, creating a disempowering mythology.[92] Obviously there were egalitarian and

classless and egalitarian societies in Africa, just as there were elsewhere, including in the recent past. **But, as the late Bernard Makhosezwe Magubane, a Marxist, argued, Africa was no "eldorado of egalitarianism" even before its incorporation into world capitalism; it included numerous societies based on serfdom, slavery, tributary modes of production, and other class systems.**[93]

On the other hand, **histories that focus on the rulers of black African civilizations ignore issues of class, domination and production i.e. they focus on elites, and ignore the story of the majority of Africans, who made up the popular classes, the exploited, and the poor.**[94] Once we start to take the long history of the majority seriously, and stop framing African history primarily around European colonialism – just one "episode in African history," in the words of J. F. Ade Ajayi[95] – a very different account emerges.

Class was central to, for example, the south-eastern African kingdoms of Mapungubwe, Mwenemutapa, Tembe and Zimbabwe.[96] It is probable that, "even at the height of the Atlantic slave trade, there were many more African slaves serving within Africa than outside."[97] **There were indigenous systems of wage labour, forced labour, plantation slavery, conquest and national oppression.**[98] Some African elites – for example, in coastal Dahomey (now part of Benin), Sokoto (now part of Nigeria), and Zanzibar (now part of Tanzania) – developed their own slave plantations to engage in global commerce, and some responded to the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade by importing and using more slaves.[99] These class systems were far from benevolent, as many black nationalists have insisted,[100] and apologias for these systems should be viewed very sceptically.[101] They were no better, and no worse, than similar systems in other parts of the world.

Furthermore, **recent work has started to reveal a picture of resistance by commoners, serfs and slaves within indigenous African class societies**, ranging from small daily acts of insubordination, to desertion and the creation of fugitive communities, to open struggle. These include strikes in ancient Egypt, peasant unrest in feudal Abyssinia, slave revolts in the Songhai Empire in the 1500s, waves of popular unrest in the late Ottoman period in North Africa, and resistance to labour demands imposed through tribal regiments in southern Africa.[102]

Slave resistance escalated in the early European colonial period.[103] There was a significant amount of resistance by sailors, servants, slaves and soldiers in the colonial Cape of Good Hope, ruled by the Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, VOC), followed briefly by the revolutionary Batavian Republic, then by the British Empire from 1806, including large-scale mutinies and revolts in the 1790s and 1800s.[104] One of the earliest strikes by wage workers took place at 1752 in the Cape Colony.[105] In Senegal –where France had a presence from 1659 – the Commanding Officer of the town of Saint-Louis (Ndar) imposed wage limits in 1804, after employers complained of being forced to accept "intolerable" increases – this indicates some degree of class consciousness (and organised solidarity) among these workers.**[106]**

Therefore, when unions emerged in Africa from the late 1800s onwards, they built on centuries and millennia of class struggle and resistance. Unions emerged from at least 1881, with the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners in Cape Town, based among white workers;[107] unions emerged in Algeria and Egypt from the 1890s. Unions including Arabic, Asian, black African or Coloured (or *mestiço*) workers started to emerge in Egypt, Mozambique, Senegal, and South Africa in the first decade of the 1900s.[108] Meanwhile, **a wave of modern socialist groups and ideas – mainly anarchist and syndicalist – emerged in from the 1870s in parts of North Africa and southern Africa, followed by a series of Communist and other Marxist currents.**[109]

Defeating Casual and Forced Labour under Colonialism and an Earlier Globalisation

Although our knowledge of the history of labour and the left in the colonial and postcolonial period is surprisingly limited – even for countries with deeply rooted socialist currents and large union movements, like Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria and South Africa[110]— **it is possible to point to some key themes, which can inform the discussion on the Decent Work agenda in sub-Saharan Africa**. There are important traditions and experiences of African labour and the left movements that provide powerful lessons and rich resources for a renewed unionism.

African unions _have_ defeated widespread casual wage labour, and the division between waged and non-waged sections of working class, in the past. **The "standard employment relationship" is, in fact, a myth**: it is only one form of employment under capitalism, comparatively rare when viewed historically or globally. Even in Western countries under the Keynesian welfare state of the 1930s to the 1970s, it co-existed with other forms of employment and of household income, such as renting out rooms, subsistence work, second jobs, credit from schemes like pawn-broking, begging and crime.[111]

To pose the so-called "standard employment relationship" as the key to building strong unions rests upon a grave misunderstanding of working class life and conditions, and as well as a grave misunderstanding of the relationship between unions and the so-called "standard employment relationship." **European colonialism from the mid-1800s largely phased out slavery, relying instead on wage labour (much of it by migrant men, who retained rural homesteads; some of it provided by Asian, Coloured /_mestiço_ or white workers), as well as on large peasantries. There was extensive use of forced (and unfree) labour, including _corvée_ labour on public works, and indenture,[112] along with widespread use of casual and precarious labour.** This was reinforced by the norms of the first modern capitalist globalisation: running roughly from the 1870s and crashing in the 1920s – which involved levels of international trade, FDI and global labour flows on a larger scale than in the 1990s, along with massive advances in telecommunications and transportation. [113]

In some ways, the labour situation was far tougher than that of today: forced labour was legal in the colonies, where colonial subjects faced repressive and racist laws; labour relations and workplaces were often highly authoritarian – if not despotic – and marked by racial discrimination and low wages; unions rarely had legal rights anywhere, including in the West.

Despite this situation, **the unions made amazing advances through massive struggles**. The ILO had been putting pressure on the empires to reform their labour practices in their colonies, but, as noted earlier, the ILO had tiptoed around the great powers for many years. In practice, however, the ILO allowed a differentiation of labour conditions between metropole and colony, and could do very little to ensure that colonial officials actually implemented the commitments and conventions accepted by imperial authorities.[114]

By contrast, **major changes in colonial labour law and rights were imposed by the African working class, with a massive wave of strikes and riots beginning in the mid-1930s,[115] itself part of a global strike wave**. **The British and French empires, and to a lesser extent, the Belgian empire, were obliged to introduce major labour reforms and drastically reduce the use of forced labour.** For example, a mass strike initiated by dockers in Dar es Salaam spread across Tanganyika (Tanzania from 1964), drawing in railway workers and teachers: after twelve days it ended, followed by a tribunal that recommended huge wage increases and union rights "'each category of workmen.'"[116]

Even more dramatically, **following a general strike across its West African colonies in 1952, France was forced to reform its colonial labour laws**: workers dependent on wages got a 40-hour week, paid vacations, accident insurance and union rights; these measures were directly modelled on the laws used in France itself.[117] **Decades later, the same pattern was seen in South Africa, where the powerful new unions built from the 1970s played a key role in winning higher wages and better jobs for black workers.** By 1995, black African union members earned 20 percent more, and white union members ten percent more, than non-union labour, [118] and the unions won a stunning series of labour reforms in the 1980s and 1990s.
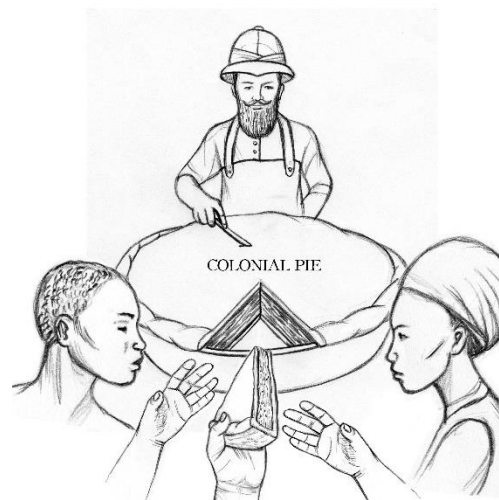
COLONIAL PIE

While African workers never came near to winning control of the "bakery" under colonialism, they were able to win a larger "slice" of the "pie," and to win better conditions in which to eat it.

Overcoming Divisions and Borders: Working Class Internationalism from Below

African workers did not win every part of the so-called "standard employment relationship" in this period, but they made significant progress towards it. **One of the great achievements of African unions in this time was to overcome ethnic and in some cases racial divisions amongst workers. Capitalism, including in its colonial form in the past, and in its neo-liberal form today, and states, too, actively promote divisions between workers. The effect is that of weakening workers' struggles. Since struggles are key to winning gains – both the right to a bigger "slice" of the "pie," and the possibility of getting control of the "bakery" – overcoming such divisions is an issue of extraordinary importance for workers, unions and the working class.**

While unions have often struggled in this arena – especially in terms of "tribal," racial, gender and immigrant/national divisions – there are many remarkable success stories.

One key example comes from East Africa, where the working class was deeply divided by race.[119] In colonial Kenya, wage levels differed by legal status, race, skill, as well as between migrant and urbanised workers. [120] Indians were a major factor in the Kenyan working class. Around 37,000 indentured Indians worked on the Uganda railroad from 1896-1902,[121] and Indian indentured labour continued to be used in Kenya until 1922.[122] Despite the repatriation of indentured workers, and strict immigration policies, the local Indian population reached 34,000 by 1914.[123] There were six times more Indians in Nairobi than whites, with the Indian population almost half that of black Africans.[124]

Divisions between the races were assiduously promoted by the colonial authorities. Indian workers organised the first strikes in the 1890s,[125] and there were joint African-Indian strikes from as early as 1900.[126] However, unions tended to follow racial lines: in 1914 the first East African union was formed, the Indian Trade Union; white workers formed their own union in 1919; both Indian and black African workers tried to organise unions in the 1930s, but these were generally separate.[127] In 1937, under pressure from a growing number of strikes, the colonial state sought to control and divide unions: unions deemed political or undesirable would not be permitted to register in the new industrial relations system, denied legal rights and pressured to dissolve.[128]

The left-wing of the union movement centred on Makhan Singh – an Indian radical linked to the anarchist/ syndicalist-influenced international Ghadar Party[129] and, later, by the Communist Party of India – who developed a profound challenge. The Kenya Indian Labour Trade Union, established in 1934, was rebuilt into a non-racial Labour Trade Union to "harness and mobilise the energies and fighting spirit of the African, Indian and other workers of Kenya."[130] I**n 1937, it was renamed the Labour Trade Union of East Africa, as it had spread into Tanganyika and Uganda. [131] It drew in Indian and black African members, aligned with black African strikes and organisations, issued materials in African, Asian and European languages, built connections with unions in Britain and South Africa, and linked up with the 1930s Chinese and Spanish anti-fascist struggles.**[132]

In 1939, the Labour Trade Union of East Africa held an unprecedented May Day rally, its largest ever congress, which formed a tenants' association to fight around rents and related issues in Nairobi and helped inspire a mass strike in Mombasa.[133] The union movement grew rapidly during the war, as did strike action, despite war-time repression and the introduction of labour conscription; it expanded post-war, with general strikes in Mombasa and Kisimu in 1947.[134] By 1948, the Labour Trade Union had 12 affiliate unions, and close ties to a range of other unions[135] It campaigned for the eight-hour day, full union rights, "equal pay for equal work" for blacks and Indians, and a united non-racial labour movement – "non-racial" meaning that race was not the basis for membership but, instead, agreement with the goals and project – and adult franchise on a common roll to the colony's legislature.[136]

It then united with other unions to form, in 1949, the East African Trade Union Congress (covering Kenya and Tanganyika and with links in Uganda), uniting black African and Indian workers.[137] What the Congress had achieved was truly remarkable: it had united workers across a deep divide *within* one country, as well as started to operate across state borders, being involved in *several* countries.

There are a number of other examples from southern Africa of bottom-up cross-border activities, including close links between the **unions of white miners** in South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe from the 1920s into the 1940s, and the **Food and Canning Workers Union**, which operated amongst black and Coloured workers in both South Africa and Namibia in the 1940s.[138]

An even more dramatic example was the Industrial and **Commercial Workers' Union of Africa** (ICU), formed in 1919: a massive radical union, it was influenced by revolutionary syndicalism, Marcus Garvey and other currents.[139] The ICU spread into Namibia in 1920, into Zimbabwe in 1927, and Zambia in 1931.[140] The ICU explicitly aimed to organise "'One Great Union of Skilled and Unskilled Workers, South of the Zambezi" (the northern border of South Africa is much further to the south, the Limpopo river), and envisaged the "other" ICUs as part of a single unitary body. The Namibian ICU, based at Lüderitz, attended the main ICU congresses in South Africa; the formation of the ICU *yase Rhodesia* body was approved at the 1927 ICU congress in South Africa, and this body was expected to transfer twenty per cent of its income to the main ICU administration in South Africa.[141]

Unions in sub-Saharan Africa have often been among the only organisations that have – by organising workers as workers; that is, organising on class lines – **organised across divisions of ethnicity, "tribe," nation, race, language and religion**. There are many examples of unions that have reinforced divisions, of course, but unions are potentially universal in their coverage of workers.

