Trade Union Imperialism: American Labour, The ICFTU and the Kenyan Labour Movement
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Trade Union Imperialism: American Labour, The ICFTU and the Kenyan Labour Movement

ABSTRACT

The paper seeks to examine the relations between the Kenyan and Western labour movements, particularly with the AFL-CIO and the ICFTU. It is shown that apart from the mere offer of financial inducements by these Western labour movements, on which many writers tend to dwell, the collaborative relationship between them and the Kenyan labour movement, which emerged from the early 1950s to the mid-1960s, was made possible by the remarkable ideological compatibility between these movements. This arose out of the conjuncture of internal contradictions of both movements and the process of decolonisation. It will be argued that while the Kenyan labour movement was not simply being 'manipulated', as is so often asserted by some dependency writers, its relations with the Western labour movements reinforced 'internal' trends towards deradicalisation.

INTRODUCTION

The end of the Second World War ushered in a new post-war international division of labour characterised by, among other things, the hegemony of American capital, the gathering storms of decolonisation, and a deepening ideological struggle between the capitalist West and the expanding Eastern socialist bloc. Not surprisingly, therefore, relations between the working classes of the metropolitan and dependent countries entered a new and particularly difficult and complicated phase.

This new phase witnessed the crystallisation of some important trends in the development of Western labour movements which were to have a profound impact on the
latter's relations with the restive labour movements of the
colonial and dependent world. First, the articulation of trade
unions and the policy-making apparatuses of the advanced
capitalist states reached a new level of intensity.1 This was
partly made possible by and, simultaneously, gave rise to a
more pronounced penetration, to use Lenin's phrase, of
imperialist ideology among metropolitan workers.2 Hence,
the almost unprecedented attempts by their labour move-
ments to incorporate labour movements from the dependent
countries into the anti-socialist crusade of Western imperial-
ism.

But it would be too simplistic to assume, as crude
dependence assertions might imply, that labour movements
in the dependent countries were just being 'manipulated' by
Western labour movements. Imperialist relations are almost
invariably more complex than that. In this paper an attempt
will be made to show that the collaborative relationship
which emerged between the AFL-CIO, ICFTU and the
dominant fraction of the Kenyan labour movement from the
early 1950s to the mid-1960s arose out of the conjuncture of
internal contradictions of both movements and the process
of decolonisation. It will also be argued that apart from the
mere offer of financial inducements by the international
labour movements, on which many writers tend to dwell,
the (Kenya Federation of Labour) KFL-ICFTU and AFL-CIO
relationship was made possible by the remarkable ideological
compatibility between these movements.

BACKGROUND

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
(ICFTU) was born out of the fractious split in the ranks of
the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) at the end of
1949. The latter, the first trade union international to in-
clude workers from both the advanced capitalist countries
and the colonial and dependent countries, had only been
created four years earlier amidst the euphoria of Allied and Soviet victory over the fascist powers. It is now rent apart by the winds of the Cold War which were sweeping the world as the new superpowers, the USA and USSR, struggled to expand and consolidate their respective hegemonies. The ICFTU was, therefore, one of the offsprings of the new world order, a telling commentary on the decline of the old colonial powers of Europe.

The British Trades Union Congress (TUC) had played a key role in the formation of the WFTU. In contrast, the American Federation of Labour (AFL) had opposed its creation from the very beginning. George Meany, one of the AFL’s leaders who became President of the AFL-CIO after its merger in 1955, contemptuously dismissed the WFTU in a phrase that characterised the attitudes and signalled the policies which the American labour movement would pursue in years to come both inside and outside of the ICFTU. The WFTU was, in his view, “an odd combination of British Imperialism and Soviet Communism”.

The virulent anti-communism of the American labour movement both at home and abroad after the Second World War represented a conjuncture of forces tending towards the deradicalisation of American labour. Trotsky already noted this trend towards conservatism when he wrote that the leadership of American trade unions reflected “not so much the proletariat, as the bourgeoisie”. Marcuse was later to argue that this was because, contrary to Lenin’s formulation, the labour aristocracy was no longer “just a small fragment of the working class which has been integrated but, as in the United States today, its vast majority”.

