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The Role of Unions in
African Economic Development

by

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THE ROLE OF UNIONS IN AFRICAN
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

Labor unions are important political and economic institutions. That unions may have a significant impact in the country in which they exist is hardly deniable. Unions may use their political power to gain economic objectives as well as to support other legislation which they favor. To obtain their goals unions may follow a course of action that imposes costs on others quite irrespective of whether or not the goal is obtained. Furthermore, unions may alter the allocation of a country's resources among competing users through their effects on the level and structure of wage rates.

One of the first things that a student of labor organization would note from a survey of African less developed countries (LDCs) is the significant presence of trade unions (see, for example, [1] [22]). This might be considered surprising since unions are a relatively recent phenomenon in world economic history. Indeed, Lofchie and Rosberg state that a major difference between the historic process of development which occurred in the West and that which is presently occurring in African nations is that:

In Western society...industrialization was more or less completed long before the establishment of organized trade unions...In Africa, relatively well-organized trade unions have come into existence at the earliest phase of economic development...[16, p.6]

There have been many explanations developed in the literature for this rapid union growth which has preceded industrialization in most LDCs (see, for example [15, pp. 302-4]).

The appearance of labor unions in the African LDCs has not always met with a warm welcome from either the government involved or from development economists. The governments of underdeveloped countries have not extended a

warm welcome to the trade unions because they view them as a threat to both rapid economic growth and political stability. To the government:

At best, they [unions] constitute annoying pressure groups for higher real wages and more advanced social services than the economy can afford at a time when investment is the critical need. At worst, they may be led by political radicals dissatisfied with the existing system of government. The line of least resistance, the one followed in all too many cases, is to deprive the unions of independence of action, if indeed they are permitted to exist at all. [10, p. 3]

When governments have attempted to control trade union action they have generally relied on the twin mechanisms of co-optation and coercion. Specifically:

Control measures include compulsory arbitration, registration of unions, granting and withholding of patronage, surveillance and inspection, government approval of international alignment and of acceptance of foreign assistance, party control over union leadership, and the co-opting of labor leaders into the political and administrative apparatus of the government in order to reduce the autonomous strength of the unions. [17, p. 33]

Many development economists consider it quite natural that the governments of LDCs should seek to drastically curtail the power of trade unions when they are permitted to exist. Some point out that unions were resisted in the presently developed countries at the time of their inception. To them it naturally follows that countries at earlier stages of economic development should more strenuously resist unionization of the industrial labor force. The LDC governments claim that their actions are necessary and in the best interest of rapid economic development. Are the exercise of the traditional union rights to organize, to bargain, and to strike, and rapid economic development under a stable government antithetical? An examination of the role of the unions in the economic development process seems to indicate that the answer to the question is no.

There have been a number of important inquiries into the role of unions in the development process, of which the Inter-University Study of Labor

Problems in Economic Development is in all probability the largest and broadest. Directed by Clark Kerr, John T. Dunlop, Frederick H. Harbinson, and Charles A. Myers, the project resulted in numerous publications. The aforementioned summarize the principal conclusions of the project in their book Industrialism and Industrial Man [13].

Kerr and his associates were at first convinced that organized labor protest would exercise a determinative impact on the development of LDCs. They are, however, forced to abandon this formulation. Rather than focusing on the determinative role of labor in explaining the pattern of industrialization, they found it necessary to explore the role of managerial and political elites. Thus, the authors view the institution of industrial relations, and in particular labor organization not as a reaction to any particular industrial system but rather as a part of the whole industrialization process. As a result, the work of the project spawned much of the development of what we will view as the major theories advanced concerning the role of union in economic development. Despite the somewhat competing nature of much of the work, the members of the project shared one belief, as Galenson (who edited two books resulting from the project) states "all of us who have worked on this book Labor in Developing Economies, and on the larger project of which it is a part, are convinced that independent trade unionism and satisfactory economic development are by no means antithetical" [10, p. 10].