Like the Labour Trade Union in East Africa, for example, the ICU generally opposed ethnic or "tribal" divisions, sought to organise in both country and town, made major strides towards uniting black African and Coloured (*mestiço*) workers, proposed alliances with white workers' unions in South Africa (and, to some extent, Zimbabwe), and formed close links to unions in Europe –as well as to the ILO. In 1946, two years before the apartheid government came to office, two-thirds of workers in the South African Trades and Labour Council – which organised the majority of white workers, and had over 168, 00 members of all races – were in unions that included black African, Coloured and Indian workers. [142]

Moving Beyond the Workplace, Uniting the Popular Classes

The remarkable achievements of unions in French-speaking West Africa, and English-speaking East Africa show how an imaginative unionism can win major concessions, even in very difficult conditions – such as during the liberal capitalist globalisation of the 1870s to the 1920s, the Great Depression in the 1930s, and under outright colonial rule. It is also important to stress here that these unions were **operating in conditions of widespread unemployment and without donor funding**, beyond occasional international union solidarity. It is also important here to dispel any notion that these unions were narrowly focussed on industrial workers, or on factories. Other than mining, the unions' main base lay in the service sector – dockers, drivers, post office workers, railway workers and teachers; in some cases, unions also successfully organised workers on plantations.[143]

Furthermore, in sub-Saharan Africa (as in Europe**) union and worker actions – especially general strikes – were able to mobilise housewives, the unemployed, the "urban crowd," and whole neighbourhoods into the struggle.**[144] In Africa and in Europe these expansive general strikes were often integral parts of larger popular uprisings, sometimes escalated into revolutions: the 1917 Russian Revolution itself began with factory-based mass strikes – for food, lower prices and an end to Russian participation in the First World War. In Africa, expansive general strikes provided a means of linking the broader working class, beyond the unionised workers. For example, in 1946, a two-month long strike movement in Dakar, Senegal – including an 11 day general strike – drew in labourers, civil servants, clerks and street traders.[145] Wages were increased, and some workers got family allowances and other perquisites.

What also emerges clearly is that **unions were able to raise profoundly political issues without being subservient to – and, in many cases, without having any formal links to – political parties, including the emerging nationalist movemen**t. **They overcame the artificial division between economic and political issues,** and the notion that the former were the preserve of unions, with the latter the responsibility of political parties. Contrary to later nationalist mythologies, which present an image of seamless unity, relations where often fraught. African nationalist leaders distanced themselves from the great French West African railway strike of 1947-1948, and some actively undermined it.[146]

While the Labour Trade Union of East Africa worked with the Kenyan nationalists – some of whom played a prominent role in its structures and ranks – and joined with more nationalist unions like the African Workers Federation to form the East African Trade Union Congress, it left a distinctly left

imprint of its own. The Labour Trade Union influenced the East African Trade Union Congress's radical programme for workplace and social reforms, and the Congress's vision that workers must "have their own share" in an independent Kenya. [147] **Here we see also the importance of a larger vision of social change: Singh favoured a pro-poor, pro-worker and pro-peasant mode of decolonisation which would see the popular classes playing a decisive role in running society and in setting its priorities, including its economic priorities**.

The East African Trade Union Congress was one of the first organisations to demand a democratic and independent Kenya,[148] soon expanding this to call for the "complete independence" of Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda and Zanzibar.[149] By contrast, key nationalists, among them Jomo Kenyatta, were mainly concerned at the time with reforms to colonialism. Meanwhile Singh was also involved in forming tenants' unions, running worker education and setting up a co-operative farm.[150] Despite massive repression in 1950, the union pulled off the biggest general strike in Kenyan history in May, drawing in all the main towns,[151] and resurfaced as the Federation of Registered Trade Unions in 1952.[152]

What Undermined Significant Reforms in the Past? African Examples

It is also clear from the African experience that political parties have tended to have very damaging effects on unions. Soon after independence, as noted earlier, nationalist parties actively suppressed independent unions using repression, new laws, and the co-option of union leaderships, imposing state-run, authoritarian corporatist systems. The impression is sometimes given in the literature that these efforts at incorporation were facilitated by union links to nationalist parties and a shared commitment to a post-colonial states' "development" agenda.[153] This is not altogether accurate. **Few sub-Saharan African unions had formal links to the nationalist parties during the national liberation struggles, most jealously guarding their autonomy, participating on their own terms, or focussing narrowly on workplace issues**.

The attempt to incorporate had other roots. Import-substitution-industrialisation is typically based on cheap labour, and powerful, independent African unions had long shown their ability to enforce wage demands. Furthermore, **the state was one of the largest employers of wage labour – by the late 1960s – often *the* largest, as a result of extensive nationalisation – and rightly considered militant labour a direct threat to its operations. Since post-colonial states developed into the principal site for the consolidation and expansion of an indigenous ruling class – a phenomenon sometimes described as a "bureaucratic bourgeoisie"[154]— unions and strikes had the potential to oust incumbents from senior state positions that provided access to power and wealth.[155]** As elsewhere, the "national vitality and heroism" of national liberation struggles was followed by "plunder and despotism," led by a "new bureaucratic aristocracy," drawn from the nationalists, "corrupted in the service of the State." [156]

It was not, then, a question of nationalist affinity that explains the programme of trying to control unions; rather, the drive to control over unions was a class war from above. **The new elites were well aware that union demands were directly at odds with their class interests, and that their "development" model was not shared by many workers**. As in the period before European colonial domination, contradictions within African societies were deep. **The "bureaucratic bourgeoisie's" antipathy towards independent unions was, of course, shared by local private capitalists, as well as by foreign multi-national corporations**. State intervention was by no means merely the culmination of ongoing state efforts, in a spirit of "emotional maturity and democratic broad-mindedness," to aid workers and avoid ill-advised actions.[157]
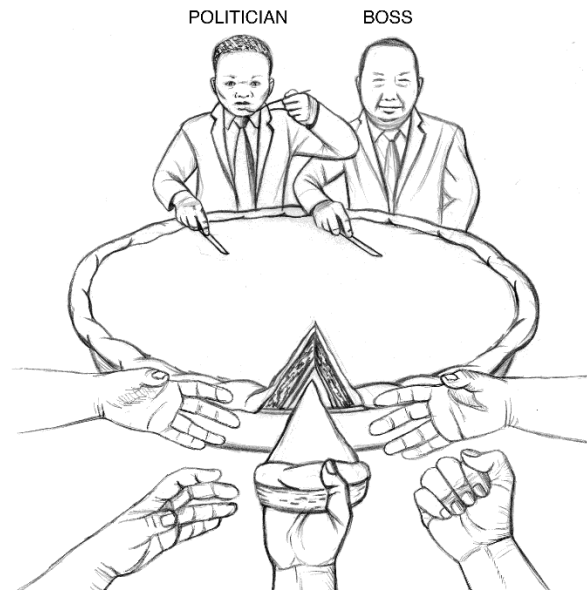
While unions sometimes received some benefits from state-run, authoritarian corporatism, such as money for education, buildings or stop-order facilities, **the core aim was to use unions to restrict wage demands, prevent strikes and maximise productivity**.[158] In Kenya, for example, unions were restructured into the state-controlled Central Organisation of Trade Unions, strikes were banned, wage-setting was used to keep wages down, and radicals like Singh were marginalised. The attack on unions was accompanied by propaganda presenting unions as selfish, wage workers as labour aristocracies and exploiters of the peasantry, and worker dissent as sabotage of the nation.[159] These arguments were not restricted to conservative post-colonial governments but were shared by, for example, Frantz Fanon, Léopold Sédar Senghor and Julius Nyerere. In Tanganyika (now Tanzania), where strikes were effectively banned in 1962 and a state-controlled National Union of Tanganyika Workers was created in 1964, Nyerere insisted that workers who did not keep their demands within the limits of what "society" could afford, or who showed "capitalist ideas," needed to be "coerced by the government."[160]

The push to put unions under state control obviously had negative effects on union democracy and on working class autonomy and struggle. Union finances were often placed under state control, with key union positions appointed by the ruling party; union leaders were expected to show fealty to the party and its project; and factional divisions in the party spilled over into unions in damaging ways as personal ambitions and patronage politics.[161]

As argued earlier, the more effective and powerful the unions, the greater the prospects of winning real gains. Conversely, **where union power is weakened, gains are eroded, conditions worsen, and rights decline.** There is no doubt that the programme of incorporation and authoritarian state capitalism weakened unions and therefore, workers. Wages fell in many African countries in the 1960s and 1970s.[162] Likewise, under African Marxist regimes, where unions were reduced to transmission belts for the state, wages were generally very low. The pattern of low and falling wages, then, cannot be explained away by reference to the global economic crisis of the 1970s or the neo-liberalism that emerged, since it *preceded* both.

Expansive General Strikes and Rebellions under State-Run, Authoritarian Corporatism

However, state-run, authoritarian corporatism, state repression or African Marxist regimes' efforts to turn unions into transmission belts for the state, did not and could not eliminate the factors giving rise to working class resistance and rebellion. Contrary to the "labour aristocracy" propaganda, sub-Saharan African workers generally earned very low wages, with incomes barely above the peasants, with whom many workers were, in any case, closely connected by family; wage differentials by skill were often modest and declining.[163]

Workers' demands and strikes continued to rise up, sometimes dramatically, through the official unions, especially at the local level. In Marxist-run Mozambique, workers were expected to channel demands through *conselhos de produção* (production councils) from 1979, followed by the state-run *Organização dos Trabalhadores de Moçambique* (Mozambican Workers Organisation), formed 1983. Workers used these bodies to raise grievances, although strikes were rare.[164]

In Zambia, on the other hand, many workers were of the view that the ruling nationalists, led by Kenneth Kaunda, "delivered lots of unfulfilled promises" and "sided with exploiters just like the colonial Ministers did."[165] Although unions were brought under increasing state control in 1964-1971, there were 241 strikes in 1966 alone, often driven by local branches and structures.[166] In Ghana, a strike wave on the mines from 1968-1971 was deeply entangled with a "revolt by the rank-and-file against a wilfully oligarchical leadership," sometimes through rank-and-file committees, which forced some reforms in the unions.[167] To survive, even the most "oligarchical" leaders were compelled to respond to popular demands, or lose credibility and positions.[168]

Expansive general strikes continued to be used in the post-colonial period. In Nigeria, a relatively divided union movement came together in 1963 as a Joint Action Committee, which opposed a wage freeze with a three-day national strike organised in the civil service, followed by a general strike. It demanded not just a new wage policy but extensive nationalisations as a "post-colonial measure to restore the national economy from old and new neo-colonialists ... and to give a democratic basis for our independence,"[169] enabling the strike to provide a popular rallying point for popular discontent in independent Nigeria. In Ghana, where unions were placed under increasing state control from 1958, a massive strike in 1961, led by the dock and railway workers, protested a new property tax on houses and a compulsory savings scheme, and won enthusiastic support from unskilled workers, market women, and the unemployed. It raised issues around housing, the national Budget, the top union leaders and the "increasingly oligarchical and authoritarian style" of Kwame Nkrumah's government; the strike leaders making the open threat that "If Parliament does not give way to the demands of the people, they would disband that body by force."[170] It helped express a mentality that stressed the virtues and culture of the "common folk," contrasted with an "idle, parasitic, and fundamentally corrupt urban elite."[171]

Naturally such strikes faced significant obstacles in systems involving state-run, authoritarian corporatism and efforts to incorporate union leaderships, whether through labour law or through patronage politics. However, such systems were manifestly unable to contain workers, or to prevent rank-and-file initiatives for collective action or for more union democracy.

Workers in sub-Saharan Africa were an integral part of the global strike wave of the late 1960s and early 1970s, despite all state measures to dampen the struggle: key events included the strikes in Ghana from 1966-1970,[172] the "May" revolt in Senegal in 1968,[173] strikes on an unprecedented scale in Botswana in 1968 and the 1970s strikes that culminated in the massive miners' strike of 1975,[174] the 1971-1973 strikes in Tanzania,[175] the 1971-1972 strikes in Namibia, the 1972 Madagascar mass strikes,[176] and, of course, the "Durban strikes" in South Africa in 1973.

In some cases existing union leaderships were actively involved in the strikes; in some cases, they were dragged in by pressure from below; in other cases, they were pushed aside. It proved extremely difficult for governments to prevent new layers of leadership, thrown up in these struggles and rising rapidly in the official unions, from seeking to re-establish union independence. Key examples are the rise of Frederick Chiluba in the Zambian Congress of Trade Unions in the 1970s, and of Morgan Tsvangirai in the Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions, which in both cases ended with the unions severing the links binding them to the ruling nationalist parties.

Unions as Forces for Political Reforms: The "Second Liberation" from the 1980s

Three final experiences in African union history bear discussion.

The first experience relates to **the role of unions in the sub-Saharan African pro-democracy movements of the 1980s and 1990s**. In the 1980s, many unions emerged as a force championing political reforms. By the early 1990s, authoritarian states faced pressures for political change on a scale unprecedented since the dissolution of colonial rule a generation earlier.[177] At the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall, 38 out of 45 sub-Saharan African states were governed by authoritarian civilian or military governments; 18 months later, half had been forced to commit themselves to multi-party elections and major limitations on executive powers, and some had actually held elections in which incumbent elites – mostly the old nationalist parties –were expelled from power.[178]

Unions were often, besides churches and other faith-based organisations, the only countrywide, popular organisations, with any significant base or resources. The central role of unions was closely allied to the fact that the implementation of neo-liberalism by post-colonial states, many ruled by the same nationalist parties that took office at independence, had a devastating effect on workers. **Many countries' economies were in serious economic decline** – partly due to the product of the 1973 global economic crisis, which gutted demand for African exports and also partly due to the damaging effects of the "bureaucratic bourgeoisie's" accumulation by draining state resources into private holdings.

