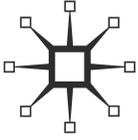


# Trade Unions and the Coming of Democracy in Africa

Edited by Jon Kraus

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TRADE UNIONS AND THE COMING OF DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2007 978-0-230-60061-4

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First published in 2007 by

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN™

175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010 and

Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England RG21 6XS.

Companies and representatives throughout the world.

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ISBN 978-1-349-37021-4 ISBN 978-0-230-61003-3 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9780230610033

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the Library of Congress.

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Scribe Inc.

First edition: December 2007

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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## Preface

This study was animated by the strikes and demonstrations that broke out all over Africa in 1989–91 and after, as workers and unions overwhelmed the barriers of authoritarian rule and repression to present demands for workers' rights and democratic political life. Trade unions had done this intermittently in individual African countries from the 1960s to the 1980s. But never had they done so in such numbers, in so many African countries, and with such a dramatic effect on the birth or the rebirth of democracy in public life. It was, observers felt, a genuinely glorious time for Africa, which had been visited with profound economic malaise and depressions in the 1980s as well as burdened with the mean dead hands of authoritarian rulers, the brutal and the less brutal alike. Such authoritarian rule, justified in various tortured ways by actors inside and outside Africa, stifled an incredible vibrancy in African public life by a wide range of social groups, a vibrancy that has existed at many times in countless African countries.

While large numbers of scholars have researched ethnic groups, women's groups, students, market women, and many local social groups, remarkably few African and Africanist scholars have studied trade union movements in the 1990s and 2000s. The number is fewer, for instance, than in the 1960s and 1970s, perhaps because the Marxist and non-Marxist Left was far more vigorous at that time in academic life. I have still been surprised by the low levels of attention by scholars to the parts played by trade unions and workers in the struggles for democracy.

When I cast about for scholars working on trade union movements in Africa, I was happy to find those who have joined me in this effort. No less than three of them had recently completed PhD theses on labor movements in African countries. Geoff Bergen wrote on Senegal, Gretchen Bauer on Namibia, and Emmanuel Akwetey on Zambia and Ghana. Robert Charlick, who had worked extensively on democratization and civil society in Niger and in French-speaking Africa, undertook to write on Niger unions. Richard Saunders was working with the Zimbabwe union movement as well as other civics in Zimbabwe when I met him by chance at a conference in Canada. I had (unknowingly) reviewed for publication his PhD thesis on communications in Zimbabwe a year earlier. William Freund, a well-known specialist on African labor and South Africa in particular, consented to contribute a South African chapter. The chapter written on Nigeria's vibrant trade union movement was ultimately unsuitable for the book and had to be dropped, but my introduction and

conclusion include information on Nigeria's labor movement in order to include it among our sample.

First and foremost I have to thank this handful of scholars in joining me in this enterprise and then persisting when I allowed the project to lapse as I became absorbed in two other research/writing obligations. When I returned to complete this project after several years, all of my contributors, without angry words or reproach, which would have been entirely justified, graciously revised their chapters, sometimes substantially. Their scholarly research adds greatly to our knowledge of trade union movements in democratization and made it possible for me to develop some generalizations in the conclusion. I am deeply indebted to them.

I thank all those who have read this manuscript in whole or in part and provided me with critical guidance and ways of improving it. Those who provided a critical reading of the introduction some years ago include Richard Sandbrook of the University of Toronto; Bob Charlick of Cleveland State; Nick van de Walle, then at Michigan State; James Hurtgen, a colleague at SUNY/Fredonia; and Roger Southall, then a journal editor in South Africa, who gave me important ideas for streamlining and cutting. I elicited readings of the conclusion from Bob Charlick at Cleveland State, Richard Sandbrook at the University of Toronto, and Richard Saunders, at York University. The latter two made detailed comments regarding areas that could be improved, for which I am deeply appreciative. Roger Southall read the entire manuscript and made valuable suggestions for changes.