There have been three major theories advanced concerning the role of unions in the economic development process: (1) the theory of political unionism, (2) the theory that the role of unions is to contribute to rapid economic growth, and (3) the theory that the role of unions is to regulate the conflict inherent in the development process. Each of these theories merits a

detailed examination as each possesses strong and weak points relative to explaining observed events in the LDSs.

Political Unionism

The proponents of the political unionism theory contend that the trade unions in developing countries tend to play chiefly political rather than economic roles. The LDC trade unions are claimed to have expended more energy pursuing political goals such as independence than in pursuing economic goals such as higher wages and better working conditions. Millen [20] defines the political union as having six specific characteristics. These characteristics are (1) the political union's leaders are involved daily in political operations and discussions so that the amount of time devoted to direct political work is an index, (2) the goals of the union leadership are quite broad compared to those of Western union leaders and may include modifying the major rules governing the society, (3) there is frequent use of direct collective action in support of nonindustrial objectives, (4) with slight temperance ideological conformity of the leadership is required, (5) there is a marked tendency toward the formation of political movements, and (6) in the early stages a political union resembles a political party and may actually be one. However, political unionism and economic unionism are not mutually exclusive means of action but merely two facets of the organizational pattern. Hence, they may vary in degree in the operation of a particular union and some degree of each is likely found in all unions.

The proponents of this theory clearly believe the degree of political action to be greater than the degree of economic action within the majority of LDC trade unions. In support of their stance they stress the frequency of political strikes in Third World nations and the impetus these have historically given to the nationalist movements in these nations. In

addition, they stress the central role that trade unions have played in the structure of many nationalist movements. They also point out that as a result of this political leaders are frequently drawn from the trade unions in LDCs. Finally, emphasis is placed on the importance of labor related issues in the nationalist period.

There is wide support for this theory and a substantial body of favorable data has been gathered. Its proponents have advanced a wide variety of reasons to explain why LDC trade unions are so politically oriented. Galenson [11] theorizes that unions are so politically involved because they possess too little economic power to effectively attain their goals through collective bargaining. The idea is that because of an overabundance of unskilled labor in the LDCs and a lack of a strong commitment by individual workers, unions lack the stable membership necessary for a high degree of bargaining power. Since unions are not strong enough to bargain effectively by themselves they seek access to political power instead. In their naturally weak state the chances of unions increasing the low standard of living substantially are slight. Hence, the unions seek to attain more significant and more rapid improvements in living conditions through direct political action in the form of social legislation. Although Berg would probably not agree with the causation, he does substantiate the fact that in Africa significant improvements in living conditions have arisen from the political arena and not the collective bargaining process. This is witnessed by his statement that:

direct union efforts against employers have rarely brought real wage increases to African labor; it is rather social legislation and the labor movement's political influence which have been responsible for most of the real wage gains of recent years. [2, p. 227]

Sufrin [26] advances a somewhat similar theory in which the collective bargaining process proves to be ineffective to attain the union's goals. As he sees it, employers, either by themselves or with the unions, are simply not

capable of arriving at satisfactory solutions to the question of wages, hours, and conditions of employment. Nor are they capable of making their unsatisfactory solutions stick. The market mechanism using collective bargaining, with a written agreement arrived at among the parties involved does not exist in developing societies in the same powerful fashion as it does in developed Western economies. As a result unions in an attempt to carry out their traditional economic role have found it necessary to maintain a strong political lobbying effort with government. This is the case since the government either as the center of economic power and control or as the major employer in the economy is capable of determining more acceptable solutions to the questions. Furthermore, it is capable of making its solutions to the questions stick either by direct legislation or by setting a pattern for other employers to follow. Thus Sufrin concludes:

In emerging lands government is the political substitute for the economic market, providing mechanisms of wage and hour determination, and making decisions based on criteria different from those which guide the operation of the economic markets of the Western World.