It was the popular classes who bore the brunt of neo-liberal reforms, including Structural Adjustment Programmes sponsored by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, with the rises in consumer prices due to currency devaluation and cuts in government subsidies on consumer staples like fuel and food, the erosion of state-run health and education services, rising unemployment due to austerity in the state sector, as well as the liquidation and privatisation of State enterprises**. Economic and political elites were generally unaffected by these impacts, and well-positioned to accumulate additional wealth** through, for example, corrupt privatisation deals. In effect, the neo-liberal restructuring involved throwing "the cost of restructuring onto the poor."[179]

Effectively, this **restructuring was the African equivalent of the class war from above** taking place at the same time in the West – with the dismantling of the Keynesian welfare state – and part of the creation – in which states played a central role – of neo-liberal capitalist globalisation, and its "race-to-the-bottom**." It resulted in mass protests in the 1980s, which fed into the 1990s pro-democracy movements. Existing governments were widely discredited for authoritarian rule, economic pauperisation and plunder.**[180]

Nationalism – the idea that all people in a given country must unite, for the common good, and use the state to express this national interest – had played a relatively progressive role in the anti-colonial struggle. In the post-colonial period, however, it revealed the character of serving the interests of a small national ruling class, first in the period of state-led, authoritarian corporatist development and second, in the period of neo-liberalism. **The ability of nationalism to contain class divisions, and to convince the popular classes that the post-colonial national state served the interests of all, was enormous, but continually undermined by the actions of the local ruling class**, and the lived experience of the popular classes, including workers and unions.

Winning the Battle, Losing the War: The Question of States and Strategy

However, **while unions played a major role in the new movements** – most dramatically, the ousting of the Kaunda government in Zambia, where the union-backed Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) swept the 1991 election, with Frederick Chiluba, a former union leader, as the new President – **they won the battle only to lose the war.**

Where union leaders and union-backed parties won elections, entanglement in the state generated precisely the same problems as before: those in office rapidly joined the ruling class, usually adopting its mores and political culture, and developing class interests at odds with the working class, peasantry and poor. The most dramatic example was the MMD: in office, it undertook the largest privatisation programme in Zambian history, and became increasingly corrupt and intolerant. The MMD embrace of neo-liberalism cannot be explained away as due to the pressures of office: the 1991 MMD election manifesto was perfectly clear that under MMD rule, "The government restricts itself to rehabilitate and build socio-economic infrastructure with a small public sector in the midst of a basically private enterprise economy."[181]

The pro-democracy movements were generally captured by elites. They were generally sceptical of the old nationalism, and of the nationalist parties that took power at independence, but they remained **convinced that problems could be solved through the national state**. The formation of political parties aiming at state power was the immediate consequence, and proved **central to the process of elites capturing the pro-democracy movements**. The new parties used the unions to build a countrywide base, absorbed union monies and personnel, and acted as road into state power for a small elite. They caused serious damage to unions by promoting neo-liberalism, seeking to use and control unions, drawing union leaders into the state machinery; unions often split as a result, as happened in Zambia after the MMD victory; meanwhile the dismal outcomes of these great struggles demoralised many ordinary workers.

The reason that unions and other popular class organisations ended up in this situation is that they had **failed to develop a real project for transforming society in the interests of the immense majority**. The problems facing the mass of the people were reduced to the corrupt authoritarianism of a few leaders, or of the ruling party, rather than located in capitalism and the state. While neo-liberalism spurred the protests, serious alternatives were almost never developed.

In a number of cases, **systems of social corporatism (tripartism) – as opposed to the older state-run, authoritarian corporatism – emerged**: notably in Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa, more sporadically in Zambia (an initiative in Zimbabwe was stillborn). While these did permit some union

input into labour law reforms, they manifestly failed to enable workers and unions to win alternative economic and social policies.[182] Instead, they often served to legitimise reforms that harmed the working class, while simultaneously eroding union democracy by fostering the development of a layer of full-time officials and highly technical processes of policy formulation unaccountable to the rank-and-file.

Again, **involvement in the state machinery delivered problems rather than solutions**. The organisational problems in the unions generated in the initial post-colonial period were reinforced by new ones created by parliamentary politics and tripartism, while serious political weaknesses were revealed. The acceleration of neo-liberalism, in turn, further weakened unions.

The Unions: Rank-and-File Demands, Accountability and Fragmentation

The second experience relates to the nature of the unions themselves. From the above account, it emerges that **even the most bureaucratic unions are obliged to respond to pressures and demands for reform from the rank-and-file;** and that no union, if it wishes to survive, can be completely co-opted. Even the most "oligarchical" union leadership cannot consistently betray members without destroying the union, and so also its own position. However, **effective union reforms** cannot be left in the hands of the existing union leadership – especially where it is insulated from the mass base – **but must be centred on independent rank-and-file movements and initiatives,** which overlap with, but are independent of, the formal union structures.

Every effort must be made to make unions democratic, participatory, and accountable, to prevent new hierarchies emerging and to challenge existing ones: "the absence of opposition and control and of continuous vigilance" by members becomes a "source of depravity for all individuals vested with social power."[183] Forming new breakaway unions generally does not solve the problem, since it tends to remove the most active and forward-looking members from the existing unions and isolating them, while often simply recreating the political culture and problems of the former mother body plus maintaining some of the same leaders.

Fragmentation of unions is obviously also a source of division and, therefore, weakness for the workers movement; such fragmentation is promoted by political party affiliations, including where union-backed parties have taken office from the 1980s and then turned on workers by adopting neo-liberal policies.

In South Africa, for example, there are currently around five federations, four of them linked to different political currents; relations between the federations is often fraught, and there is little progress towards the unions' stated goals of unification . [184] The main union federation, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) split from 2013, for example, after the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa refused to continue to support the ruling African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party. In Zambia, the Mineworkers Union of Zambia led a breakaway from the Zambian Congress of Trade Unions in 1994, after the MMD government gutted jobs through neo-liberalism and interfered with the unions.[185] It is clear that workers rather need one big union – sub-divided by industry or sector – in which different political currents can co-exist and in which resources can be pooled – rather than conflicts between unions and the splits between workers (who have a common interest) that this involves.

This does not mean unions should be non-political; instead, unions should be involved in economic, political and social struggles but on the basis of independence from parties; instead of forming alliances with parties, they should aim at union re-unification and at fostering alliances with other popular class organisations.

African Unions, Workers and Bottom-Up Efforts at Control of Production and Services

The third experience bearing discussion is cases where African union movements went well beyond what the ILO and the Decent Work agenda suggest, by pushing the frontiers of control of work and moving towards control of production itself through efforts to use works councils, workplace occupations, and union-based co-operatives and services.
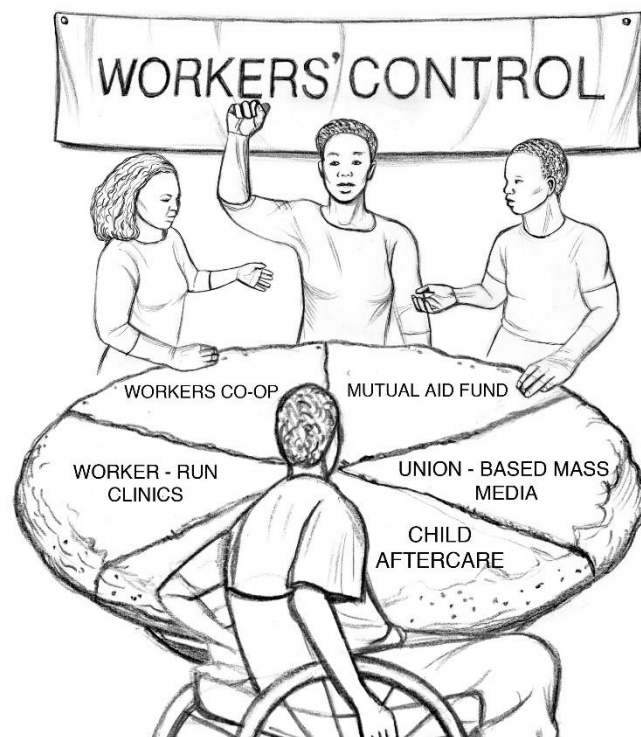
In Zambia, where the state introduced "works councils," supposedly for co-determination between workers and management, these were used by workers to block management demands for discipline. In Tanzania, the state maintained a strong grip on the unions, and imposed wage freezes, while expounding, in words, a radically democratic version of "African Socialism." It also established "workers committees" in the larger workplaces as an adjunct to the National Union of Tanzanian Workers, which the state controlled as much as possible through the authoritarian corporatist system. As elsewhere, however, **state-run, authoritarian corporatism** was unable to contain class struggles. Militant workers were elected to some "workers committees," which then acted as a means for rank-and-file dissent.[186]

This situation exploded when, in 1971, the ruling party published a set of guidelines, known as the *Mwongozo* declaration. This argued that "development" must involve individual freedom and workers' self-management. The tension between the state's rhetorical radicalism and its labour-repressive approach now exploded. Workers grasped the promises of *Mwongozo* as a basis for rebellion; a strike wave developed, in which workers downed tools, expelled management and took

over factories, sometimes using the state-sanctioned workers' committees.[187] At the Mount Carmel Rubber Factory, for example, a "revolutionary council" captured the workers committee; workers barred the personnel manager from entering and took control of production.[188] The state responded (predictably) with repression, and the usual argument that workers were selfish and destructive, but the point had been made. African workers had the capacity and the interest to involve themselves in production: "We are ready to work night and day if allowed to take over the factory."[189]

Co-operatives have also been important ways in which unions and workers have sought to exercise control over production. Earlier, mention was made of an effort to set up a co-operative farm in Kenya. In South Africa, sections of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa (ICU) experimented with schemes – largely unsuccessful –to buy farms and establish co-operative factories in the 1920s.[190] Many years later, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUM) set up a co-operative for workers dismissed after a massive strike at BTR-Sarmcol Rubber in 1987; NUM also set up 30 co-operatives amongst retrenched mineworkers – not just in South Africa, but in Lesotho and Swaziland, which were major sources of mine labour to South Africa.[191]

This point can be illustrated by the success of an alternative form: union-run services. The General Factory Workers Benefit Fund set up in South Africa in 1972 as a means of organising workers developed, over time, into a mutual-aid fund that was able to provide significant services, such as immunisations, for workers. The Food and Canning Workers Union, which operated a large medical aid scheme of its own, used these funds to establish the highly effective Ray Alexander Workers Clinic in Cape Town.[192] Union printing presses in South Africa, earlier in the twentieth century, were sometimes funded by the issue of shares to members and to unions – this was a way to mobilise workers' savings but to keep them out of the hands of private investors.

The great advantage of such co-operatives and facilities is that they provide examples of an alternative production model – in terms of aims and how they are run – which also provides concrete assistance to the working class. In addition they offer, potentially, a self-managed alternative to state-run welfare systems, which replace popular systems of mutual aid with "delivery" from above by the state – usually inefficient and often inegalitarian – as part of patronage politics, promoting popular passivity whilst opening vast opportunities for speculation and corruption by state elites. **This could also be a real alternative to expensive, profit-driven private healthcare and other systems**.

Systematically developing co-operatives and union-run alternative services requires, however, the development of a real project of class-based economic and social transformation. **Working class producers' co-operatives in Africa have generally been unsuccessful, for the simple reason that they cannot compete in open market conditions against far larger, and better resourced, private and state firms.[193] They can only work if shielded from markets, through unions making a commitment to their support and protection, through providing guaranteed contracts paying above market rates**, i.e. "solidarity prices."

The alternative – state sponsorship for co-operatives and "fair trade" – are deeply problematic. **State-sponsorship involves state control and patronage, and often directly undermines workers' co-operatives** by forcing them to adopt the business models favoured by politicians. **"Fair trade" arrangements aid co-operatives by marketing producer co-operative products to affluent consumers** who are willing and able to pay higher prices on ethical grounds. **The problem is that this arrangement *requires* an unequal society;** it is reliant on the existence of wealthier people, rather

than a challenge to an unequal society; it does not address the basic problem that the low incomes of the majority actually lead them to punish workers' co-operatives – and workers – by purchasing the cheapest possible items, often produced under horrific and labour-repressive conditions.

For worker-run co-operatives and services to actually become part of a challenge to the system, they must be embedded in mass movements based on struggle; they must be part of struggles and supported as part of those struggles. The decision to fund these worker-run co-operatives using union resources, by paying higher prices on a sustained basis, is a profoundly political decision. Likewise, the decision to invest in worker-based services – as opposed, for example, to putting union monies into banks or stock markets through investment companies, seeking profits – **requires a vision and programme of bottom-up change, and a healthy – and surely well-grounded scepticism of the state – and a commitment to working class autonomy**.

The working class and the unions should also demand that state welfare, where it is provided, promote equality and reduce poverty. At the same time, however, great care must be taken to mitigate the problems associated with state-run welfare, and not undermine popular systems of mutual aid, including systems like union-run clinic services. On the one hand, unions need to campaign from below, to ensure **that state-run welfare actually benefits** ordinary people; on the other hand, they must fight, as an independent force, against corruption in state-run welfare, including the use of welfare funds for elite enrichment; oppose patronage politics, and build working class autonomy; and actively promote popular alternatives, including union-run clinics, pension schemes, schools and housing.

Conclusions: Decent Work and a Decent Future for African Unions

I opened this paper asking whether the ILO's Decent Work agenda is a feasible goal for unions in Sub-Saharan African unions, and – if it was – how African unions might pursue this goal. In the course of the paper **I have argued that unions can and should champion elements of the Decent Work agenda –**productive, secure, dignified work, protected from direct coercion, danger and discrimination; basic rights; income protection; the right to organise and negotiate – and even make use, in some cases, of complaints to the ILO as a means of defending workers and unions.