In a penetrating piece on the American proletariat, Mike Davis has gone so far as to argue that:

In spite of the periodic intensity of the economic class struggle and the episodic appearance of ‘new lefts’ in every generation since the Civil War, the rule of capital has remained more power-
fully installed and less politically contested than in any other advanced capitalist formation.\(^6\)

In fact, unlike the working classes of Western Europe, the American working class because of its lack of "a rich panoply of collective institutions or any totalising agent of class consciousness (that is, a class party), has been increasingly integrated into American imperialism through the negatives of its internal stratification, its privatisation in consumption, and its disorganisation vis-a-vis political and trade union bureaucracies".\(^7\)

In the face of the immense sociopolitical hegemony of the American bourgeoisie, the American proletariat was debilitated by profound ethno-racial-religious polarizations, which were reinforced by continual European immigration and internal migration, and, thus, led to the constant re-composition of the working class. In different periods, Davis maintains, these divisions have fused together as definite intra-class hierarchies. In short, the increasing proletarianisation of the American social structure was not "matched by an equal tendency toward the homogenisation of the working class as a cultural or political collectivity".\(^8\) Such internal contradictions, coupled by fratricidal struggles between the AFL and CIO in the 1930s, and the cumulative impact of historic defeats suffered by the American working class, led to the radical disjuncture between elemental trade union militancy of many American workers and their apparent political quiescence at home and subservience to the goals of American imperialism abroad.

Thus, although neither the AFL nor the CIO before their merger enjoyed the kind of relationship with the Democratic Party that the British TUC had with the Labour Party, in its international relations, the American labour movement was, no less, conditioned by the exigencies of American foreign policy. It is even tempting to argue that the very lack of an independent labour or socialist party in the
United States of America made the integration of trade unions into the post-war 'cold war' consensus of American foreign policy all the easier. By the time of the outbreak of the Second World War, the AFL had already degenerated into a conservative monolith of business unionism and class collaboration and was bitterly opposed to the relative radicalism of the CIO. Meanwhile, the CIO, which was "born out of the New Deal and upsurge of mass organising and sometimes revolutionary socialist movement in the thirties", was, itself, edging towards a political alliance with the Democrats, although "the real institutional coalescence of the two only permanently took hold in 1944 with the launching of the Political Action Committee (PAC) as the CIO's new campaign apparatus". From the late 1930s, moreover, the CIO fell victim to "renewed employer territorialism" and an anti-radical backlash fanned by the media and the AFL which accused the CIO of being communist-dominated. This has the effect of exacerbating factional cleavages within the CIO and the ensuing "running batrles between Trotskyists and 'Stalinists' further diluted its strength in the late thirties and forties".

During the war, a number of major developments took place which were to have far-reaching effects on the international relations of American labour. First, the savage 'civil wars' within the CIO and between the latter and the AFL continued and laid the ground for 'cold war' bloodletting within the labour movement itself. The failure of the communists to influence wartime labour militancy as a result of their "virtually uncritical adulation of Roosevelt and Murray (a leader of the CIO) in the fall of 1941" following the German invasion of the Soviet Union, "opened the way for anti-communist forces within the CIO to manipulate the rank and file unrest to their own factional advantage".

Second, partly as a result of this factionalism, partly out of labour's desire to play an important role in the organisation of the wartime economy, and partly because of Roosevelt's efforts, "to shore up the position of the labour bureaucracy in the face of internal union decomposition and consequent loss of control over the work force", In an attempt
to safeguard the labour vote, the American unions became more bureaucratised and rank and file activism was, thereby, further dissipated. Consequently, unlike the TUC, there would be “no fights over foreign policy on the convention floors” of practically all unions”. American union leaders would, therefore, have a free reign to conduct reactionary international policies in collusion with the interests of American imperialism.

Thirdly, the rise of wartime nationalism created the basis for a new cultural cohesion within the post-war American working class which reinforced trends towards conservatism because this new nationalism “was broadly inclusive of the white working class (blacks, Mexicans, and especially Japanese-Americans need not apply) and, moreover, was propped by powerful material supports. The latter included the job-generating capacities of the permanent arms economy, and, in a more general sense, the new structural position of the American working class within a post-war world economy dominated by U.S. capital.