...the labor role of government in the underdeveloped areas is so much greater than the role of government in the Western World, that in emerging societies the major orientation of union effort is often directed toward political concern rather than toward economic concern. Thus, collective bargaining plays a lesser role in the new societies than in the old, but politics plays a greater role, even though the effectiveness of new governments may be limited. [26, pp. 29-39]

Millen [20] saw still additional factors as explaining the politicizing of Third World trade unions. There were a prevalence of revolutionary political parties in the LDCs that sought to politicize all interest groups in the society including trade unions. Third World colonial countries tended to be characterized by a pervasive pattern of racial injustice. As a result of this, white employees were often allowed to organize and bargain collectively where natives were not. Hence, the native workers tended to resort to

political means to improve their material conditions. Once this pattern emerged it tended to be self-perpetuating.

Having surveyed what he considers to be impressive evidence marshalled by himself and other supporters of this theory of the union's role in development, Galenson is led to believe that "it should be apparent that the outlook for non-political unionism in the newly developing countries is not bright. We may expect, rather, a highly political form of unionism, with a radical ideology" [9, p. 8].

The theory of political unionism as developed so far has a number of implications in regard to government attitudes and action toward trade unions. It does not suggest that the newly established governments in LDCs should necessarily seek to restrict action by trade unions. After all, this theory indicates that most of these new governments owe their existence to the union's efforts against the colonial rulers. It also seems to indicate that perhaps it is incorrect to interpret co-optation of union leaders as an attempt by government to control unions. It might be the case that the causation works the other way. Perhaps union leaders want to be co-opted into the political and administrative apparatus of the government because they feel they will be better able to attain their supporters' economic objectives in that way. The theory does not conclusively tell us in which direction the causation flows. The political unionism theory does seem to indicate that colonial governments of the past or those that would seek to continue their economic policies might have reasons to consider trade unions as a threat and hence seek to control them. A careful examination of the arguments put forth by the critics of political unionism indicates, however, that historically this has not been the case. Rather, trade unions were allowed more independent action under colonial rule than they have been since independence

in most cases. As Ananaba [1, p. 6] states, "There are probably more African trade unionists in jail or in detention, killed or driven into exile by independent African countries than was the case during the whole period of colonial rule." (For detailed studies of colonial policies in Africa, see [19, pp. 31-52].)

Despite the wide support for the political unionism theory it does not confront the large body of seemingly contradictory evidence in certain parts of the world, which critics of the theory have been quick to point out. A number of studies of African countries have been made with reference to the issue of political unionism by examining the relationship between trade unions and political commitment before independence. Most of these studies have not shown support for the theory in practice. As Henley [12, p. 224] puts it, "one of the persisting myths surrounding African trade unions is that they are peculiarly committed to politics and parties." He goes on to note that "in Kenya, the theory of political unionism has had few adherents." Davies [6] approaches the issue of political unionism by examining the relationship between trade unions and political commitment before independence. He observes that unions were more overtly political in the French-speaking territories than they were in the English-speaking territories. However, even within French-speaking Africa only Guinea appears to have come really close to conforming to the ideals of the political unionism theorists. In general he concludes that the political unionism school is very weak when actual African countries are studied. Thus Davies observes that "the instance where trade unions early allied themselves with the leading political parties and continued to do so up to independence are few" [6, p. 96].

Other studies of trade unions in Tropical Africa further substantiate Davies findings. Berg and Butler [3] surveyed labor movements in over a dozen

African nations and found that only two might fit into the political unionism classification. They point out, however, that it is very difficult to find elsewhere in Africa the close union party ties observed in Guinea and Kenya. Of particular importance are the cases of Tanzania and Ghana as these two countries are frequently cited by the proponents of political unionism as examples in support of the theory. However, certain studies of these countries strongly suggest that where the trade unions did actively support revolutionary movements they did so only to obtain economic objectives and not as a reaction to a particular system of government. In the case of Tanzania, trade union action was prompted by opposition to major agricultural employers [27, p. 410]. In Ghana the unions acted in protest against rapid inflation. Damachi's [4] case study of Ghanaian economic development provides careful documentation of this phenomenon in relation to the general strike of 1950. Berg and Butler are even more adamant on the issue of Ghana. The authors state that:

The Ghana trade-union movement before 1958 not only had limited reactions with the dominant political party, but was one of the least ideological labor movements in all Africa. It revealed little interest in broad political issues and goals. [3, p. 351]

Various reasons have been advanced to explain this lack of political interest during the colonial period. Roberts [23] feels that the most important factor in explaining behavior in former British territories is the attitude held by the government's colonial administrators toward the trade unions. At least in former British colonies there were not attempts on the part of the government to stifle union development. Instead the administrators did what they could to encourage the development of trade unions and collective bargaining along the European line. With a strong framework for collective bargaining insured by the government and relatively autonomous action allowed, trade unions had no reason to challenge the

colonial administrations. Lofchie and Rosberg agree that:

The historic autonomy of trade unions during the colonial era casts serious doubts on the assumption that common opposition to European rule fomented strong and early bonds between union leadership and nationalist politicians. It is probably more accurate to interpret colonial rule as an important factor in accounting for union separatism. [16, p. 44]

This substantial body of evidence contradicting the theory of political unionsim, particularly that from Ghana and Tanzania, severely damages its credibility. Furthermore, this evidence does not justify the present attitude toward the trade unions that most LDC governments have. If the trade unions in these countries have traditionally played nonpolitical roles they should not be a threat to the stability of present governments. If the unions are allowed to maintain the independent role which they played under the colonial administrators, there appears no reason why they should suddenly turn revolutionary. It would seem that a new government wishing to maintain industrial and political harmony should guarantee that the collective bargaining process continues to work as effectively as it did during the country's colonial period. The implications of just such an approach on the part of the government will be examined later. It is clear that the literature of neither proponents nor the critics of the political unionism theory contain anything that would substantially justify the current actions against unions. Indeed some of the views advanced would seem to suggest that a more favorable attitude toward the unions would be beneficial.

Unions and Rapid Economic Growth

This approach to the role of unions in the development process is primarily an attempt to integrate the theory of political unionism and the Inter-University Study of Labor Problems in Economic Development. It views the union's role as being both political and economic in nature. The proponents of this theory advance a role for unions in LDCs that is widely at

variance with that played by Western trade unions. The theory is basically a production-oriented one. The union role in development is to help to restrain wage demands and thus to reduce consumption-oriented activities. Unions are to reduce strikes, attempt to increase labor productivity in general, and to exert pressure on low-productivity workers in order to increase national output. At first glance these activities certainly seem counter to the consumption-oriented behavior of Western trade unions. Mehta [18] and Schweinitz [25] have been among the most fervent exponents of a form of trade unionism in LDCs that is oriented toward increased production.

The logic behind this theory is quite persuasive. Suppose that union leadership has as its objectives the maximization of some welfare function of its members, the self perpetuation of the union, and the self perpetuation of themselves as the union's leaders. Considering the first objective, in a stagnant, under developed economy the only way the union leadership can appreciably improve their members' welfare is at the expense of other segments of the economy. To do so is going to require that the union possess substantial economic power. No one ever knowingly allows himself to be made worse off without a struggle. This is particularly likely to be the case when the person is very near subsistence level as is often the case in most LDCs. Such resistance imposes a cost on the union for any gains they are capable of achieving. Unless the unions are exceedingly more powerful than they usually are in LDCs the cost may be greater than any gains. These costs may take purely monetary forms. More importantly from the standpoint of the union leaders they might manifest themselves in the form of government restrictions on the actions or even existence of unions. Since this would endanger the objective of union self-perpetuation, the leadership must seek to improve their members' welfare in other ways. The alternative available to them is to

help to promote a rapid economic growth. This is a particularly appealing approach as it allows everyone to become better-off within the economy. In addition, it is quite likely that the government will reward the unions for their cooperation through the passage of special social legislation which they favor. This will tend to both improve the union's position relative to other segments of the economy and to help perpetuate the union as an institution within the economy. So long as everything continues to move rapidly the leaders will also be able to maintain their positions.