However, **they also need to steer clear of the Decent Work agenda's more problematic features –** easy assumptions that Decent Work is compatible with capitalist globalisation, assumptions of social partnership, promotion of tripartism and state-run welfare – **and be aware of its silences**. The Decent Work agenda fails to address the deep class structures of power and wealth that enable the working class – and the popular classes more generally – to be exploited, oppressed and impoverished; this class system is intrinsically connected with, and reproduced by, capitalism and the state.

While the deeper structures of power and wealth are not changed, reforms will be undermined by the dynamics of the existing system (for example, its recurrent tendencies towards crisis, as seen in 1973), by its evolution (as seen with the growth of multi-national corporations within the womb of the Keynesian welfare state), and by the ongoing power of its ruling classes (as shown by the undemocratic decision to implement neo-liberalism).

I have, I hope, made it clear that **I believe that any real changes to the benefit of the popular classes – including the implementation of the better parts of the Decent Work agenda – cannot be entrusted to the ILO or to states**. The foundation of real changes, in the interests of the masses of the people, rests on working class and popular power, including through unions: this alone can compel and defend substantial concessions. The more power, the more possible concessions. The more effective the unions, the greater the chance of gains.

This, in turn **requires powerful, inclusive and imaginative unions**, willing to forge alliances across the working class as well as with the peasantry and poor, willing to learn past lessons of triumphs over low-wage, casual, insecure and divided labour, and of powerful struggles for change that go well beyond workplace relations, including for political rights. The foundation for such a unionism is a participatory, flat structure, without a powerful full-time leadership, autonomous of states and the political party system, reliant on direct action and self-activity, and continually committed to education, debate and critical thinking. It is possible – as union history shows – to make major gains in terms of daily conditions, even in extremely adverse situations.

In the end, too, it requires a programme that looks far beyond reforms, **fighting for a deep transformation and a massive redistribution of wealth and power to the popular classes**, if only because the existing continually generates inequality and disempowerment while corroding reforms that are won. Since no reforms are permanent under capitalism, it is essential for unions to link immediate struggles to tactics and strategy that can enable fundamental, deep-seated changes in society, a massive redistribution of wealth and power to the popular classes, the creation of new, democratic societies, freed of economic and social inequalities and including economic democracy, where working and poor people are the main beneficiaries, rather than the main victims, of economic development. In short, we cannot understate the importance of developing a concrete programme for a new society, freed of economic and social inequalities, one that is profoundly democratic – including economic democracy. Workers' organising and self-activity, are the keys to any real changes, and it carries within itself the seeds of a new society.

In other words, **while unions should always fight for a larger "slice" of the "pie," they need to aim at taking over the "bakery" in the long-run, in alliance with other popular class movements. That the working class has the potential to run the "bakery" is shown by experiences in African union and working class history,** including the post-*Mwongozo* strikes and various workers' co-operatives and worker-run services.
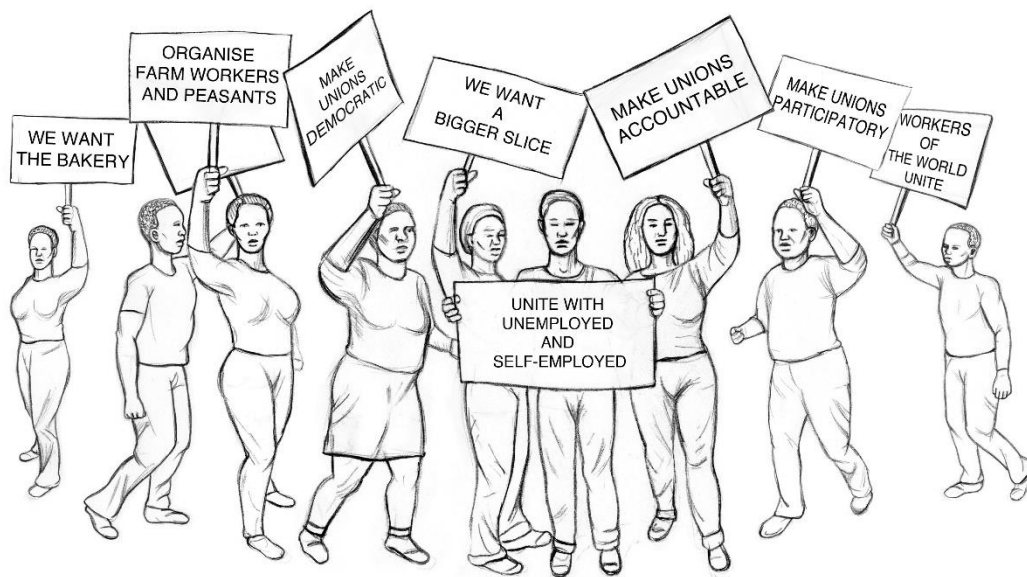
However, any fight for Decent Work – and for more than Decent Work – also requires a clear grasp of concrete conditions, as well as the development of tactics and strategy appropriate to specific contexts. An argument for the centrality of struggle from below and the importance of mobilisation and self-activity is not the same as an argument for mindless militancy or ultra-radicalism that ignores objective conditions and the balance of forces. **It is an argument for a careful, consistent building of counter-power and a democratic and progressive counter-hegemonic project – a revolutionary counter-culture – including strong, flat unions, alliances between unions and other popular class sectors, and the steady accumulation of the organisational, ideological and technical capacities to change society**. It is therefore important to pick battles carefully, to steadily win modest gains without losing sight of the larger project, and to **understand the terrain of struggle**. Start small, fight carefully, and then move on, understanding that every conquest is a "fortress" from which to launch a new battle.[194]

In closing, therefore, I will highlight three main issues:

First, sub-Saharan Africa is extremely diverse, and this means there is no "one-size-fits-all," one true "African model" of unionism. It is important to examine specific national contexts, and to use this to develop nuanced tactics and strategy. Here care can and must be taken to set priorities, to target strategic sectors as a basis to win outposts of power and leverage for further struggles, and to understand which popular class forces and organisations – for example, peasants, petty traders, sections of the professional strata and so on, faith-based organisations, co-operatives, protest groups and so on – can be allies. The overall approach should, however, take place within the parameters suggested by past lessons: the need for independence from political parties, the parliamentary system, tripartism, entanglement in the state more generally, and a critical view of state-run welfare systems; a stress on class politics and working class autonomy, rather than unions being swamped in multi-class nationalist and pro-democracy parties; and the importance of understanding that the problems faced by the working class and the popular classes more generally, are systemic: they are not primarily due to specific individuals, parties, corruption and so on, but to a

class system that concentrates power and wealth in the hands of the few, while promoting maximum division amongst the many.

Second, it is important to understand the current phase of capitalism, which is neo-liberal capitalist globalisation. This period was inaugurated by a massive capitalist crisis, shaped by the rise of powerful multi-national corporations, and is marked by uneven development as well as heightened competition amongst capitalists and states. It is also a period of economic instability, unlike the so-called "Golden Age" of capitalism, from the late 1940s to the early 1970s. **A key feature of the period is a renewed globalisation of capital and a "race-to-the-bottom." World productive capacity has increased massively, meaning that the "bakery" produces a bigger "pie" than ever. However, the relative power of the working class – despite its massive growth and the persistence and even expansion of unions – means that the working class "slice" is actually getting smaller.**

This means that real gains are *possible*, but that **the battle for gains – for a bigger "slice" – will require much *higher* levels of struggle and pressure from below, which requires serious attention to reforming, renewing and expanding unions**. This is by no means impossible, and it should be borne in mind that if workers internationally were able to mobilise effectively in the earlier globalisation from the 1870s to the 1920s, and under the guns of racist colonial rule and forced labour, they can certainly do so now. But this requires a serious reform of unions, which requires effective, independent rank-and-file movements within the unions.

The new period also requires much more attention to linking struggles to global issues. Capital has become global, and operates globally; unions have not. They are connected formally through various Global Union Federations (GUFs) and in regional bodies like the Southern African Trade Union Co-ordinating Council (SATUCC), and share a platform in the ILO. But in the day-to-day life of the unions, global activity plays very little role. It is obvious that *within* countries, unions need to expand their coverage of the working class, but unions also cannot afford to ignore any longer how mass migration, the repression of workers and unions in many countries – such as the massive oppression of the Chinese working class – and growing possibilities for relocating production are key to the "race-to-the-bottom" .

This problem cannot be solved by methods that reinforce divisions amongst workers – such as demands for trade barriers, strict immigration controls, and national-level deals and solutions, which are precisely what state elections and tripartism entail. Divisions in the working class – and the deliberate promotion of conflicts within the working class by ruling classes – harm all workers. Exploiting these divisions is the bread-and-butter of the crudest forms of identity politics, nationalist and other right-wing demagogy, and right-wing religious fundamentalisms; it has no place in a left, and progressive, and pro-working class project.

Progressive politics require a clear criticism of nationalism. Extreme forms of nationalism share with the milder forms inherent limitations. The nationalist idea that all people in a given country must unite, for the common good, and use the state, is flawed. There are deep class divisions within every country, meaning that nationalism always involves compromising the interests of the popular classes by allying it with its "own" exploiters. The state cannot be used by the popular classes, as this account has shown because the state– like the private corporation – is a centralised organisation controlled by, and for, small ruling classes. As daily life across sub-Sharan Africa shows, the state

itself is an oppressive force, and a site of accumulation; it is not essentially different to capitalism in these respects. And finally, all nationalism strives to enforce "on the separate parts of the great human family" deep divisions, with each pocket meant to identify with the state of its own particular ruling class.[195]

While anti-imperialist nationalism played a relatively progressive role in the anti-colonial struggle, **nationalist politics today is generally at odds with the need of the hour: international working class solidarity**. The solution is not for each national state to "hamper the economic development of other nations by establishing special spheres of power and interest," with a vicious circle of trade wars and open warfare, but international solidarity from below.[196]

This means **fighting, from below, for international labour standards**, including equal union rights, a global minimum wage and common conditions, including for all workers, worldwide, spanning the continents as well as all within each individual country. [197] It also involves fighting for more control over production, and more democratic space. Parliamentary democracy opens important space for the development of workers' power; although it is not truly democratic, it is vastly preferable to open dictatorships, whether one-party states, military regimes, or absolute monarchies. In other words, the task is an upward levelling of the conditions of the masses of the people everywhere, won from below. This requires effective organising and solidarity, including specific campaigns within, and by, unions against the additional burdens carried by those sectors which face additional burdens, beyond just exploitation: women, oppressed nationalities and races, minorities, illegal immigrants and so on. This also requires a campaign against prejudices, including national, racial and religious hatreds.

Workers' power is key to winning a bigger "slice" for workers everywhere, and must be part of a larger campaign to address nationalist and anti-immigrant sentiment in the working class everywhere – including within Africa – which is an area in which the unions have rather failed.[198]

This also requires dealing with the tensions that have emerged between workers in regional hegemonies – notably South Africa – and immigrants, and also addressing the question of overcoming the negative attitudes that are part of the ideology of the ruling class in South Africa, which is a small imperialist power in its own right. It also requires dealing with the reality of a persistent domination the world economy by a small number of powerful states, the countries in which most multi-national corporations are headquartered. There are, however, some positive examples from Africa, from which we can learn. For example, the National Union of Mineworkers in South Africa – organising mines where up to 70 percent of black workers were from other countries – opened its ranks to all, even campaigning for black miners from elsewhere to be given the vote in South Africa.[199]

A globalisation of the labour movement is the necessary reply to the globalisation of capital. It might seem daunting, but it is certainly possible. Unions are in a good "position to mobilize international solidarity campaigns," especially when "massive violations of trade union or human rights occur."[200] As noted earlier in this paper, cross-border union operations have a long history in Africa, including the 1952 general strike across French-ruled West Africa, the East African Trade Union Congress, and the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa (ICU) in southern Africa. Co-operation took place in the 1980s between unions in Namibia and South Africa, both facing the apartheid government, and there were numerous examples of international co-operation – including

direct, shop-steward-to-shop-steward links – between these unions and their counterparts elsewhere in Africa, as well as in Europe.[201]

In recent years there have been significant campaigns, including border blockades of Swaziland in the 1990s by South African unions, in solidarity with the struggle against the absolute monarchy, the union-led campaign against arms shipments to Zimbabwe in the 2000s,[202] and efforts to link the struggles of workers in Kenya's cut-flower industry to international campaigns,[203] part of a series of new initiatives that organise along global production chains. Reforms of the GUFs and SATUCC are important – to democratise them, to make them more relevant to workers' daily realities, and to develop more campaigns and projects that connect workers in different countries and continents – but such bodies are no substitute for worker-linked, bottom-up, worker-to-worker, shop-steward-to-shop-steward activity.

This **globalisation of African labour needs, in turn, to be linked to a globalisation of the workers' movements worldwide** – including alliances with the working class in the West – and opening the road to collective bargaining at a regional and international level, as well as at the level of the multi-national corporations, and of multi-lateral bodies of states, including the UN, SADC, ECOWAS, the East African Community and the African Union. The framework of nation-states, "where the labour movement traditionally exerted influence," needs to be replaced with an approach based on "global struggle, global organisation and global bargaining."[204] This possibility is opened by working internationalism – including non-racialism – and solidarity.