I am indebted intellectually to the small community of those who, over the years, have devoted their efforts to the study of trade unions in Africa and elsewhere and the debates on trade unions and democratization. With some I have exchanged ideas at conferences and notable colloquia on trade union movements and strikes. My immense debts to them are indicated by the reference lists in my chapters. I have communicated with some of them on and off over the years, exchanging information and drafts of writings. These include Peter Waterman, Tayo Fashoyin, Richard Sandbrook, Richard Jeffries, Jeff Crisp, and Joseph Scalfani, among others. Scholars shared information through a now-vanished Internet labor list in the early and mid-1990s. And in the 1980s we benefited from Peter Waterman's creation, writing, and distribution of the *Newsletter of International Labor Studies* from the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, which kept our minds focused.

I could not have produced this work on Ghanaian and other unions without the cooperation, interest, and tolerance of several generations of Ghanaian trade unionists and a smaller number of Nigerian union leaders. The Ghanaian trade unionists understood that my interest in their unions was genuine. Many met with me year after year, enduring my many questions and frequent requests for various internal union documents and reports. They often permitted me to pursue highly intrusive questions about union history, affairs, and conflicts, and they were usually very frank in response. They have trusted me to use their verbal information and internal documents in a worthy way, a trust I hope that I have fulfilled. It is an indication of the open, democratic spirit of Ghana's unions that only a couple of the seventeen national unions regarded their affairs as private and not to be shared with researchers and the public.

I wish to thank the following individuals within Ghana's Trade Union Congress (TUC), its national federation: Benjamin Bentum, its secretary-general, or SG in Ghanaian parlance, during 1966–72 for opening wide the union files; Augustus K. Yankey, a brave and unassuming SG during the hard, intimidating years of 1983–92, when authoritarian rule was resisted, and who became a friend who shared his knowledge with me readily; Christian Appiah-Agyei, SG during 1993–2000; and Kojo Adu-Amankwah, SG since 2000, who readily made documents about the TUC's internal life available to me. Jonathan O. Abidi, Yankey's personal assistant over many years, was a valuable source about the internal dynamics of intra-union relationships. Ben Yinsob, Adu-Amankwah's administrative assistant, frequently extended himself to assist me in securing information not easily accessible. He also frankly discussed the quality of union-state relations. Dennis Vorwamor, a deputy SG during 1992–98, was also helpful. K. Mbia, the longtime doyen of the TUC's Administrative Department, had a deep knowledge of the movement and was often helpful and genial. Most recently, the deputy SG for Operations, Kofi Asamoah, was extremely helpful regarding TUC linkages with its Regional and District Labor committees, and J. Y. N. Atopoly, deputy SG for Administration, also shared his knowledge.

Jonathan Tetteh, who was the sole man in the Research Department in the 1970s, was always friendly, thoughtful, and helpful. I also want to thank the many others in various TUC offices over the years who have assisted my research.

I extend my special thanks to Peter Arthiabah posthumously. I first met Peter in 1973, when he worked for the Public Service Workers Union (PSWU). He was immediately helpful and became a constant correspondent and provider of documents via mail for many years. Peter was a man totally engaged with the union movement. He understood the need for the TUC—for which he worked in the 1980s and 1990s—to maintain relations with other social groups in Ghana, for which he was the main link. Ali Ibrahim, an old acquaintance, was a deputy secretary-general in the Organization of African Trade Union Unity, headquartered in Accra in the mid-1980s. He provided important information on the attempted takeover of the Ghana union movement by Jerry Rawlings and the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) in 1982–83.

Within the Industrial and Commercial Union (ICU), long Ghana's largest union, I have benefited from years of support from many of its leaders. In the early 1970s Patrick Kumady and Benjamin Bartimeus shared documents and information regarding their years under the Nkrumah regime, when they served as ICU leaders. Ben Edjah, general secretary (GS) during 1972–82, willingly agreed to be interviewed and shared ICU documents, even by mail when I could not get back to Ghana. L.K.K. Ocloo, the dynamic ICU GS in 1983–91 during the turbulent PNDC years, who was forced to flee into exile, provided useful information. Even more forthcoming and helpful were Abraham Koomson, a deputy GS, and Joseph Haywood Dadie, acting GS during a time of ICU crisis in 1991–92.