Unions may help to promote rapid economic growth in a number of ways. To start with they must be willing to curtail strikes. In LDCs, as in advanced countries, unions tend to organize and to have their greatest power in the most important sectors of the economy. In the case of most LDCs, the most important sector is the public sector as a very substantial portion of the wage labor force is directly or indirectly employed by the government. Thus, a strike by union members would not only drastically reduce output in the public sector itself but would in addition have substantial feedback effects into all sectors of the economy. Considering the economy's already weak state, such strikes would have a devastating effect on the government's attempts to attain rapid economic growth.

It is equally as important to keep wage levels low at least in the short run. As Ananaba has noted, in post-independence Africa:

Claims for improvement in wages and working conditions were generally frowned at,...because of their likely consequences on the public service, as the governments--and local authorities and institutions created by them— were the largest employers in practically every African country. [1, p. 193]

Also, the capital-investment multiplier effect is felt to give a greater impetus to growth than that of consumption. Keeping wages low allows industry to generate a high level of investable profits with such capital investment

leading to rapid economic growth. An additional benefit to the economy from keeping wages low is a reduction in unemployment. This has a particularly significant impact since productive methods in LDCs are usually capital not labor saving. Also, keeping wages low in the modern sector helps to keep the urban-rural wage differential small and thus not encourage a mass migration to the city from the country. This is important since LDC governments are seldom capable of providing the social-overhead-capital necessary to handle such migrations.

Finally, if trade unions can raise the productivity of their members, output will increase for a given level of expenditure. Thus the proponents of this theory stress that not only is it important that unions not interfere with management's attempts to discipline low-productivity workers but rather complement it through peer pressure [8]. The ultimate result of such a strategy will be a more rapid rate of economic development.

This view of the union's role in the development process certainly does not justify the present government attitude toward them. Though it is true that unions are seen as functioning as a kind of third arm of the government they are not doing so because of any overt or covert action on the part of the latter. Instead, unions are believed to act in the described manner because they perceive it to be in their best interest. Their actions are motivated by the three objectives of the union's leadership, namely members' welfare maximization, union perpetuation, and leadership perpetuation. This theory strongly suggests that independent trade union action and successful economic development may be complementary rather than contradictory. Indeed, one of its staunch supporters, Mehta, views independent unions as a prerequisite to successful development. He states, "The desire of trade unions to play a decision role in the economic growth of an underdeveloped country can only

succeed if they are independent" [18, p. 16]. This view is apparently shared by Ghanaian trade unions who in a survey by Damachi "felt that only their independence and their equal partnership with the other participants [politicians and management] in the formulation of national developmental policies would adequately generate motivation which was essential to workers' productivity" [5, p. 29].

Unfortunately, this theory seems to be more one of what the role of unions should be rather than what it is. Most recent data seems to indicate that unions in underdeveloped countries act quite similar to their Western counterparts. It appears that unions have been either unwilling or unable to act as an ancillary element of the government. In the previously cited survey by Damachi [5] of Ghanaian trade union members, 100 per cent of the union members responding felt that job interest of the workers was the primary purpose of trade unionism, whereas only 30 per cent of them embraced nation-building as a secondary role.

In many countries the governments have tried to restrict the consumption proclivity of union members through the institution of forced savings. The idea was that through compulsory savings a large pool of investable funds could be created leading to a greater rate of capital investment and growth. Ghana and Tanzania both have attempted to institute a program of compulsory savings. In both cases the scheme of imposed savings failed. A primary reason for this failure was a lack of support in the part of the unions [8].

It also appears that unions have not been successful in curtailing strikes. Nor does it appear that they have actually tried to do so. On the contrary, unions have acted in cooperation with government only for a price in the short run. If the price the government pays is more autonomy for the unions, the result may be an increase in strikes. An example is Ghana during

the National Liberation Council government (1966-69).