There are no fundamental contradictions between the interests of different sectors of workers, and all workers lose from divisions, and all gain from unity, as the history of colonialism and, today, the process of the "race-to-the-bottom" show. Workers within Africa are not a labour aristocracy, nor are better-off layers of workers recipients of "privileges" that set their basic interests against those of other workers. And here, there is much to learn from inspiring examples of overcoming difference and division, from Makhan Singh and the unions in east Africa from the 1930s, to the rise of non-racial radical unions in South Africa from the 1970s, to the decision of the National Union of Mineworkers in South Africa – organising a workforce including many external migrants – to establish co-operatives not just in South Africa, but also Lesotho and Swaziland, from the 1980s. It is true that these earlier activities had their limits, but they provide a foundation and inspiration for future progress.

Driving to the Future

And finally **third, my paper closes by arguing for the need for vision**. Even the most dramatic reforms achieved by the working class and the unions under capitalism – the Keynesian welfare state in the Western countries, from the 1930s to the 1970s – have proved transient, as changes in capitalism and the state destroyed the foundations upon which they were built. It is necessary to consider the means and ends of making more fundamental, deep-seated changes that can enable long-term, democratic and egalitarian societies, freed of economic and social inequalities, and in which working and poor people are the main beneficiaries – rather than the main victims – of economic development. **This must be an international project,** "not world exploitation but a world economy in which every group of people shall … enjoy equal rights," based on sharing resources and creating a "new human community" beyond the "borders of the present states."[205]

It is precisely because the existing system is an obstacle to genuine democracy and equality that formations like unions exist; **it is only through a profound change in society – driven from below, through class-based counter-power and counter-culture – that this situation can end**. Thus, the paper stresses the importance of ideas, and of a long-term "Utopian" thinking that exposes what we take for granted in our daily lives as "natural," and that allows us to imagine– and work towards – more just and decent ways of arranging society, including the economy. [206]
Thank you.

FOOTNOTES

[1] ILO, 1999, *Report of the Director-General: Decent Work, International Labour Conference*, 87th session, Geneva, Switzerland, online at https://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc87/rep-i.htm; also see Dharam Ghai, 2003, "Decent Work: Concept and Indicators," *International Labour Review*, 142 (2), pp. 113-145.

[2] See Gerry Rodgers, Lee Swepston, Eddy Lee and Jasmien van Daele, 2009, *The International Labour Organization and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*, Geneva, ILO, pp. 222-235.

[3] Maria Barriel and Mark Dean, 2005, "Why has World Trade Grown Faster than World Output?," *Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin*, 44, p. 309.

[4] ILO, 2014, *Global Employment Trends 2014: The Risk of a Jobless Recovery*, Geneva, ILO, p. 68.

[5] World Bank, 2014, "Foreign Direct Investment Flows into Sub-Saharan Africa," *Science, Technology, and Skills for Africa's Development*, Washington DC, World Bank Group, March, pp. 1-2.

[6] In both absolute (size terms i.e. smaller overall) and relative (as a percentage of the total i.e. smaller as a proportion) terms.

[7] Bukola Adebayo, 2018, "Nigeria Overtakes India in Extreme Poverty Ranking," *CNN*, 26 June, online at https://edition.cnn.com/2018/06/26/africa/nigeria-overtakes-india-extreme-poverty-intl/index.html

[8] Graeme J. Buckley, 2004, *Decent work in a Least Developed Country: A Critical Assessment of the Ethiopia PRSP*, International Labour Organization, Working Paper number 42, pp. 1-5.

[9] OPEC is the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.

[10] Bukola Adebayo, 2018, "Nigeria Overtakes India in Extreme Poverty Ranking," *CNN*, 26 June, online at https://edition.cnn.com/2018/06/26/africa/nigeria-overtakes-india-extreme-poverty-intl/index.html

[11] Hubert René Schillinger, 2005, *Trade Unions in Africa: Weak but Feared*, Global Trade Union Programme: Occasional Papers – International Development Cooperation, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, p. 7.

[12] International Labour Organisation, 2015, *Global Wage Report 2014/15: Wages and Income Inequality,* International Labour Organisation, Geneva, pp. 14, Figure 14.

[13] International Labour Organisation, 2015, *Global Wage Report 2014/15: Wages and Income Inequality,* International Labour Organisation, Geneva, pp. pp. 27-28.

[14] Mike Davis, 2004, "Planet of Slums: Urban Involution and the Informal Proletariat," *New Left Review*, 26, p. 7.

[15] Public Investment Corporation, "Our Clients," online at https://www.pic.gov.za/index.php/about-us/our-clients/ The figure of ZAR1.928 trillion for March 2017 was converted to USD using the 31 March 2017 exchange rate. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of South Africa was USD349.42 billion in 2017: online at https://tradingeconomics.com/south-africa/gdp

[16] International Rivers, 2003, *Eskom's Expanding Empire: The Social and Ecological Footprint of Africa's Largest Power Utility*, online at https://www.internationalrivers.org/resources/eskom%E2%80%99s-expanding-empire-the-social-and-ecological-footprint-of-africa%E2%80%99s-largest-power

[17] Dineo Faku, 2017, "Questions about Bigger PIC stake in Lonmin," *Business Report*, 5 November, online at https://www.iol.co.za/business-report/energy/questions-about-bigger-pic-stake-in-lonmin-11863159; Sikonathi Mantshantsha and Theto Mahlakoana, 2018, "Union takes Aim at PIC and Gigaba after New Eskom Bail-out," *Business Day*, 6 February, online at https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/companies/energy/2018-02-06-union-takes-aim-at-pic-and-gigaba-after-new-eskom-bail-out/

[18] Hubert René Schillinger, 2005, *Trade Unions in Africa: Weak but Feared*, Global Trade Union Programme: Occasional Papers – International Development Cooperation, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, p. 7.

[19] ILO, 2015, *Report VI: Labour Protection in a Transforming World of Work –Recurrent Discussion on the Strategic Objective of Social Protection (Labour Protection)*, International Labour Conference, 104th Session, Geneva, ILO, p. 3.

[20] E.g. Gerhard Bosch, 2004, "Towards a New Standard Employment Relationship in Western Europe," *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 42 (4), pp. 618-619. Also see Marcel van der Linden, 2003, *Transnational Labour History: Explorations*, Aldershot, Burlington VT, Ashgate, pp.197-198.

[21] There is a vast literature on this issue: notable works include Peter Cole, 2007, *Wobblies on the Waterfront: Interracial Unionism in Progressive-Era Philadelphia*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2007; Eric Hobsbawm, 1949, "General Labour Unions in Britain, 1889-1914," *Economic History Review*, second series, 1 (2/3), pp. 123-142. R.J. Holton, 1976, *British Syndicalism: Myths and Realities,* London, Pluto Press; John Newsinger, 2004, *Rebel City: Larkin, Connolly and the Dublin Labour Movement*, London, Merlin Press; Gwynn Williams, 1975, *A Proletarian Order: Antonio Gramsci, Factory Councils and the Origins of Italian Communism 1911-21*, London, Pluto Press.

[22] Frederick Cooper, 1989, "From Free Labor to Family Allowances: Labor and African Society in Colonial Discourse," *American Ethnologist*, 16 (4), pp. 752-756.

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[23] See e.g. Mirko Herberg (ed.). 2018, *Trade Unions in Transformation: Success Stories from All Over the World,* Bonn, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, pp, 11-24.

[24] Nestor Makhno, quoted in Piotr Arshinov, [1923] 1987, *History of the Makhnovist Movement 1918-1921*, London, Freedom Press, p. 58.

[25] The term "sub-Saharan Africa" is widely used as a synonym for "black Africa." Notions of a uniform culture in the region can be found in, for example, the argument that black African culture was essentially classless, egalitarian and socialist: Julius Nyerere, 1962, *'Ujamaa': The Basis of African Socialism*, Dar es Salaaam. However, the notion of a single, distinctive African (or black) culture is difficult to sustain, and class societies have been common in African history: see, respectively, Michael Nassen Smith and Tafadzwa Tivaringe, 2016, "From Afro-Centrism to Decolonial Humanism and Afro-Plurality: A Response to Simphiwe Sesanti," *New Agenda*, 62, pp. 41-43, and Bernard Magubane, 2000, *African Sociology: Towards a Critical Perspective – The Collected Essays of Bernard Makhosezwe Magubane*, Africa World Press, Trenton NJ, Asmara, Eritrea, pp. 205-207.

[26] Although the late, great Marxist political economist Samir Amin emphasised the diversity of African societies, his analysis of "Black Africa" from the 1600s onwards presented basically three varieties of a single inexorable "underdevelopment" by Western imperialism. See Samir Amin, 1972, "Underdevelopment and Dependence in Black Africa: Origins and Contemporary Forms," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 10 (4), pp. 503-524.

[27] Jean-François Bayart, for instance, looking at a number of Francophone cases, spoke of the post-colonial African state as governed by patronage politics, which he traced to systems preceding European colonialism. While these clientelistic systems obviously exist, they are neither unique to Africa or to African states, nor are they the central feature of all African states. See Jean-François Bayart, 1993, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*, London, Longman, and c.f. e.g. Thandika Mkandawire, 2001, "Thinking about Developmental States in Africa," *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 25 (3), pp. 289-313.

[28] Behind France, the United States of America, Britain and Malaysia: see UNCTAD. 2013, "The Rise of BRICS FDI and Africa," *Global Investment Trends Monitor*, UNCTAD (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development), Geneva, p. 7, figure 5.

[29] See Robert Gale Woolbert, 1936, "The Rise and Fall of Abyssinian Imperialism," *Foreign Affairs*, 14 (4), p. 692-697. It lost Eritrea to Italy from 1887, defeated further Italian incursions until 1936, but was liberated by the Allies in 1941. Influential separatist movements emerged in the Oromo, Tigray and other regions, but only Eritrea secured independent statehood (in 1993).

[30] John Saul and Colin Leys, 1999, "Sub-Saharan Africa in Global Capitalism," *Monthly Review*, 51 (3), p. 13.

[31] World Bank, 2014, "Foreign Direct Investment Flows into Sub-Saharan Africa," *Science, Technology, and Skills for Africa's Development*, Washington DC, World Bank Group, March, p. 2.

[32] E.g. for South Africa: Alec Callinicos, 1992, "Social Democratic Dreams or Class Struggle Realism? A Reply to Enoch Godongwana," *South African Labour Bulletin*, 16 (6), pp. 64-67; Congress of South African Trade Unions and South African Communist Party, 1999, *Building Socialism Now: Preparing for the New Millennium*, Johannesburg; Enoch Godongwana, 1992, "Industrial Restructuring and the Social Contract: Reforming Capitalism or Building Blocks for Socialism?," *South African Labour Bulletin*, 16 (4), 20-23; Oupa Lehulere, 1995, *The Workplace Forums and the Struggle for Workers Control*, Johannesburg, Khanya College; Yunus Mohamed, 1989, "Worker Participation: a Trojan Horse?," *South African Labour Bulletin*, 14 (5), pp. 93-100; Bashier Vally, 1992, *A Social Contract: The Way Forward?*, Johannesburg, Phambili Books;. Lucien van der Walt, 2010, "COSATU's Response to the Crisis: An Anarcho-Syndicalist Assessment and Alternative," *Zabalaza*, 11, pp. 17-19; Eddie Webster, 1995, "Speak Out, Social Democrats!," *Mail and Guardian¸* 1-24 August.

[33] For example, in the course of a two -day general strike in 1991 against rising sales tax: *South African Labour Bulletin*, 1991, "'National General Strike: 'It's More than VAT, It's the Entire Economy' – Interview with Jay Naidoo," *South African Labour Bulletin*, 16 (2), p. 15.

[34] For a partial overview, see Pauline Dibben, Gilton Klerck and Geoff Wood, 2015, "The Ending of Southern Africa's Tripartite Dream: The Cases of South Africa, Namibia and Mozambique," *Business History*, 57 (3), pp. 461-483. On Zambia: Glenn Adler and Edward Webster, 1997, *Bargained Liberalisation: The Labour Movement, Policy-Making and Transition in Zambia and South Africa*, Institute for Advanced Social Research, African Studies Seminar series, University of the Witwatersrand, 4 August. On Zimbabwe: Richard Saunders, 2007, "Trade Union Struggles for Autonomy and Democracy in Zimbabwe," in Jon Kraus (ed.), *Trade Unions and the Coming of Democracy in Africa*, Basingstoke, UK and New York, Palgrave Macmillan, esp. pp. 174-178; Lucien van der Walt, 1998, "Victory for Zimbabwe Workers?," *South African Labour Bulletin*, 22 (6), pp. 89-90; Edward Webster and Dinga Sikwebu, 2010, "Tripartism and Economic Reforms in South Africa and Zimbabwe," in Lydia Fraile (ed.), *Blunting Neoliberalism: Tripartism and Economic Reforms in the Developing World*, Basingstoke, UK and New York/ Geneva, Palgrave Macmillan/ ILO, pp. 176-223.

[35] Notable examples include NEDLAC Labour Caucus, 1996, *Social Equity and Job Creation: The Key to a Stable Future – Proposal by the South African Labour Movement*, Johannesburg; Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, 1995, *Beyond ESAP: A Framework for a Long-Term Development Strategy in Zimbabwe*, Harare, Zimbabwe.

[36] See Gerry Rodgers, Lee Swepston, Eddy Lee and Jasmien van Daele, 2009, *The International Labour Organization and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*, Geneva, ILO, pp. 222-235.

[37] ILO, 1999, *Report of the Director-General: Decent Work, International Labour* Conference, 87th session, Geneva, Switzerland, online at https://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc87/rep-i.htm; also see Dharam Ghai, 2003, "Decent Work: Concept and Indicators," *International Labour Review*, 142 (2), pp. 113-145.