The ICU has had its problems, but Napoleon Kpow, its GS since 1992, has been exceptionally open in sharing documents and information about the ICU's internal life and its disputes with the TUC. He has shared documents and information on

repeated visits. F. Kofi Davoh, who led another breakaway within the ICU in the 2000s, which has since rejoined the TUC, readily met with me to discuss the dynamics of ICU life. I have talked to many others within the ICU over the years, in Accra and Tema, to whom I owe thanks. I have also received essential assistance from union office personnel who have found and assembled documents and files for me while managing other duties. The always busy Eric Atrow, personal assistant to general secretary Kpow, deserves my special thanks.

Abraham Koomson became a friend, and he has continued to teach me about trade union life and the dynamics of Tema union life as head of the now independent Textile, Leather, and Garment Workers Union (TLGWU) and the new Ghana Federation of Labor he created.

I am likewise grateful to Richard Baiden, the dynamic GS of the Maritime and Dockworkers Union (MDU) during the 1966–82 era, who enjoyed the great confidence of his members in Tema and Takoradi. But he fell afoul of the PNDC regime after he became TUC SG and once again (as during 1961–66) had to go into exile. I owe enormous thanks to Baiden's successor, Seth Abloso, who has long since become a friend, who was GS for the period 1983–88. I learned a great deal from him about the dynamics of union-state conflicts during Rawlings's PNDC government and about political life in the 1990s. Several succeeding MDU GSs have been extremely forthcoming, including Kofi Asamoah, now TUC deputy SG, and the current MDU GS, K. O. Afrieye, who recently shared candidly his knowledge of the dynamics of intra-TUC leadership struggles between 1988 and 2004.

In 1972 I met I. K. Osei-Mensah, then general secretary, GS, of the General Transport, Petroleum, and Chemical Workers Union (GTPCWU), and he graciously shared information about the union. I was surprised, upon returning a year later, to find A. K. Yankey in the GS's chair. Supported by internal union documents, he explained that the union executive committee had found financial irregularities on the part of its GS and therefore changed the leadership. This proved to be an early lesson for me in how Ghanaian unions maintain leadership accountability. Yankey went on to become the TUC SG and, with others, to bring the TUC out from under the heavy hand of PNDC-attempted domination and intimidation during 1983–92. Yankey's successor as GTPCWU's GS was Napoleon Amoah, who served from 1983 through the mid-1990s. He was a highly competent and strong leader, who shared information about GTPCWU's conflicts with the PNDC government in the 1980s and early 1990s. The next two GSs in succession, J. N. Y. Atopoly, now deputy TUC SG for Administration, and E. A. Mensah, have also generously shared information.

I also appreciate the assistance I received from successive officials in the PSWU starting with Peter Arthiabah in the 1970s. They are: Korang Opore-Ababio, GS in the 1980s and early 1990s; E. T. Ofori, a deputy GS; and A. T. K. Okine, the current GS. I am also grateful to John Brimpong, national chairman, and Robert Coles, GS of the Mine Workers Union, for interviews and assistance. In the large General Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU), former GSs Kweku Haligah and Samuel Asante provided interviews and union documents. In recent years GAWU deputy GS, Kingsley Ofei-Nkansah, has been a friendly source of information about union

thinking. In the 1970s Charles Attah of the Construction and Building Workers Union made available information on the union as has, more recently, P. M. K. Quainoo, a deputy GS.

I am also grateful to officials in the Teachers & Educational Workers Union, Local Government Workers Union, Communications Workers Union, Timbers and Woodworkers Union, Public Utility Workers Union, and Private Transport Workers Union for providing information through interviews over the years.

Within the ranks of labor, but outside of the TUC, successive leaders in the very large Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) have provided me with information on GNAT's activities and GNAT-government relations. I have had a long relationship with its leaders in the 1970s and 1980s, Tom Bediako and Nana-Henne Ababio, respectively. Nana was also a mid-career university student of mine in the United States and remains a good friend. Their successor in the 1990s, Paul Osei-Mensah, was always especially generous in meeting with me and providing detailed documentation about ongoing pay and other disputes with the governments.

I am also deeply indebted to the Labor Department in Accra, which since the 1980s has made available to me some of its files on contemporary and historical areas of trade unions. The detailed reporting on labor by district labor officers has created an important and indispensable historical record of union activities and union-government interactions. In particular, I am very grateful to the successive chief labor officers who have enabled me to conduct research there, including E. Aseidu-Nyarko, Patrick Obeng-Fosu, Alex Gyebi, and Mr. Appenteng.