To help ease the problem of implementation [of new policies], the military regime enlisted the cooperation of the TUC [Trade Union Congress]. But the TUC would not readily offer its cooperation without a definite commitment from the government guaranteeing protection of its interest. So the TUC was once more told it was free to organize democratically and bargain collectively, despite the fact that the problems of inflation, balance of payments, and foreign debts remained. Therefore this phase witnessed an upsurge in strikes, for labor was bent on easing its frustrations that had accumulated during the Nkrumah regime. [4, p. 130]

Once again it appears unions have been unable or unwilling to act to assist government plans for rapid economic growth.

Particular emphasis should be placed on the fact that unions may be unable to help. The theory had unions acting in the described manner because the leaders perceived it to be in their best interest. Now along with the objective to maintain the union, the leaderships seek to retain their positions of authority within the union. To retain their offices union leadership must convince their constituents that they are acting in their best interest. A policy which seeks to restrict consumption in the face of increasing member aspirations is not likely to meet with a favorable response. Since the weights to be attached to the three objectives of the leadership are unknown, it is possible that the leadership may prefer to risk government displeasure and maintain control than to cooperate and find themselves out of a job. Knowles comments that "in an environment of unemployment and poverty, semiliterary and superstition, along with lack of experience in collective action and group discipline, the vital question is: Can a labor politician or labor leader become responsible and still remain a leader?" [14, p. 293].

The proponents of the theory have amassed a considerable amount of contradictory evidence. This evidence also presents a relatively strong base of support for present LDC government action at first inspection. The evidence shows unions if not resisting at least not supporting compulsory

savings programs. They cooperate with government only to obtain more power which they then abuse. The union leaders cannot act responsibly because the members do not know their best long-run interest. All this would certainly seem to justify strong government restrictions on trade unions.

There is, however, no evidence that unions have acted concertedly to sabotage compulsory savings programs. At best the evidence indicates that union leaders really do not control their members' actions. Restricting unions does not necessarily change the behavior of the individual members. And this is what the government must do if its programs are to be successful. The evidence from Ghana indicates that the rash of strikes resulted because of frustrations that had accumulated during a period of heavy restrictions under the Nkrumah regime. Had the union never faced such restrictions, this period of catching-up strikes would not have been necessary. Thus union restrictions might prove to be self-perpetuating, since whenever they are removed at some future date it might lead to a period of aggressive union action. Furthermore, if restricting trade union action does not change the underlying emotions of the members, the government is creating a mass of frustration that has no organized outlet. It is highly likely that this frustration will then be expressed in forms that are potentially more harmful to a developing economy than that of potential union actions. This fact was apparently realized by British colonial rulers in Africa as early as 1930 [1, pp. 1-2]. Thus a second inspection of the reasoning does not seem to indicate the present government policies are in the best interest of development.

Unions and Conflict Regulation

The newest theory of the union's role in the development process may provide the most positive case of the existence of independent trade unions. The theory views the union as being the organizers and regulators of the

conflict inherent in the development process. This is carried out through the collective bargaining process. The union serves to channel worker protest into socially useful forms.

The reasons why there would be social and labor unrest and discontent during the development period are many and varied. One of the primary needs of any developing economy is the development of a relatively large industrial labor force in a short period of time. The shortage of such a labor force causes a large positive wage differential between the urban industrialized sector and the rural backward sector of the economy. This positive wage differential induces a migration of manpower from the rural to the urban areas. Uninitiated in the ways of modern society the migrant workers often suffer from urban shock. Since in most cases the migrant leaves family and friends in the rural area, he finds himself alone in a culture he does not understand. In most cases the governments in the LDCs do not have the amount of resources to provide the necessary social overhead capital to service burgeoning urban populations. The result is a drastic lack of sanitary facilities, civil servants, and housing. This leads to the development of slums and all the social problems that accompany them, such as crime, delinquency, prostitution, gambling, alcoholism, discrimination, unfair competition, and so forth. This migration thus poses special problems to the society that may be somewhat alleviated by the existence of active trade unions. As Mehta has pointed out:

Their (immigrants) social adjustment in the settled population patterns must be smoothed, and the trade unions can assist the State in this task. One of the main ways in which the problem can be solved is the provision of industrial housing. It is possible for trade unions to float cooperative housing societies for their members and thus canalize the flow of immigrants. [18, p. 22]

A related problem in the process of building an industrial labor force is the initiating of the new recruit to the discipline of the work routine (see,

for example [21, pp. 161-68] [12, pp. 228-32]). As an agricultural worker the new recruit was basically free to determine his pace and hours of work. His decision was conditioned only by the need to provide a subsistence living. In the case of a family owned farm he was his own boss surrounded by his family. In the case where he was a hired laborer or sharecropper he was undoubtedly well acquainted with and to a certain extent friendly with his landlord. Now as an industrial worker he must report for work at a certain time each day and work at some prescribed minimum rate for a definite number of hours. He must abide by the rules and regulations regarding work and safety. He must observe factory protocol and in all ways strictly follow factory discipline. The new industrial worker accustomed to the relative freedom of the agricultural sector often is annoyed with all the rules and regulations which to him seem quite arbitrary and which he cannot understand. The result is a growing feeling of discontent on the part of the worker [18].

Unions may alleviate this problem by providing the worker with a certain esprit de corps. They provide the worker with someone he can turn to for interpretation of work rules and support for his grievances. As Henley [12, p. 238] puts it "in this formalization or 'depersonalization' process, trade unions have two potential roles. The first is to educate workers in the existing 'rules of the game' and the second to defend their membership against retrenchment and arbitrary managerial actions." Unions improve the individuals self-worth by making him feel that what he is doing is important and dignified. Damachi [5, pp. 32-33] in his survey of Ghanaian trade union members noted that "nationally ...trade unions have aroused the consciousness of the worker and have stimulated his interest in national rather than in tribal objectives...and by making him see himself as playing an essential role in the development process, have helped him to develop a new confident

self-identity." And, primarily unions represent a collective force to right what might be unjust about present work regulations and to force employers to be efficient.

Unfortunately LDC governments have often led people to believe that a more rapid rate growth was possible than actually is. This was often a part of the revolutionary propaganda. The people were led to believe that simply disposing of the colonial administration would lead to an immediate increase in wealth for everyone. When the governments are unable to meet their promises workers soon begin protest. Unless this protest is controlled and channeled it might erupt in violent general strikes, work slowdowns and even open revolt, all of which have harmful effects on the economic stability of the country involved. The natural functions of unions is the channeling of such protest. Unions therefore are seen to be a very necessary element in a society in the process of industrial transition. They play a very important role in reducing social friction and hence enabling a more rapid rate of economic growth.

As this theory stands, the benefits to LDCs from the establishment of trade unions are very substantial. Such benefits strongly suggest that the present government attitude toward the unions is unjustified. Furthermore, it may actually be harmful to the attainment of rapid economic growth. There does, however, exist a substantial body of observations that appear to contradict the theory. Where trade unions do exist they have not always succeeded in controlling and channeling the conflict. Trade unions have participated in the overthrow of the government in several countries and the eruption of violent general strikes in others. Included among these countries are Nigeria, Congo-Brazzaville, and Dahomey.

These examples of trade union inability to contain conflict may be

explained by examination of the necessary preconditions of successful collective bargaining. First, all parties involved must recognize every other party as a legitimate representative of a special interest with a right to participate in the decision-making process. Such mutual recognition is not always the case in the LDCs. Governments and business leaders alike fail to recognize the trade unions and with almost equal frequency the unions do not recognize the government leaders as true representatives of the general populace. Mutual recognition is not the only precondition that must be fulfilled, as Galenson points out:

For successful collective bargaining, there must be at least approximate equality of bargaining power, and the willingness of the parties to forget the lacerations caused by the bargaining process. These ingredients are rarely to be found in under-developed countries. [10, p. 6]