[38] See e.g. Pauli Kettunen, 2013, "The ILO as a Forum for Developing and Demonstrating a Nordic Model," in Sandrine Kott and Joëlle Droux (eds.), *Globalizing Social Rights: The International Labour Organization and Beyond*, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 223.

[39] Madeleine Herren, 2013, "Global Corporatism after the First World War: The Indian Case," in Sandrine Kott and Joëlle Droux (eds.), *Globalizing Social Rights: The International Labour Organization and Beyond*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 137-152; Pauli Kettunen, 2013, "The ILO as a Forum for Developing and Demonstrating a Nordic Model," in Sandrine Kott and Joëlle Droux (eds.), *Globalizing Social Rights: The International Labour Organization and Beyond*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 210-230.

[40] Jasmien van Daele, 2005, "Engineering Social Peace: Networks, Ideas, and the Founding of the International Labour Organization," *International Review of Social History*, number 50, p. 458.

[41] By 2012, only 15 states had ratified a 1935 ILO convention on a forty-hour week: Pauli Kettunen, 2013, "The ILO as a Forum for Developing and Demonstrating a Nordic Model," in Sandrine Kott and Joëlle Droux (eds.), *Globalizing Social Rights: The International Labour Organization and Beyond*, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 216.

[42] ILO, 2015, *Report VI: Labour Protection in a Transforming World of Work –Recurrent Discussion on the Strategic Objective of Social Protection (Labour Protection)*, International Labour Conference, 104th Session, Geneva, ILO, p. 51.

[43] E.g. J.P. Daughton, 2013, "ILO Expertise and Colonial Violence in the Interwar Years," in Sandrine Kott and Joëlle Droux (eds.), *Globalizing Social Rights: The International Labour Organization and Beyond*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 87-89; Daniel Maul, 2007, "The International Labour Organization and the Struggle against Forced Labour from 1919 to the Present," *Labor History,* 48 (4), pp. 480-483; Daniel Maul, 2012, *Human Rights, Development and Decolonization: The International Labour Organization, 1940–70*, Palgrave Macmillan UK.

[44] Reiner Tosstorff, 2005, "The International Trade-Union Movement and the Founding of the International Labour Organization," *International Review of Social History*, number 50, p. 399, 429-433.

[45] James Shotwell, 1933, "The International Labor Organization as an Alternative to Violent Revolution," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 166 (1), p. 18. Also, for example, Jasmien van Daele, 2005, "Engineering Social Peace: Networks, Ideas, and the Founding of the International Labour Organization," *International Review of Social History*, number 50, p. 449.

[46] ILO, 2006, "Bringing Decent Work into Focus," *World of Work: Magazine of the ILO*, 57, p. 5.

[47] "Global Labour University," online at https://global-labour-university.org/

[48] See e.g. J.P. Daughton, 2013, "ILO Expertise and Colonial Violence in the Interwar Years," in Sandrine Kott and Joëlle Droux (eds.), *Globalizing Social Rights: The International Labour Organization and Beyond*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 90-91.

[49] Gerry Rodgers, Lee Swepston, Eddy Lee and Jasmien van Daele, 2009, *The International Labour Organization and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*, Geneva, ILO, p. 236.

[50] Kim Moody 1997, *Workers in a Lean World: Unions in the Global Economy*, London, New York, Verso, p. 13.

[51] For two slightly different analyses, see Paul Hirst, 1997, "The Global Economy: Myths and Realities," *International Affairs*, 73 (3), pp. 409-425 and Kim Moody 1997, *Workers in a Lean World: Unions in the Global Economy*, London, New York, Verso, chapters 2-4.

[52] By 1996, there were already one billion unemployed or underemployed worldwide: Kim Moody 1997, *Workers in a Lean World: Unions in the Global Economy*, London, New York, Verso, p. 41. The entire global population in 1896 was barely 1.6 billion.

[53] On the role of the reserve army of labour and of migration, see Immanuel Ness, 2016, *Southern Insurgency: The Coming of the Global Working Class*, London, Pluto Press, chapter 2.

[54] Rob Lambert and Edward Webster, 2016, "The China Price: The All-China Federation of Trade Unions and the Repressed Question of International Labour Standards," *Globalizations*, 14 (2), pp. 1-14.

[55] Shawn Hattingh, 2009, *The Global Economic Crisis and the Fourth World War*, ILRIG Occasional Paper, Cape Town, ILRIG (International Labour Research and Information Group).

[56] Pragya Khanna, 2011, "Making Labour Voices Heard During an Industrial Crisis: Workers' Struggles in the Bangladesh Garment Industry," *Labour, Capital and Society*, 44 (2), pp. 113-116

[57] In 1997, the whole of Africa attracted less than three percent of global FDI, and sub-Saharan Africa (excluding South Africa), half that: John Saul and Colin Leys, 1999, "Sub-Saharan Africa in Global Capitalism," *Monthly Review*, 51 (3), p. 28 note 11.

[58] See Sarah Mosoeta, 2001, "The Manchester Road: Women and the Informalization of Work in South Africa's Footwear Industry," *Labour, Capital and Society*, 34 (2), pp. 184-206.

[59] Gerry Rodgers, Lee Swepston, Eddy Lee and Jasmien van Daele, 2009, *The International Labour Organization and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*, Geneva, ILO, pp. 235.

[60] ILO, 2015, *Report VI: Labour Protection in a Transforming World of Work –Recurrent Discussion on the Strategic Objective of Social Protection (Labour Protection)*, International Labour Conference, 104th Session, Geneva, ILO, pp. 3, also 34, 56.

[61] ILO, 2006, "Bringing Decent Work into Focus," *World of Work: Magazine of the ILO*, 57, p. 5.

[62] ILO, 2015, *Report VI: Labour Protection in a Transforming World of Work –Recurrent Discussion on the Strategic Objective of Social Protection (Labour Protection)*, International Labour Conference, 104th Session, Geneva, ILO, pp. 67-68.

[63] Gerry Rodgers, Lee Swepston, Eddy Lee and Jasmien van Daele, 2009, *The International Labour Organization and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009*, Geneva, ILO, pp. 238-239.

[64] Jack London, 1903, *The People of the Abyss*, Macmillan; also George Orwell, [1936] 2001, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Penguin.

[65] Ulbe Bosma, 2007, "Beyond the Atlantic: Connecting Migration and World History in the Age of Imperialism, 1840-1940," *International Review of Social History*, 50, pp. 119-120.

[66] George Reid Andrews, 1988, "Black and White Workers: Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1888-1928," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 68 (3), pp. 515-520. A sense of the scale of this massive outflow, driven by landlessness, poverty and unemployment, emerges if we compare 72 million emigrants from Europe to the estimated 11 million slaves kidnapped from Africa, who survived the passage into slavery across the Atlantic to the Americas, and the 4.4 million that came to the Muslim east via the Indian Ocean, Red Sea or Sahara, from 1600-1900: on slavery figures, see Paul E. Lovejoy, 2000, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 62-63, table 7.1 on p. 142. The figures for slavery do not include deaths in transit, slaves kept within Africa, the growth by natural increase of black slave populations outside Africa and, of course, they do not provide any estimate of how slavery (and the racism that accompanied it) created great specific evils and huge burdens for slaves and their descendants.

[67] Michael D. Higgins, 11 September 2013, "The Lockout of 1913," *The Irish Times*, online at https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/the-lockout-of-1913-1.1522296

[68] Social-democratic governments, including minority governments: Britain (1924, 1929), Germany (1918, mainly in coalitions), Sweden (1917 in coalition; 1921, 1924, and 1932 onwards). Social-democrats in coalition governments: France (1914, 1924, 1936) and Spain (1931, 1936).

[69] Gwynn Williams, 1975, *A Proletarian Order: Antonio Gramsci, Factory Councils and the Origins of Italian Communism, 1911-21*, London, Pluto Press, pp. 194-195.

[70] Murray Bookchin, 1994, *To Remember Spain: The Anarchist and Syndicalist Revolution of 1936 – Essays by Murray Bookchin*, Edinburgh, San Francisco, AK Press, p. 43.

[71] Ian Birchall, 1974, *Workers Against the Monolith: The Communist Parties since 1943*, London, Pluto Press, pp. 21-24.

[72] Revolutions and attempted revolutions by the left-wing: Finland (1918), Germany (1918-1919, 1923), Italy (1920), Portugal (1918), and Spain (1917, 1919, 1936). Revolutions and attempted revolutions by the right-wing: Austria (1934), Germany (1923, 1933), Italy (1922), Japan (1931, 1932, 1934, 1936, 1940), France (1934, 1936), Portugal (1926) and Spain (1923, 1936).

[73] There is a vast literature on this issue: notable works include Peter Cole, 2007, *Wobblies on the Waterfront: Interracial Unionism in Progressive-Era Philadelphia*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2007; Eric Hobsbawm, 1949, "General Labour Unions in Britain, 1889-1914," *Economic History Review*, second series, 1 (2/3), pp. 123-142. R.J. Holton, 1976, *British Syndicalism: Myths and Realities,* London, Pluto Press; John Newsinger, 2004, *Rebel City: Larkin, Connolly and the Dublin Labour Movement*, London, Merlin Press; Gwynn Williams, 1975, *A Proletarian Order: Antonio Gramsci, Factory Councils and the Origins of Italian Communism 1911-21*, London, Pluto Press.

[74] Rudolph Rocker, [1938] 1989, *Anarcho-syndicalism*, London, Pluto Press, pp. 53-55, 86-90, 109-113, 117-118.

[75] E.g. Angel Smith, 2007, *Anarchism, Revolution and Reaction: Catalan Labour and the Crisis of the Spanish State, 1898-1923*, New York, Oxford, Berghan Books, pp. 208-209, 214, 226, 228-230, 242-233, 262-265, 292-294, 307-308, 349-350.

[76] Paul Davies, 1987, *A.J. Cook*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, pp. 77-158.

[77] The two remaining European fascist states – Portugal and Spain, which lasted into the mid-1970s – were the key exceptions.

[78] Gøsta Esping-Andersen, 1990, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Princeton University Press, pp. 3, 21-23.

[79] Eric Hobsbawm, 1994, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, Abacus, London, p. 572.

[80] John Marsh, 2011, *Class Dismissed: Why we Cannot Teach or Learn our Way Out of Inequality*, New York, Monthly Review Press, pp. 33-35 including Figures 1.4 and 1.5.

[81] Gøsta Esping-Andersen, 1990, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Princeton University Press, pp. 27-28.

[82] E.g. Guy Standing, 2010, "The International Labour Organization," *New Political Economy*, 15 (2), pp. 309-310.

[83] Leo Panitch, *Working Class Politics in Crisis: Essays on Labour and the State*, London, Verso, p. 149.

[84] Richard Titmuss, 1964, "The Limits of the Welfare State," *New Left Review*, series one, 27, p. 5.

[85] Stuart Wilks, 1996, "Class Compromise and the International Economy: The Rise and Fall of Swedish Social Democracy," *Capital and Class*, 20, p. 97. See also Lynne Segal, 1979, "A Local Experience," in Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hillary Wainwrights (eds.), *Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism*, London, Merlin Press, pp. 159-180.

[86] Jonas Pontussen, 1992, "At the End of the Third Road: Swedish Social Democracy in Crisis," *Politics and Society*, 20 (3), pp. 309,314,317, 324; Stuart Wilks, 1996, "Class Compromise and the International Economy: The Rise and Fall of Swedish Social Democracy," *Capital and Class*, 20, p. 96

[87] Notable examples: Huw Beynon. Hilary Wainwright and the Vickers Shop-Stewards Combine Committee, 1979, *The Workers' Report on Vickers: The Vickers Shop-Stewards Combine Committee Report on Work, Wages, Rationalisation, Closure, and Rank-and-File Organisation in a Multinational Company*, London, Pluto Press; Hilary Wainwright and Dave Elliott, 1981, *Lucas Plan: New Trade Unionism in the Making*, London, Allison & Busby.

[88] Ian Birchall, 1974, *Workers Against the Monolith: The Communist Parties since 1943*, London, Pluto Press, p. 28, 30; Beatrice Reubens, 1946, "'Production Control' in Japan," *Far Eastern Survey*, 15 (22), p. 344; for an insider's recollections of unrest in the British forces, see Albert Meltzer, 1996, *I Couldn't Paint Golden Angels: Sixty Years of Commonplace Life and Anarchist Agitation*, Edinburgh, San Francisco, AK Press, chapter 5.

[89] Eric Hobsbawm, 2011, *How to Change the World: Reflections on Marx and Marxism*, New Haven, London, Yale University Press, pp. 412-413

[90] Steve H. Hanke, 1999, "We were All Keynesians – Then," *Forbes*, 22 February.

[91] Leo Panitch, 1986, *Working Class Politics in Crisis: Essays on Labour and the State*, London, Verso, p. 152.

[92] See e.g. see Samir Amin, 1998, "The First Babu Memorial Lecture," *Review of African Political Economy*, 25 (77), p. 482; Abdulrahman M. Babu, 1981, *African Socialism or Socialist Africa?*, Dar es Salaam, London, Zed Books, pp. 52-72; Michael Nassen Smith and Tafadzwa Tivaringe, 2016, "From Afro-Centrism to Decolonial Humanism and Afro-Plurality: A Response to Simphiwe Sesanti," *New Agenda*, 62, pp. 41-43 ; also

[93] Bernard Magubane, 2000, *African Sociology: Towards a Critical Perspective – The Collected Essays of Bernard Makhosezwe Magubane*, Africa World Press, Trenton NJ, Asmara, Eritrea, pp. 205-207. Also Samora Machel: "In our country, slave-owners, feudalists, kings, and emperors ruled society until the colonial conquest. The colonialist bourgeoisie then established itself in power and imposed its wishes upon all strata": Samora Machel, [1971] 1985, "Establishing People's Power to Serve the Masses," in Barry Munslow (ed.), *Samora Machel: An African Revolutionary – Selected Speeches and Writings,* Zed Books, London, pp. 6.-7. On the tributary mode, see Martin Hall 1987, "Archaeology and Modes of Production in Pre-Colonial Southern Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, volume 14, number 1, pp. 1-17.