Finally, it has been pointed out that the Red Army’s entry into Eastern Europe had an electrifying impact upon the slavs and Hungarians who comprised perhaps half of the CIO membership. Consequently, “the left wing ethnic organisations which had played such a heroic role in the early organisation of the CIO, and which had been one of the most important sources of socialist influence on the industrial working class, either collapsed or were marginalised by a huge recrudescence of right-wing, anticommunists nationalism in each community”.

American labour, therefore, emerged from the Second World War with its organisational base of industrial unionism virtually ossified into a bureaucratic mould, and was ideologically predisposed to embrace the global anti-communist crusade of American imperialism.
After the war, Europe was shattered and exhausted while the USA was left triumphant, the new centre of the capitalist world, its industries brimming with overproduction. In 1947, the Marshall Plan was devised to enable European economies to absorb American surplus production and to help them in their long term reconstruction programmes. It was in the same year that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was formed out of the wartime Office of Strategic Services. The orientation of American labour relations, first in Europe, then later in the Third World, was to be heavily influenced by these two developments: the establishment of the Marshall Plan and the CIA.

The Soviet bloc and Western European communist unions were opposed to the Marshall Plan. In France, for instance, there was a wave of strikes in 1947 led by communist unions refusing to handle U.S. Marshall Aid consignments. Consequently, the U.S.A. sought to undermine these unions and the WFTU. The CIA channelled large amounts of money to the AFL which, in turn, used those funds to reorganise and harness European trade union support for the Marshall Plan. Everything was used; propaganda, material and financial aid, to prop up the positions of anti-communist and pro-American trade unionists. Similar strategies were to be used in the Third World shortly after. European governments tolerated these AFL and CIO machinations, if only because they were dependent on Marshall Aid and they, themselves, were worried about communist takeovers.

Apart from the Marshall Plan and other political considerations, American labour's antipathy towards the WFTU was partly determined by the opposition of American-dominated international Trade Secretariats against subordination to the WFTU. Within the ICFTU, itself, intense rivalry between American unions and the British TUC soon developed. In fact, the AFL initially boycotted the ICFTU for
two years in protest over the election of the TUC general secretary, Sir Vincent Tewson, as President. The AFL was not impressed by what it considered the TUC’s lukewarm opposition to communism.21

The divisions between the British and American labour movements were deepened when American labour leaders decided to take their anti-communist crusade to the colonial world. The British were resentful of any significant inroads into their colonies by others who might upstage them. Coupled with their deeply ingrained Fabian spirit, this explains why they deplored the importation of cold war politics into areas under their paternalistic suzerainty. Even the British government, itself, issued complaints about the activities of American labour leaders in Africa.22 The Americans, on the other hand, were determined to establish contacts with colonial trade union leaders, which might pay political dividends in the future. “The obscure trade unionist of today,” wrote George Cabot Lodge, one of the directors of the CIA-supported Fund for International Social and Economic Education, “may well be the president or prime minister of tomorrow. In many countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, trade unions are almost the only organised force in direct contact with the people and they are frequently among the most important influences on the people.”23

In the end, the British TUC would be handicapped by its own familiarity in the colonies. Moreover, the fact that the AFL-CIO could drum up more cash for international work in one year than the TUC could in a decade, gave the American labour movement a decisive advantage.24 The policies of the AFL-CIO, and, increasingly, those of the ICFTU, as the influence of American unions in the confederation rose at the expense of the TUC, were geared at promoting the American model of industrial unionism in order to facilitate the expansion and consolidation of Ameri-
can economic and political interests, all in the name of stemming the tide of ‘communist expansionism’. Four broad strategies were adopted to win the hearts and minds of African trade unions: first, there was massive use of propaganda; second, political support for decolonization; third, the colonial trade unions were provided with substantial material and financial aid; and finally, the development of powerful national trade union bureaucracies was actively encouraged.