One basic problem that is likely to occur is that business and governments will fail to realize the potential strength of trade unions until it is forced upon them. As Friedland notes, "The organizational forms of African trade unions are often misleading because they appear so weak and so chaotic by the standards of industrial societies" [12, p. 7]. However, when one considers them in light of their own environment their strength quickly increases. Typically the societies within the LDCs have few well-organized, voluntary interest groups outside of traditional tribal and family groups. Further the administration of LDCs are often relatively weak and lacking effective means to control labor protest and maintain the public order. An examination of recent history shows that it is often the case that union power is underestimated. According to Sandbrook:

too often the smallness of unions in African counties, together with their financial and sometimes organizational weaknesses led observers to conclude that these bodies are no match for a government determined to have its way. Yet these unions have frequently shown a remarkable obstinacy in pursuing traditional union aims in the face of government displeasure. [24, p. 24]

And in some cases where the governments have underestimated union power, the results have been devastating.

Friedland examines the countries of Nigeria, Congo-Brazzaville, and Dahomey. In the first country unions resorted to a general strike, and in the latter two countries trade unions participated in the overthrow of the government. In all three cases there is substantial evidence that the actions resulted because of government's failure to recognize the unions as labor's representative in the negotiation process. There is also some evidence that this was reinforced by a lack of faith in the government on the part of the unions. Friedland in his study of Nigeria observes both of these phenomena as is evident in the following:

Despite government's recognition of the Joint Action Committee, the labor movement had little confidence in the federal government's intentions throughout the seven months of the Morgan Commission inquiries. The subsequent delay in publishing the Commission's report and the unsatisfactory nature of government's counter-proposal only heightened labor's suspicions, while also revealing the government's gross underestimation of the unions power to carry out their strike threats.

Efforts of the union leaders to negotiate before the strike were thwarted by the absence or inaccessibility of key government officials. [7, p. 8]

Thus one of the largest obstacles in the path of unions successfully regulating conflict is the government's failure to recognize them and to properly gauge their strength.

An examination of specific cases where conflict regulation has failed shows the failure occurred because the necessary preconditions were not satisfied. Specifically, it failed because of the attitude and action of LDC governments toward trade unions. This theory shows that not only are the LDCs losing the potential benefits of independent trade unions but that they may actually be making themselves worse off. As Knowles states, "In the absence of established trade unions and established political parties, labor unrest

leads to both political and economic instability" [15, p. 308]. There are costs to the political and economic instability that has occurred when conflict regulation has failed, costs that are far too high for a country that is on the threshold of economic growth.

If the governments of the LDCs are seriously interested in the welfare of their citizens and in their attempts to attain a rapid rate of economic growth then they must not prohibit independent trade unions. Rather than acting to restrict and weaken union action, the LDC governments should ensure that the union's actions have the most beneficial effect for the entire country. There is a need for the governments and the trade unions to recognize each others right to exist and their legitimacy to represent their constituents.

Summary and Conclusion

It has been observed that the underdeveloped nations of Africa have been experiencing a rapid unionization of their labor force. There is no historical counterpart to this phenomenon, as the presently developed nations were considerably more industrialized at the time when rapid unionization began. The governments within the African LDCs have for the most part not reacted favorably to the inception of unionism. They have instead resorted to a number of strictures designed to weaken or prevent unions from forming. The question arises whether or not such actions are in the best interest of rapid economic growth. It is believed that insight into the answer may be gained by studying the role of unions in the development process.

There have been three major theories proposed to describe the role unions play in economic development. Each of these theories has substantial evidence in support of it and substantial evidence which appears to contradict it. None of the theories are successful in giving a comprehensive explanation of observed occurrences in LDCs. However, partial though they may be, none of

them in any significant way suggest that unions and successful economic development are antithetical. Nor do the critics of the theories present any evidence in support of the present government stance. Rather, all of the evidence considered seems to indicate that there are benefits associated with the existence of independent trade unions. Some is so strong that it suggests that the present government stance is not only precluding the attainment of certain benefits but may in fact have a damping effect on economic growth. If these governments are sincere in their espoused goals, then they should definitely reconsider their present policies toward trade unions.

NOTE

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