[94] Bill Freund, 1984, *The Making of Contemporary Africa: The Development of African Society Since 1800*, Bloomington*,* Indiana University Press, pp. 4-12.

[95] J. F. Ade Ajayi, 1968, "The Continuity of African Institutions under Colonialism," in Terence Ranger (ed.), *Emerging Themes in African History*, London, pp. 189-200, also quoted in Frederick Cooper, 1994, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History," *American Historical Review*, 99 (5), p. 1522.

[96] E.g. Thomas Huffman 2001, *Mapungubwe: Ancient African Civilisation on the Limpopo,* Wits University Press, Johannesburg, pp. 32-54; Henry Slater, 1976, "Transitions in the Political Economy of South-East Africa before 1840," PhD diss., University of Sussex, chapters 3, 5, 6.

[97] Roland Oliver and Anthony Atmore, 2001, *Medieval Africa, 1250–1800*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, p. 230.

[98] Stephen Ferguson, 2011, "The Utopian Worldview of Afrocentricity," *Socialism and Democracy*, volume 25, number 1, pp. 61-62; Jonathon Glassman, 1991, "The Bondsman's New Clothes: The Contradictory Consciousness of Slave Resistance on the Swahili Coast," *Journal of African History*, volume 32, number 2, pp. 277-312.

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[100] See the discussion in Stephen Ferguson, 2011, "The Utopian Worldview of Afrocentricity," *Socialism and Democracy*, volume 25, number 1, pp. 61-62.

[101] See e.g. Paul Lovejoy, 1986, "Fugitive Slaves: Resistance to Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate," in Gary Okihiro (ed.), *In Resistance: Studies in African, Caribbean and Afro-American History*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, pp. 71-95.

[102] See e.g. Guillemette Andreu, 1997, *Egypt in the Age of the Pyramids,* Ithaca New York, Cornell University Press; John Chalcraft, 2016, *Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, New York, Cambridge University Press, pp. 54-98.Catherine Coquery Vidrovitch and Paul E. Lovejoy (eds.), 1985, *The Workers of African Trade,* Beverly Hills, Sage Publications; Humphrey Fisher, 2001, *Slavery in the History of Muslim Black Africa*, New York, New York University Press, esp. pp. 152-176; Jonathon Glassman, 1991, "The Bondsman's New Clothes: The Contradictory Consciousness of Slave Resistance on the Swahili Coast," *Journal of African History*, 32 (2), pp. 277-312; Paul Lovejoy, 1986, "Fugitive Slaves: Resistance to Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate," in Gary Okihiro (ed.), *In Resistance: Studies in African, Caribbean and Afro-American History*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, pp. 71-95; Richard Pankhurst, 1992, *A Social History of Ethiopia: The Northern and Central Highlands from Early Medieval Times to the Rise of Emperor Tewodros II*, Red Sea Press; John Romer, 1984, *Ancient Lives: The Story of the Pharaoh's Tomb-Makers*, London, Phoenix Press, especially pp. 116-123. For suggestive comments on resistance to regimental labour imposed by chiefs, see Christian John Makgala, 2007, "The Role and Development of the Labour Movement to 1994," in Christian John Makgala (editor), *History of the Botswana Manual Workers Union: A Story of Courageous Struggle for Democratic and Economic Advancement in Southern Africa*, Gaborone, Botswana, Botswana Manual Workers Union, pp. 29-30.

[103] Frederick Cooper, 1989, "From Free Labor to Family Allowances: Labor and African Society in Colonial Discourse," *American Ethnologist*, 16 (4), p. 748.

[104] See, especially, the work of Nicole Ulrich, who locates these in the larger radicalisms, rebellions and solidarities of the eighteenth century "Atlantic working class": Nicole Ulrich, 2010, "Abolition from Below: The 1808 Revolt in the Cape Colony," in Marcel van der Linden (ed.), *Humanitarian Intervention and Changing Labour Relations: The Long-Term Consequences of the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, Leiden, Brill, pp. 193-222; Nicole Ulrich, 2014, "International Radicalism, Local Solidarities: The 1797 British Naval Mutinies in Southern African Waters," *International Review of Social History*,58, 61-85; Nicole Ulrich, 2014, "Popular Community in 18th-Century Southern Africa: Family, Fellowship, Alternative Networks, and Mutual Aid at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652–1795," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40 (6), pp. 1139–1157.

[105] Nigel Worden, 2005, "Artisan Conflicts in a Colonial Context: The Cape Town Blacksmith Strike of 1752," *Labor History*, 46 (2), pp. 155-184.

[106] Iba der Thiam, 1991, *Histoire du Mouvement Syndical Africain 1790-1929*, Paris, Editions L'Harmattan, pp. 18-21.

[107] W.H. Andrews, 1941, *Class Struggles in South Africa*, Stewart Printing, Cape Town, pp. 12-13.

[108] E.g. the General Workers Union, in Cape Town, South Africa (1905), the *Association des Ouvriers Sénégalais de Kayes*, in Senegal (1907), the *Ligue Internationale des Ouvriers Cigarretiers et Papetiers du Caire* in Egypt (1908); and the *Associação Das Artes Gráficas De Lourenço Marques* in Mozambique (ca. 1911). See Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, 1988, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954*, London, , I.B. Tauris and Co., p. 52; José Capela, [1981] 2009, *O Movimento Operário em Lourenço Marques, 1898-1927*, Centro de Estudos Africanos da Universidade do Porto, pp.127-132; Iba der Thiam, 1991, *Histoire du Mouvement Syndical Africain 1790-1929*, Paris, Editions L'Harmattan, pp. 70; Lucien van der Walt, 2011, "Anarchism and Syndicalism in an African Port City: The Revolutionary Traditions of Cape Town's Multiracial Working Class, 1904-1924," *Labor History*, 52 (2), pp. 139, 143, 146.

[109] See e.g. Sylvain Boulouque (ed.),1994, *Saïl Mahomed: Appels aux Travailleurs Algériens*, Paris, Volonte Anarchiste: Edition du Groupe Fresnes-Antony; Philippe Bouba, 2014, "L'Anarchisme en Situation Colonial: Le Cas de l'Algérie – Organisations, Militants et Presse (1887-1962)," PhD diss., Université Perpignan Via Domitia (France) / Université Oran ES-Sénia (Algérie); José Luís Garcia, 2017, "The First Stirrings of Anti-Colonial Discourse in the Portuguese Press," in José Luís Garcia, Chandrika Kaul, Filipa Subtil and Alexandra Santos (eds.), *Media and the Portuguese Empire*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 125-144; Anthony Gorman, 2010, "'Diverse in Race, Religion and Nationality . . . but United in Aspirations of Civil Progress': The Anarchist Movement in Egypt 1860-1940," in Steven Hirsch and Lucien van der Walt (eds.), *Anarchism and Syndicalism in the Colonial and Postcolonial World, 1870-1940: The Praxis of National Liberation, Internationalism and Social Revolution*, Leiden, Boston, Brill, pp. 3-31; Lucien van der Walt, 2018, "From Below: An Overview of South African Politics at a Distance from the State, 1917–2015, with Dossier of Texts," in Kirk Helliker and Lucien van der

Walt (eds.), *Politics at a Distance from the State: Radical and African Perspectives*, London, New York, Routledge, pp. 111-163.

[110] For example, there is no systematic history of socialist groups in Nigeria, where the revolutionary left has been active since at least the 1930s: Adam Mayer, 2016, *Naija Marxisms: Revolutionary Thought in Nigeria*, London: Pluto Press, p. 37. Important published contributions, besides Mayer, include Hakim Adi, 1997, "The Communist Movement in West Africa," *Science and Society*, volume 61, number 1, pp. 94-99 and Hakeem Ibikunle Tijani, 2005, "Britain and the Development of Leftist Ideology and Organisations in West Africa: The Nigerian Experience, 1945-1965," PhD diss., University of South Africa. Another country example: no history of the giant (and officially Marxist-Leninist) Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU, formed 1985) has been published since 1991; there is only one history of the South African Communist Party (SACP, 1953) in the same period: see Jeremy Baskin, 1991, *Striking Back: A History of COSATU*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press; Eddie Maloka, 2013, *The South African Communist Party: Exile and After Apartheid*, Johannesburg: Jacana Media.

[111] Marcel van der Linden, 2003, *Transnational Labour History: Explorations*, Aldershot, Burlington VT, Ashgate, pp. 198-200.

[112] On the centrality of forced labour in the colonial period, see *inter alia* J.P. Daughton, 2013, "ILO Expertise and Colonial Violence in the Interwar Years," in Sandrine Kott and Joëlle Droux (eds.), *Globalizing Social Rights: The International Labour Organization and Beyond*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 87-89; Daniel Maul, 2007, "The International Labour Organization and the Struggle against Forced Labour from 1919 to the Present," *Labor History,* 48 (4), pp. 480-483; Albert Nzula, Albert, Ivan Potekhin and Aleksander Zusmanovich,[1933] 1979, *Forced Labour in Colonial Africa*, London, Zed Books.

[113] Major powers also had trade-to-Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ratios, and volumes of capital exports, exceeding those of the 1990s: Paul Hirst, 1997, "The Global Economy: Myths and Realities," *International Affairs*, 73 (3), p. 411; Eric Hobsbawm, 1977, *The Age of Capital, 1848-1875*, Abacus, London, p. 66 *et seq.*

[114] J.P. Daughton, 2013, "ILO Expertise and Colonial Violence in the Interwar Years," in Sandrine Kott and Joëlle Droux (eds.), *Globalizing Social Rights: The International Labour Organization and Beyond*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 85-97; Daniel Maul, 2007, "The International Labour Organization and the Struggle against Forced Labour from 1919 to the Present," *Labor History,* 48 (4), pp. 477-500.

[115] Frederick Cooper, 1989, "From Free Labor to Family Allowances: Labor and African Society in Colonial Discourse," *American Ethnologist*, 16 (4), pp. 752-756.

[116] George Gona, 2007, "Towards a Concrete East African Trade Union Federation: History, Prospects and Constraints," *African Studies*, 66 (2/3), p. 280.

[117] Frederick Cooper, 1989, "From Free Labor to Family Allowances: Labor and African Society in Colonial Discourse," *American Ethnologist*, 16 (4), pp. 753-754.

[118] Kristin Butcher and Cecilia Rouse, 2001, "Wage Effects of Unions and Industrial Councils in South Africa," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 54 (2), pp. 349-372.

[119] Besides the discussion and references provided here, see Lucien van der Walt, 2013, "Makhan Singh's (1914-1973) Legacy for Kenyan and African Trade Unions: Learning from the IWW, the Ghadar Party, and the East African Trade Union Congress," Second Makhan Singh Memorial Lecture, Nairobi, 5 December.

[120] Zarina Patel, 2010, *Manilal Ambalal Desai: The Stormy Petrel*, Nairobi, Desai Memorial Foundation/ Zand Graphics, pp. 1-2.

[121] Makhan Singh, 1969, *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952*, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, p. 4.

[122] David Northrup, 1995, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834-1922*, University of Cambridge Press: Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, p. 146.

[123] Zarina Patel, 2010, *Manilal Ambalal Desai: The Stormy Petrel*, Nairobi, Desai Memorial Foundation/ Zand Graphics, p. vii. It may have been 21,000-22,000 in 1921: Zarina Patel, 2007, "Makhan Singh and the Ghadrites," mimeo, presented at the University of the Witwatersrand, p. 1; Zarina Patel, 2010, *Manilal Ambalal Desai: The Stormy Petrel*, Nairobi, Desai Memorial Foundation/ Zand Graphics, p. 120.

[124] Zarina Patel, 1997, *Challenge to Colonialism: The Struggle of Alibhai Mulla Jeevanjee for Equal Rights in Kenya*, Nairobi, Zand Graphics, p. 51

[125] Zarina Patel, 2006, *Unquiet: The Life and Times of Makhan Singh*, Nairobi, African Books Collective, p. 57.

[126] Shiraz Durrani, 2006, *Never Be Silent: Publishing and Imperialism in Kenya, 1884-1963*, London, Vita Books, pp. 32-33; Makhan Singh, 1969, *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952*, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, pp. 6-7.

[127] Makhan Singh, 1969, *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, pp. 10, 40-47.

[128] Zarina Patel, 2006, *Unquiet: The Life and Times of Makhan Singh*, Nairobi, African Books Collective, pp. 234-235; Makhan Singh, 1969, *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, pp. 102-103; Sharon Stichter, 1974, "Trade Unionism in Kenya, 1947-52: The Militant

Phase," in Peter Gutkind, Robin Cohen and Jean Copans (eds.), *African Labour History*, Beverly Hills, Sage Publications, pp. 159-162.