With AFL-CIO backing, the ICFTU set up a number of newsletters and magazines, in which the two organizations incessantly professed their anti-colonial policies and championed their solidarity with the African peoples in their struggles for independence and development. Articles by African trade unionists themselves, like Mboya, attacking colonialism and the depressed working conditions in their countries and celebrating workers’ and nationalist struggles, were also a staple feature of these publications.25 And at ICFTU conferences, American delegates always reminded their colonial counterparts of America’s “anti-colonial traditions,” its support for human rights and abhorrence of “colonial regimes, whether they be of the Soviet Communist type or the old style brand”26. The ICFTU itself periodically called attention to the liberation struggle in Algeria and Portuguese oppression in Angola and Mozambique. South Africa was singled out for particular retribution. The ICFTU even tried to organise a boycott of South African goods, and the country’s expulsion from the ILO and the UN, none of which were heeded, however.27

KFL–ICFTU RELATIONSHIP

Such acts in support of African nationalist struggles as well as the more propagandist anti-colonial postures of the ICFTU struck a chord among many African trade unionists. This was certainly more than they had come to expect from the British TUC. It is indeed ironical that, despite the
Gomperist tradition of non-political unionism, the Americans were insisting that political involvement by African trade unions was inevitable, while the TUC "in a stand rather different from that practised in the British Isles argued that African unions must be insulated from politics". Underlying this apparent contradiction lay the fact that Americans on the whole had little to lose and much to gain from supporting decolonization. As Vice-President Nixon reported to the Foreign Relations Committee following his 1957 African tour:

American interests in the future are so great as to justify us not hesitating even to assist the departure of the colonial powers from Africa. If we can win native opinion in this process the future of America in Africa will be assured.

It was, therefore,

of vital importance that the American government should closely follow what goes on in the trade union sphere and that American consular and diplomatic representatives should get to know the trade union leaders of these countries intimately.

Nixon was, of course, merely restating long-standing American desires to see the colonial world opened up to American capital. American labour was to play its role in this grand scheme by establishing links with colonial labour movements, for which sufficient funds would be made available. By the early 1960s, the American government was spending over $13 million annually on international labour affairs, and had "forty-eight labour attaches in developing countries supported by a host of trade union advisers. For its own part, the AFL-CIO devoted 8 per cent of its budget in 1960-1 to international activities, and other sums were spent indirectly and by individual unions".

With its relatively higher level of economic development, and existence of the largest proletariat in East Africa, Kenya was earmarked by the AFL-CIO and the ICFTU as a centre from which they could launch their operations in the
region. So successful were their efforts that despite mounting internal and continental hostility towards them, the KFL leadership staunchly defended the AFL-CIO and ICFTU as the only voices raised against the British government "during the dark days of the Emergency". But what really accounts for the close relationship between the KFL and the ICFTU and AFL-CIO?

The KFL became affiliated to the ICFTU in 1952, following a visit of a five man ICFTU delegation to Kenya in November 1951. The delegation had vehemently attacked the system of low wages, poor working conditions, and anti-trade union attitudes and policies of the government and employers. Predictably, the delegation also called attention to what it saw as the 'subversive' role that communism was playing in East Africa, particularly in fomenting unrest. In this struggle against the twin yokes of colonial oppression and communist subversion, the delegation’s report concluded, "there can be no question of the side which the ICFTU must take". All this struck a chord among the embattled Kenyan trade unionists.

There were three main reasons for the Kenya Federation of Registered Trade Unions (KFRTU), the KFL’s predecessor, to become affiliated to the ICFTU at this historical juncture. First, militant trade unionists had been incarcerated after the 1950 Nairobi General Strike and immediately preceding and following the declaration of the State of Emergency in 1952. Internal union opposition to international affiliation had, therefore, been removed. Second, the trade unionists who remained behind and those who joined to take the place of their erstwhile colleagues, now in jail, were genuinely desperate for external support. Since affiliation to the WFTU was simply out of the question, if only because the Kenyan government would not even allow WFTU publications into the country after 1951, the ICFTU became the only organisation which, in the view of the Kenyan trade unionists, was
"in a position to compel respect from the British authorities", and, thus, provide them with a protective international umbrella. Finally, it was the Kenyan government itself, through the Labour Department, which prevailed on the KFRTU to demonstrate a more favourable attitude to the ICFTU as a sign that it had shed its 'communist learnings' and abandoned the crass militancy of the late 1940s.