A number of other Ghanaians have become good friends, and they are remarkably knowledgeable about the Ghanaian union movement and Ghanaian politics generally. One is Yaw Graham, a student radical and then a leftist labor and political organizer in industrial Tema in the 1980s, who has also written on labor. After a brief visit with Ghana's penal facilities in the 1980s and a period in exile, Yaw returned to Ghana in the early 1990s to start Ghana's best newspaper, the then-weekly *Public Agenda*, the only paper with decent coverage of labor. Now head of the most influential policy think tank in Ghana, Third World Network, Yaw has often given me insight into Ghana's political dynamics through his intimate knowledge of Ghanaian political life.

A second is Akoto Ampah, a former student radical who is exceptionally knowledgeable about Ghana's union movement and the ideological and policy choices of leadership. He generously takes time from his busy schedule as a lawyer for the hectoring and harassed of Ghana to discuss politics and trade unions with me.

I am perhaps most deeply indebted to Kwesi Pratt, a good friend and the perpetual agitator of the Ghanaian Left who found himself repeatedly in jail for his resistance to the PNDC in the 1980s and early 1990s, as did Graham and Ampah. I first introduced myself to Kwesi in 1991, as he was organizing the first meeting of a revived (if still illegal) Nkrumahist party. Within days he took me to a meeting of some of the leaders of the recently organized political opposition. Since that time Kwesi has extended to me enormous time, his warm friendship, his great knowledge of Ghanaian politics, and extraordinary efforts to assist me, not least

through introducing me to his unparalleled network of friends from all sides of the political spectrum. I have been quite blessed by my acquaintance with these three leftist Ghanaians, who persist in their fundamental antagonism to inequality.

I also thank my friend Kwame Ninsin, a professor in the Political Science Department of the University of Ghana, who has repeatedly shared his radical intelligence and abundant knowledge about politics in Ghana, as has my longtime friend and excellent analyst of Ghanaian political life, Cyril Daddieh of Miami University of Ohio.

I am deeply grateful to my youthful, engaging, and highly attractive and political wife, Wilma, the object of my considerable affections and desires, who has always supported me in my time-consuming research and writing endeavors. She has exercised substantial tolerance for my abundance of Ghanaian materials.

I greatly appreciate the extensive and exacting labors of the copy editor who worked with me on this manuscript, Dale Rohrbaugh.

Ultimately, this book was written in solidarity with, and as witness to, the insistent demands of many African trade unions and workers in all these countries for a voice and for democratic representation, for a right to participate in processes and choices that affect their lives.

# Abbreviations

## Ghana

AFRC—Armed Forces Revolutionary Council government 1979  
CDRs—Committees for Defense of the Revolution  
CPP—Convention People's Party, 1949–66  
CSA—Civil Servants Association  
DCL(s)—District Council(s) of Labor  
EOSBs—end of service benefits  
GRNA—Ghana Registered Nurses Association  
GNAT—Ghana National Association of Teachers  
HIPC—Highly Indebted Poor Countries  
ICU—Industrial and Commercial Workers Union  
IMF—International Monetary Fund  
KNRG—Kwame Nkrumah Revolutionary Guards  
MDU—Maritime and Dockworkers Union  
NDC—National Democratic Congress party, 1992–  
NDM—New Democratic Movement  
NPP—New Patriotic Party, 1992–  
NUGS—National Union of Ghanaian Students  
PDCs—People's Defense Committees  
PP—Progress Party, 1968–72  
PNP—People's National Party, 1979–81  
PNDC—Provisional National Defense Council, 1982–92  
PSWU—Public Service Workers Union  
SMC—Supreme Military Council government, 1971–79  
TUC—Trade Union Congress  
WDCs—Workers Defense Committees

## International and Other

HDI—Human Development Index  
HIPC—Highly Indebted Poor Countries  
ICFTU—International Confederation of Free Trade Union  
ILO—International Labor Organization  
IMF—International Monetary Fund  
NLC—Nigerian Labor Congress  
OATUU—Organization of African Trade Union Unity  
SAPs—structural adjustment programs