[129] See Zarina Patel, 2007, "Makhan Singh and the Ghadrites," mimeo, presented at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. The Ghadar movement was largely secret in Kenya after repression in the late 1910s. Makhan Singh was approached to write the history of the Kenya Ghadar grouping, but never did so: see Zarina Patel, 2006, *Unquiet: The Life and Times of Makhan Singh*, Nairobi, African Books Collective, pp. 377-378. More on Ghadar: H.K. Puri, 1983, *Ghadar Movement: Ideology, Organisation and Strategy*, Amritsar, Guru Nanak Dev University Press.

[130] Makhan Singh, 1969, *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, pp. 48.

[131] Zarina Patel, 2007, "Makhan Singh and the Ghadrites," mimeo, presented at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, p. 4; Makhan Singh, 1969, *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, pp. 58-59, 66, 70-75.

[132] Makhan Singh, 1969, *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, pp. 68-70.

[133] Makhan Singh, 1969, *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, pp. 77-88; Patel, *Unquiet*, pp. 89-93.

[134] Shiraz Durrani, 2006, *Never Be Silent: Publishing and Imperialism in Kenya, 1884-1963*, London, Vita Books, p. 83; Zarina Patel, 2006, *Unquiet: The Life and Times of Makhan Singh*, Nairobi, African Books Collective, p. 100; Makhan Singh, 1969, *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, pp. 103-124, 129-171; Sharon Stichter, 1974, "Trade Unionism in Kenya, 1947-52: The Militant Phase," in Peter Gutkind, Robin Cohen and Jean Copans (eds.), *African Labour History*, Beverly Hills, Sage Publications, p. 159.

[135] Sharon Stichter, 1974, "Trade Unionism in Kenya, 1947-52: The Militant Phase," in Peter Gutkind, Robin Cohen and Jean Copans (eds.), *African Labour History*, Beverly Hills, Sage Publications, pp. 160-164.

[136] Makhan Singh, 1969, *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, pp. 171-181; Sharon Stichter, 1974, "Trade Unionism in Kenya, 1947-52: The Militant Phase," in Peter Gutkind, Robin Cohen and Jean Copans (eds.), *African Labour History*, Beverly Hills, Sage Publications, p. 164.

[137] See George Gona, 2007, "Towards a Concrete East African Trade Union Federation: History, Prospects and Constraints," *African Studies*, 66 (2/3), pp. 277-279;, Zarina Patel, 2007, "Makhan Singh and the Ghadrites," mimeo, presented at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, pp. 8-9; Zarina Patel, 2006, *Unquiet: The Life and Times of Makhan Singh*, Nairobi, African Books Collective, pp. 207-221; Makhan Singh, 1969, *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, pp. 202-287.

[138] See Lucien van der Walt, 2007, "The First Globalisation and Transnational Labour Activism in Southern Africa: White Labourism, the IWW, and the ICU, 1904–1934," *African Studies*, 66 (2/3), pp. 229-230, 243.

[139] Lucien van der Walt, 2007, "The First Globalisation and Transnational Labour Activism in Southern Africa: White Labourism, the IWW, and the ICU, 1904–1934," *African Studies*, 66 (2/3), pp. 224, 237-240.

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[141] Terence Ranger, 1970, *The African Voice in Southern Rhodesia, 1898-1930*, London, Ibadan/ Nairobi, Heinemann/ East Africa Publishing House, pp. 150, 155, 163.

[142] Peter Alexander, 2000, *Workers, War and the Origins of Apartheid: Labour and Politics in South Africa, Oxford/ Athens*, Ohio/ Cape Town, James Currey/ Ohio University Press/ David Philip, pp. 84-85.

[143] Bill Freund, 1988, *The African Worker*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 91.

[144] See, for e.g., Temma Kaplan, 1977, "Other Scenarios: Women and Spanish Anarchism," in Renate Bridènthal and Claudia Koonz (eds.), *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, first edition, esp. p. 166; Temma Kaplan, 1987, "Women and Communal Strikes in the Crisis of 1917–1922," in Renate Bridènthal, Claudia Koonz and Susan Stuard (eds.), Becoming *Visible: Women in European History*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, second edition, pp. 429-449; Ardis Cameron, 1985, "Bread and Roses Revisited: Women's Culture and Working-Class Activism in the Lawrence Strike of 1912," in Ruth Milkman (ed.), *Women, Work and Protest: A Century of U.S. Women's Labor History*, Boston, Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp. 42–61.

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[145] Frederick Cooper, 1989, "From Free Labor to Family Allowances: Labor and African Society in Colonial Discourse," *American Ethnologist*, 16 (4), p. 753.

[146] Frederick Cooper, 1994, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History," *American Historical Review*, 99 (5), pp. 1535-1536 note 71.

[147] For the progamme, see documents in Makhan Singh, 1969, *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, pp. 202-206, 228-237. For the quote, see Sharon Stichter, 1974, "Trade Unionism in Kenya, 1947-52: The Militant Phase," in Peter Gutkind, Robin Cohen and Jean Copans (eds.), *African Labour History*, Beverly Hills, Sage Publications, p. 169.

[148] Sharon Stichter, 1974, "Trade Unionism in Kenya, 1947-52: The Militant Phase," in Peter Gutkind, Robin Cohen and Jean Copans (eds.), *African Labour History*, Beverly Hills, Sage Publications, p. 169.

[149] Zarina Patel, 2006, *Unquiet: The Life and Times of Makhan Singh*, Nairobi, African Books Collective, pp. 222-227; Makhan Singh, 1969, *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, pp. 103-124, 129-171, pp. 259-262.

[150] Makhan Singh, 1969, *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, pp. 134-139, 143-144, 200-204, 213, 139-142.

[151] [151] Shiraz Durrani, 2006, *Never Be Silent: Publishing and Imperialism in Kenya, 1884-1963*, London, Vita Books, pp. 181-182; Zarina Patel, 2006, *Unquiet: The Life and Times of Makhan Singh*, Nairobi, African Books Collective, pp. 232-236; Makhan Singh, 1969, *History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952*, Nairobi, East African Publishing House, pp. 270-287.

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[154] E.g. Claude Ake, 1976, "Explanatory Notes on the Political Economy of Africa," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 14 (1), pp. 1-23; Issa G. Shivji, 1978, *Class Struggles in Tanzania*, London, Heinemann, chapters 7-8.

[155] Also see Bill Freund, 1988, *The African Worker*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 95.

[156] Mikhail Bakunin, [1873] 1971, "Statism and Anarchy," in Sam Dolgoff (ed.), *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, London, George Allen and Unwin, p. 343.

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[158] See e.g. Emmanual Obliteifi Akwetey, 1994, *Trade Unions and Democratisation: A Comparative Study of Zambia and Ghana*, Stockholm, University of Stockholm, Department of Political Science, PhD reprint, pp. 45-47.

[159] For more examples of this attack, see the examples cited in, for e.g., Richard Sandbrook, 1977, "The Political Potential of African Urban Workers," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, 11 (3), pp. 413-415; John Saul, 1976, "The 'Labour Aristocracy' Thesis Reconsidered," in Richard Sandbrook and Robin Cohen (eds.), *The Development of an African Working Class: Studies in Class Formation and Action*, University of Toronto Press, pp. 303-310; Lucien van der Walt, 1998, "Trade Unions in Zimbabwe: For Democracy, Against Neo-Liberalism," Capital and Class, 22 (3), p. 109. For a discussion of efforts to revive this line of argument in post-apartheid South Africa, see Glenn Adler and Gerald O'Sullivan, 1996, "Rounding Up the Usual Suspects: Recycling the Labour Aristocracy Thesis," in Jeremy Baskin (ed.), *Against the Current: Labour and Economic Policy in South Africa*, Johannesburg, Ravan, pp. 165-185.

[160] Julius Nyerere, 1962, *'Ujamaa': The Basis of African Socialism*, Dar es Salaaam, p. 7. Also see Issa G. Shivji, 1978, *Class Struggles in Tanzania*, London, Heinemann, pp. 77-78.

[161] See, for example, Richard Sandbrook, 1975, *Proletarians and African Capitalism: The Kenya Case, 1960-1972*, New York, Cambridge University Press, chapter 6.

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[163] Richard Sandbrook, 1977, "The Political Potential of African Urban Workers," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, 11 (3), pp. 415-420.

[164] See e.g. Peter Sketchley, 1985, "The Struggle for New Social Relations of Production in Industry," in John Saul (ed.), *A Difficult Road: The Transition to Socialism in Mozambique*, New York. Monthly Review Press, pp. 268-270.

[165] Testimony of Michael Sata, quoted in Henry S. Meebelo, 1964, *African Proletarians and Colonial Capitalism: The Origins, Growth and Struggles of the Zambian Labour Movement to 1964*, Lusaka, Kenneth Kaunda Foundation, pp. 520-529, quote from p. 520.

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[166] Emmanual Obliteifi Akwetey, 1994, *Trade Unions and Democratisation: A Comparative Study of Zambia and Ghana*, Stockholm, University of Stockholm, Department of Political Science, PhD reprint, p. 46.

[167] Jeff Crisp, 1984, *The Story of an African Working Class: Ghanaian Miners' Struggles, 1870-1980*, London, Zed Books, pp. 158-168, quote from p 163.

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[169] Quoted in Iaon Davies, 1966, *African Trade Unions*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, p. 144.

[170] Richard Jeffries, 1975, "Populist Tendencies in the Ghanaian Trade Union Movement," in Richard Sandbrook and Robin Cohen (eds.), *The Development of an African Working Class: Studies in Class Formation and Action*, University of Toronto Press, p. *204*.

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[173] Françoise Blum, 2012, "Sénégal 1968: Révolte Étudiante et Grève Générale," *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, 59 (2), pp. 144-177.

[174] Dave Cooper, 1984, "Unions in Botswana: Comparisons with Lesotho," *South African Labour Bulletin*, 10 (8), pp. 109-110.

[175] Issa G. Shivji, 1978, *Class Struggles in Tanzania*, London, Heinemann, chapters 11-13.

[176] Françoise Blum, 2011, "Madagascar 1972: L'Autre Indépendance – Une Révolution Contre les Accords de Coopération," *Le Mouvement Social*, 236, pp. 61-87.

[177] Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, (1992), "Towards Governance in Africa: Popular Demands and State Responses," in Goran Hyden and Michael Bratton (eds.), *Governance and Politics in Africa*, Boulder, pp. 27-55.

[178] Samuel Decalo, 1992, "The Process, Prospects and Constraints of Democratisation in Africa," *African Affairs*, 91 (362), pp. 7-35.

[179] Neva Makgetla, 1993, "Should South Africa Fear Rule by IMF?," *The Star*, 13 October.

[180] Samuel Decalo, 1992, "The Process, Prospects and Constraints of Democratisation in Africa," *African Affairs*, 91 (362), pp. 12-13.

[181] Quoted in Lise Rakner, 2003, *Political and Economic Liberalisation in Zambia, 1991-2001,* Uppsala, Nordic Africa Institute, p. 61.

[182] Pauline Dibben, Gilton Klerck and Geoff Wood, 2015, "The Ending of Southern Africa's Tripartite Dream: The Cases of South Africa, Namibia and Mozambique," *Business History*, 57 (3), pp. 461-483.

[183] E.g. Mikhail Bakunin, [1871] 1971, "The Programme of the Alliance," in Sam Dolgoff (ed.), *Bakunin on Anarchy: Selected Works by the Activist-Founder of World Anarchism*, George Allen and Unwin p. 245

[184] The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) is formally aligned to the ruling African National Congress (ANC) as well as to the South African Communist Party. The South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU) was formed at the initiative of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa after that union was pushed to leave COSATU for rejecting the ANC and South African Communist Party link. Comprising over half of SAFTU, and by far the biggest SAFTU affiliate, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa recently launched its own (Marxist-Leninist) party. The National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) has historically been linked to the Pan-Africanist Congress and the Back Consciousness Movement, but has no formal links to any party. The Federation of Unions of South Africa (FEDUSA), and the Confederation of South African Workers' Unions (CONSAWU) explicitly define themselves as non-party-aligned. However, CONSAWU's largest affiliate, Solidarity (formerly the South African Mineworkers Union, today active in a wide range of sectors), is integrally linked to Afrikaner nationalism, and has a far greater public profile and role than CONSAWU. COSATU, FEDUSA and NACTU have a history of co-operation, but COSATU and SAFTU currently refuse to co-operate. COSATU affiliates have worked with Solidarity, but the relationship is not a friendly one: see e.g. Gwede Mantashe, 2008, "The Decline of the Mining Industry and the Response of the Mining Unions," MA diss., University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

[185] Emmanuel Akwetey and Jon Kraus, 2009, "Trade Unions, Development, and Democratization in Zambia: The Continuing Struggle," in Jon Kraus (ed.), *Trade Unions and the Coming of Democracy in Africa*, Basingstoke, UK and New York, Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 136-140.

[186] Issa G. Shivji, 1978, *Class Struggles in Tanzania*, London, Heinemann, pp. 129-131.

[187] Issa G. Shivji, 1978, *Class Struggles in Tanzania*, London, Heinemann, pp. 134-146. Also see M.A. Bienefeld, 1975, "Socialist Development and the Workers in Tanzania," in Richard Sandbrook and Robin Cohen (eds.), *The Development of an African Working Class: Studies in Class Formation and Action*, London, Longman, pp. 239-260.

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[189] Placard at the Mount Carmel Rubber Factory, quoted in Issa G. Shivji, 1978, *Class Struggles in Tanzania*, London, Heinemann, p. 143.

[190] See Sylvia Neame, 2015, *The Congress Movement: The Unfolding of the Congress Alliance, 1912-1961*, volume 2, Pretoria, HSRC Press, pp. 469-475.

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