Over the years, other factors entered into the picture and came to dominate the way in which ICFTU-KFL relations developed. Important among them was the growth of KFL dependence on ICFTU and American financial support. Given their perennial shortage of funds, a problem which was accentuated by the emergency, many Kenyan trade unionists were only too glad to receive ICFTU and AFL-CIO money. Starting from a trickle in the early 1950s, by 1959 the ICFTU was donating £750 a month to the KFL, and £1,000 a month in the early 1960s. In 1962 alone, the KFL received $44,000 from the ICFTU, a fairly large sum by the Kenyan standards of the time. The AFL-CIO also made its own direct grants to the KFL. Mboya came back from his first American tour in 1956 with $35,000 from the AFL-CIO. In the late 1950s, the latter gave $56,000 towards the building costs of the KFL headquarters, Solidarity Building. In the early part of 1961, the AFL-CIO donated 28,000/- to the KFL, and in 1962 the former contributed 49,000/- towards the cost of Kenya Labour Day festivities organised by the KFL and which cost 70,000/- altogether. In the following year, the AFL-CIO gave the KFL another 78,037/- . Additional funds to Kenyan unions also came from individual American unions and International Trade Secretariats, such as the International Transport Workers Federation which gave 5,400/- to the Railway African Union, the Plantation Workers’ International Federation which helped in funding the creation of agricultural unions in Kenya in the late 1950s, and the Inter-
national Ladies Garment Workers’ Union in Philadelphia which sent aid to the Kenya Tailors and Textile Workers’ Union.\textsuperscript{46}

Finally, funds were channelled to Kenya through CIA-supported organisations like the Fund for International Social and Economic Education which contributed more than $25,000 to the KFL’s coffers in the early 1960s.\textsuperscript{47} If we included gifts of office equipment, stationery and the like, we cannot escape the conclusion that the material and financial aid that the KFL received from the ICFTU and American Unions and other American sources was very large. The British TUC was quite unable to compete at these levels, even had it wished to do so.

These funds provided the KFL with much needed shelter from chronic shortages of funds so that the Federation could, if it wanted, and did in a few cases, afford to devote itself to mobilising and unionising the tens of thousands of unorganised workers in the country. Unfortunately, on the whole, these funds also encouraged tendencies towards the bureaucratisation and deradicalisation of the KFL. The KFL built a large bureaucracy which gradually divorced itself from grass roots activism. As Kubai stated:

\textit{I pointed out that it was due to KFL reliance on regular remittance from abroad that made the union weak. Corrupt and inefficient many of the leaders had no contact with the branches. They were not dependent on the efficient working of union branches because they received their cheques from the ICFTU.}\textsuperscript{48}

For voicing such criticisms the KFL dismissed Kubai as director of organisation, partly at the insistence of the ICFTU which had threatened that unless Kubai was removed “it would be difficult for the KFL to get more funds from the ICFTU”.\textsuperscript{49} Kubai’s dismissal was not an isolated case for other radicals were struck by the same fate.\textsuperscript{50}

The ICFTU kept a close watch on internal developments
within the Kenyan trade union movement and the latter’s international dealings. In fact, the KFL used a great portion of its funds from the ICFTU and the American unions to fight and undermine dissidents from within and rivals from without, like the Kenya Trade Union Congress (KTUC) and later Kenya Federation of Progressive Trade Unions (KFPTU) before it changed its name to Kenya African Workers Congress (KAWC), all of which were staunchly opposed to the KFL’s affiliation to the ICFTU and the latter’s interference in Kenyan trade union affairs. The beneficiaries of ICFTU and American aid proved to be good pupils, for by the early 1960s they were using anti-communist rhetoric with a flourish to justify their efforts to sabotage their factional rivals.

“It was at the end of 1960,” declared the KFL Treasurer, James Karebe,

when the KFL realised that communism had gone very deep into the trade union movement . . . we decided to clear our own house first and this we did by dismissing Messrs. Mutiso and Gachaga . . . . In February, we started a programme with unions by then most affected, i.e. RAU, PWU, SPWU, TAWI. With ICFTU money we managed to remove the communist supporters from the offices in the respective unions . . . [communism] is no longer a major threat in our trade union movement.