## Namibia

CBO—community based organization  
CDM—Consolidated Diamond Mines  
COD—Congress of Democrats  
DTA—Democratic Turnhalle Alliance  
EIU—Economist Intelligence Unit  
EPZ—export processing zone  
JCF—Joint Coordinating Forum  
LaRRI—Labour Resource and Research Institute  
MP—member of parliament  
MUN—Mineworkers Union of Namibia  
NAFAU—Namibia Food and Allied Union  
NAFTU—Namibian Federation of Trade Unions  
NANGOF—Namibia Nongovernmental Organization Forum  
NANTU—Namibia National Teachers Union  
NAPWU—Namibia Public Workers Union  
NAWU—Namibia Workers Union  
NCSTU—Namibian Christian Social Trade Unions  
NGO—nongovernmental organization  
NPSM—Namibia People's Social Movement  
NUNW—National Union of Namibian Workers  
PSUN—Public Service Union of Namibia  
SWAPO—South West African People's Organisation  
TUCNA—Trade Union Congress of Namibia  
WOSC—Workers Steering Committee

## Niger

ACET—*Alliance crédible aux exigences des travailleurs*  
ANDP—*Alliance nigérienne pour la démocratie et le progrès*  
CDS—*Convention démocratique et sociale*  
CDTN—*Confédération démocratique des travailleurs du Niger*  
CNT—*Confédération nigérienne des travailleurs*  
MNSD-NASSARA—*Mouvement national pour la société de développement*  
PNDS—*Parti nigérien pour la démocratie et le socialisme*  
PPN-RDA—*Parti progressiste nigérien-Rassemblement démocratique africaine*  
RDP-JAMA'A—*Rassemblement pour la démocratie et le progrès*  
SNEN—*Syndicat national des enseignants du Niger*  
SNECS—*Syndicat national des enseignants et chercheurs du supérieur*  
UGTN—*Union général des travailleurs du Niger*  
UNTN—*Union nationale des travailleurs du Niger*  
USTN—*Union des syndicats des travailleurs du Niger*

## Senegal

CNTS—*Confédération national des travailleurs du Sénégal*  
 CSA—*Confédération des syndicats autonomes*  
 PDS—*Parti démocratique sénégalais*  
 PIT—*Parti de l'indépendance et du travail*  
 PS—*Parti socialiste*  
 SUDES—*Syndicat unique et démocratique des enseignants sénégalais*  
 UDEN—*Union démocratique des enseignants sénégalais*  
 UNSAS—*Union des syndicats autonomes du Sénégal*  
 UPS—*Union progressiste sénégalais* (later, PS)  
 UTLS—*Union des travailleurs libres du Sénégal*

## South Africa

ANC—African National Congress  
 COSATU—Congress of South African Trade Unions  
 CUSU—Council of South African Unions  
 FOSATU—Federation of South African Trade Unions  
 GEAR—Growth, Employment, and Redistribution policy  
 LRA—Labour Relations [Amendment] Act  
 NEDLAC—National Economic Development and Labour Council  
 NUM—National Union of Mineworkers  
 PAC—Pan-Africanist Congress  
 SACTU—South African Congress of Trade Unions  
 SACP—South African Communist Party  
 UDF—United Democratic Front

## Zambia

CSUZ—Civil Servants Union of Zambia  
 FFTUZ—Federation of Free Trade Unions of Zambia  
 MUZ—Mineworkers Union of Zambia  
 MMP—Movement for Multiparty Democracy  
 UNIP—United Nationalist Independence Party  
 ZCTU—Zambian Congress of Trade Unions  
 ZNCB—Zambian National Commercial Bank  
 ZNUT—Zambia National Union of Teachers  
 ZUFIAW—Zambia Union of Financial Institutions and Allied Workers

## Zimbabwe

ICA—Industrial Conciliation Act of 1934  
 ILO—International Labor Organization  
 LRA—Labor Relations Act  
 MDC—Movement for Democratic Change

NCA—National Constitutional Assembly

NECF—National Economic Consultative Forum

TNF—Tripartite Negotiating Forum

PVO Act—Private Voluntary Organizations Act

ZANU and ZANU-PF—Zimbabwe African National Union and ZANU-Patriotic  
Front

ZAPU—Zimbabwe African People's Union

ZCTU—Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions

ZFTU—Zimbabwe Federation of Trade Unions