TRAINING PROGRAMMES

The bureaucratisation and deradicalisation of the Kenyan labour movement was reinforced by the type of training programmes which were sponsored by the ICFTU and AFL-CIO. After financial aid and the KFL’s growing dependence on it, the training programmes constituted another critical pillar in the emerging KFL-ICFTU and AFL-CIO collaborative network. A number of key Kenyan trade unionists were flown to the USA for training, such as Peter Kibisu who was sponsored by the AFL-CIO to study at Harvard University’s Graduate School for Business Administration; Arthur Ochwada who also went to Harvard in
1959, \(^5\) Ochola Mak’ Anyengo who was sent to the University of Chicago, \(^5\) and Clement Lubembe who participated in the Foreign Leader Programme of the Office of Cultural Exchange of the U.S. Department of State in 1962. \(^6\) Many more received scholarships from the International Trade Secretariats and individual US unions. \(^7\) Others found their way to the Afro-Asian Institute for Cooperation and Trade Unionism in Israel which was financed “by the Histadrut with a generous scholarship contribution from the AFL-CIO”. \(^8\) After 1964, when the African-American Labour Centre was set up in the United States, the number of trade unionists from Kenya and the rest of Africa who were sponsored to go to the U.S.A. increased substantially. \(^9\) Then there was, of course, the famous airlift programme in the late 1950s and early 1960s, perhaps one of the most spectacular feats in crash-education in Kenyan history, in which thousands of young men and women were flown to American colleges and universities. The role of American labour in the operation of this programme cannot be overemphasised. \(^10\) These young men and women were to constitute a significant proportion of Kenya’s bureaucratic and professional classes after independence.

The ICFTU and AFL-CIO training programmes did not end there, however. Other programmes were launched locally. The ICFTU began its educational programme in Kenya in 1955 when two series of six-week courses were held for 180 students in collaboration with the KFL. This was the first extension of ICFTU work already started in West Africa a couple of years earlier. \(^11\) In 1958 the ICFTU set up a Labour College in Kampala, which marked the culmination of the confederation’s educational efforts on the continent. \(^12\) For its part, the AFL-CIO, in conjunction with the International Ladies Garment Workers’ Union, sponsored the formation of the Institute of Tailoring and Cutting in Nairobi in 1963 by the Kenya Tailors and Textile Workers Union. \(^13\)
The issue of scholarships further fuelled factionalism and clientelism in the unions. More important, however, these training programmes both abroad and locally tended to disseminate 'productionist' and 'economistic' notions of trade unionism. In other words, Kenyan trade unionists were subjected to a fair amount of anti-communist and anti-socialist teachings. “Trade union functions in Africa”, R.M. Mwilu, then Principal of the ICFTU Kampala Labour College told his students,

cannot be based on the Marxian theory of class struggle . . . laid down over a hundred years ago by a socialist philosopher who hardly knew anything about Africa and who possibly did not hear anything about Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika and Zanzibar . . . . Within [the] philosophy [of African socialism] . . . the role of trade unions becomes that of adjusting the working community to address themselves to the fight for national sovereignty, within which the members can be proud of their nationhood.

Thus, to a large extent ICFTU teachings were merely reinforcing the obscurantist tendencies inherent in the ideology of African socialism to which many Kenyan trade unionists subscribed. In short, it was the high level of ideological compatibility between African socialism and the anti-revolutionary predilections of the ICFTU and American labour which facilitated and sustained the KFL-ICFTU and AFL-CIO relationship.

DEVELOPMENT AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT

Like the KFL the ICFTU recognised the underdeveloped nature of African economies. Apart from some contentious ecological and demographic factors it tended to offer as explanations, the ICFTU’s catalogue of the obstacles to economic development and large-scale industrialisation in African countries did not depart in any fundamental way from that presented by movements like the KFL. According to the ICFTU, African economies suffered from poor infrastructural development, low agricultural productivity, lack of capital, undeveloped consumer markets
because of low wages, and economic extraversion in that these economies were more integrated with the metropolitan centres than with each other to their considerable detriment.66

It was perhaps in the solutions it offered to these problems of Third World underdevelopment that the ICFTU’s role as the front for the preservation of the world capitalist system becomes very evident. Using arguments that would later become a common feature of prescriptions by the World Bank, the EEC-ACP Conventions and North-South Dialogue conferences, the ICFTU stressed, first, the need to expand and improve international trade, particularly through the stabilisation of primary commodity markets, and, second, the importance of increasing aid and investment in the underdeveloped countries.67

The ICFTU specifically recommended that the developed countries should at least devote 1 per cent of their national income for aid to underdeveloped countries. It also emphasised that the capital needed for the development programmes in Africa should no longer be restricted to the colonial powers, but had to be internationalised and multilateralised. Third World countries were urged, however, to provide sufficient protection to foreign capital.68 "To curtail excessively the profits of existing foreign companies", the ICFTU warned, "may discourage other foreign capitalists from investing in the country concerned".69

It cannot be emphasised too strongly that the KFL leaders subscribed to, essentially, the same views about the underdevelopment of their country and the need to attract and protect foreign capital.70 Thus, the ICFTU, much like the dominant fraction of the KFL, implicitly assumed that there would be no structural class division, no antagonistic class relations in post-colonial society, between a bourgeois class and a working class, and explicitly maintained that economic growth, and not the social relations arising from
the production process itself and the social division of labour, would be the crucial factors in the development of such a society. The ICFTU derived its tenets from post-war 'developmentalist' prescriptions of Western liberal, while the KFL leaders were inspired by the credo of nationalism in its peculiar African socialist garb. These two ideologies were mediated through the development of 'economistic' industrial unionism as the organisational mode of the Kenyan labour movement.

It followed from this preoccupation with economic growth and national integration that trade unions had to be structured in such a way that they would not only be responsible to the needs of their members but also to those of the national economy as a whole. The ICFTU was of the view that since the African labour movements had been part of the anti-colonial nationalist struggles for nation building and development. Thus, like the Mboyas, the ICFTU encouraged or hailed labour's struggles against colonial rule, but urged labour's political accommodation with nationalist parties and leaders, if not labour's actual addiction of autonomy after independence. This was a fine recipe for American-style conservative business unionism. "The function of trade unions," Mwilu declared categorically, was to encourage "business unionism" and "discourage revolutionary unionism".

It is tempting to conclude that ICFTU advice and money reinforced internal trends towards the degeneration of the KFL into a conservative oligarchy of 'economistic' industrial unionism. The KFL leadership abdicated revolutionary action in favour of reformism at the altar of collective bargaining. The question of fundamental change in the basis of Kenya's political economy was hardly ever raised, indeed, it was regarded as irrelevant or, worse still, part of the machinations of 'communist subversives'.

The KFL was not without its critics and rivals, however.
At the turn of the 1960s, the federation found itself being challenged for its growing conservatism and continued affiliation to the ICFTU by breakaway radical labour federations, on the one hand and, on the other, by Ghana, the first independent Sub-Saharan African state and the bearer of radical Pan-Africanism, and the All-African Trade Union Federation (AATUF). It is fair to say that the question of international affiliation to the then American-dominated ICFTU rocked the foundations of Kenyan labour solidarity and “produced perhaps the angriest of all divisions in the Pan-African front”.

But, it was decolonisation itself which finally undermined the KFL-ICFTU and AFL-CIO collaborative engagement. To begin with, the Kenyatta government, like all post-independent African governments, was intolerant of powerful autonomous organisations which could challenge the central authority of the ruling party and the state, especially if those organisations were also dependent on foreign financial support. In other words, repression by the post-colonial state with its strong military administrative apparatus, inherited from the colonial state, its ‘centrality’ in appropriating and deploying a large part of the economic surplus, and the growth of bureaucratic-authoritarian corporatism played a direct role in deradicalising labour. This suggests that the deradicalisation of organised labour in Africa did not mean that the former or its dominant fractions had been coopted into a ‘pampered’ labour aristocracy as was originally assumed by Fanon, Arrighi and Saul and many others.

Thus, after independence the Kenyan state proceeded to undermine the autonomy of organised labour. The American government supported the clampdown on the KFL by the Kenyatta government and it is significant to note that they partly orchestrated the withdrawal of American financial support for the KFL. The Americans appreciated the fact that Kenya was now an independent state, and overt support
for the KFL no longer constituted helping a movement that was opposed to British interests, but one that could challenge the authority of a friendly indigenous government, and, thus, jeopardise American interests which had grown substantially. By 1967, for instance American investments in Kenya would reach $100 million so that some of the Kenyan union demands (over wages, etc.) began to lose their charm. But even more important 1964 also brought dangers of "political instability" in East Africa ... Mboya had long been supported as a force to the right of Prime Minister Jomo Kenyatta, but an accommodation with Kenyatta was now seen as necessary, particularly to insure that he did not support the Congolese rebels, and more generally to get him to close ranks against the agitating Kenyan left .... In June 1964, US ambassador to Kenya William Attwood met with Kenyatta and agreed that Western labour groups would also stop subsidising Mboya and the KFL; and for balance, Kenyatta assured him that Russian and Chinese aid to the leftist leader, Vice-President Odinga would also end.\footnote{77}

Once again labour solidarity was being subordinated to the interests of American imperialism and the Kenyan state. It is safe to argue that the American labour movement was not an unwilling accomplice.

CONCLUSION

Western labour movements, therefore, played an important role in the deradicalisation of the Kenyan labour movement both before and after decolonisation in that they sought to reorient Kenyan trade unions into the direction of 'economistic' unionism overlaid by anti-socialist ideology. But Kenyan trade unionists were not robots who merely reacted to 'external' pressures and instructions. Rather, they were actively involved in the formulation and development of their 'external' relationships. It has been demonstrated in this paper that the KFL-ICFTU and AFL-CIO relationship was partly sustained because these movements shared ideological similarities in their analysis of African underdevelop-
ment and how to overcome it. It was cemented by the KFL’s adoption of a model of industrial unionism and collective bargaining based on assumptions that the interests of labour were essentially compatible with those of all the class forces, including the national bourgeoisie. In the name of African socialism, the dominant fraction of the Kenyan labour movement prostrated itself at the shrine of the ‘nation’ and ‘development’. It is plausible to conclude, therefore, that it was the conjuncture of Kenyan decolonization and American post-war hegemony which led to the emergence of close links between the KFL and the Western labour movements, links which, it cannot be over-emphasized, reinforced ‘internal’ trends towards Kenyan labour deradicalisation. Thus, it might be useful to guard against inventing labour movements in dependent countries with eternal ‘revolutionary messianism’.

FOOTNOTES


2 V.I. Lenin, Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1978, p. 103.


8 *op. cit.*, p. 15.
13 *op. cit.*, p. 67.
14 *op. cit.*, p. 64.
21 *op. cit.*, p. 18.
The TUC refused to give any money to the ICFTU Solidarity Fund (set up in 1957) for the 1961-63 period. The AFL-CIO quickly stepped in to fill the coffers. During the 1960s the annual cash flow into the Fund sometimes exceeded $2 million per year. Thomson and Larson, op. cit., p. 21.


Address by Treasurer-Secretary W.F. Schnitzler, AFL-CIO, to the ICFTU Regional Conference, Ambassadorial Hotel, Accra, 14 January, 1957.


Dan Schechter et al., op. cit., p. 58.


East African Standard, 6-11-51.

I. Davies, op. cit., p. 194.


Dan Schechter, op. cit., p. 59.


Clayton and Savage, op. cit., p. 436.

See Cotu Archives (CA) KFL File 185.

See CA KFL File 49.

Clayton and Savage, op. cit., p. 418.

op. cit., p. 426f.

AFL-CIO-KFL, 2-12-62, CA KFL File 610. Also see File 306.

Dan Schechter, op. cit., p. 59.


ibid. Also see CA KFL File 322 for the reasons the KFL dismissed Kubai.


There were even proposals by the ICFTU that it should inspect KFL books. See CA KFL File 112. The ICFTU also wanted to be informed about any international visits made by KFL leaders. CA KFL File 578.

KFL General Review of the Past Activities and Estimates for 1962 Organisation Programme, by James Karebe, Treasurer, CA KFL File 64.

CA KFL File 77.

KFL 1960 Annual Conference Report. Also see Lubembe, op. cit., p. 195f.

KFL 1960 Annual Conference Report.

CA KFL File 49.

See CA KFL File 306.
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59 For more details on the training programmes, funding and aims of the AALC, see B. Cohen, op. cit., pp. 73-79; and Thomson and Larson, op. cit. Also see “The AFL-CIO Goes on Safari”, in Counterspy, Washington, D.C. Spring/Summer, 1975.


62 ibid. Also see KFL 1960 Annual Conference Report.


66 op. cit., pp. 100-123, 132-149.


70 Mboya, op. cit., p. 133.


72 For more details on the KFL’s programmes and prescriptions for the country’s economy see P.T. Zeleza, “Dependent Capitalism . . .” Chapter 6.

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77 Dan Schechter, *op. cit.*, p. 61.