

LABOUR IN AFRICAN HISTORY

Trends and organisational forms

**Paper presented by
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Let me begin the paper by expressing my gratitude and delight to be part of the second New Year School of ITUC-Africa. As a labour researcher and a gender activist, I find events such as this that provide me the space to link theory with practice and share my research endeavours with practitioners in a context that makes it possible to influence policy direction and impact the living conditions of workers unique and exciting in several respects. It is in this context that I deem myself deeply indebted to the organisers of this programme particularly the Secretary-General of the ITUC Mr. Kwesi Adu-Amankwah who invited me to make a presentation at this forum. This occasion as the one before and numerous ones of its kind are but platforms for renewing the efforts of organised labour to survive in hostile environment complicated by cyclical crisis of capitalism largely captured as the financial crisis. Events since 2008 now intensified by the experience of Greece and others like Spain and Italy show that workers will be asked to once again carry the burden of repair. In this context any attempt to understand the history of labour how, world events have shape its form and nature, its ensuing responses over time anywhere is a useful exercise. Such and exercise presents organised labour a repertoire for devising strategies and devices for their continuous revision. History we are told is the best teacher, what better then than to begin the year in the learning context through a review of history so we leaders of organised labour on the continent will be informed and armed to face the challenges that 2012 portends to force on us.

Several efforts have been devoted to examining African labour history from different angles and persuasions. Most have focused on the representatives of labour, trade unions in specific countries (Akwetey E. O., 2001; Andraë & Beckman, 1998; Anyemedu, 2000; Arthiabah & Mbiah, 1995; Baskin, 1991; Beckman, 2001; Britwum A. O., 2007; El-Shafei, 2001; Jeffries, 1978) (Kraus, 2007). Significant attempts by others such as Cohen, Copans, and Gutkind (1978), Kraus (1988), Gutkind (1978) Kester & Sidibé, (1994) have tried to cover the entire continent focusing on a particular point in history. Particular interests have been unions and the nationalist struggles from colonial rule to independence or the transition from political dictatorship to political liberalism. They have all attempted to highlight the relations between state and trade unions while some focused on unions and their contribution to political change others have been interested in the proletarianisation of the African labour force, the development of a class identity and ability to carry out a class revolution.

This presentation is an effort to trace the trajectory of labour as it has evolved within the changing production modes in Africa. This paper is being delivered within a context of global financial crisis, of capitalism in retreat and the ensuing brutal repression of labour worldwide. Nation states in general and African government in particular, are faced with serious legitimacy crisis as they fail increasingly to respond to the needs of their people. My discussion will

explore political systems and their accompanying economic structures that shape production modes within which workers sell their labour power. I shall attempt to highlight the fortunes of labour in Africa, how dominant economic forms shape the African workforce and the implications such emerging structures and forms hold for organised labour in Africa.

There will be an attempt to highlight the cracks in capitalism and the implication for organised labour. What has been workers' response, how have their movements positioned themselves to deal with their peculiar context? I will do this by looking at significant cases, look for similarities and deviations. I do this acknowledging that the conditions of labour are shaped by several interlocking forces not in the least are the existing social orders which also impacted by production relations. I acknowledge that labour is not a passive agent moulded and shaped continuously through existing production modes and their accompanying social formations. I shall be interested therefore in the extent to which labour in its various forms waged and unwaged, has served as a significant social category. What demands it has made for change to reflect its conditions and how the response of various actors like capital and the state or the representatives of capital in the workplace, management have shaped further labour conditions. My premise, borrowed, is expressed in the form of a task set by Cohen, Copans, and Gutkind (1978, p. ...) sets to '...test the proposition that the "true" history of colonial Africa is the history of [labour]'. I seek to extend the period from colonial rule till present. Perhaps from a perspective that insists that colonial rule is over in its raw form but persists in yet another form. A fact recognised by Nkrumah who names it neo-colonialism (...).

This paper draws information from existing literature on the subject and will be supplemented by interviews with union leaders at this second New Year school where it was delivered. The interventions of participants gathered here are useful in testing the veracity of national context and providing further elaboration of the current events. News coverage both print and electronic, have been instrumental in providing the information on the present. These sources pose their own challenges I acknowledge, their details might deviate in some instances for the reality. In generality though, they provide as close as possible the situation of labour in Africa.

Borrowing from the works of Kester (2007), Kester & Sidibé (1994) as well as Cohen et al (1978) the paper breaks up the history of Africa into distinct epochs to allow some ease in teasing out the myriad of events that have characterised the fortunes of labour on the continent. These epochs have transformed production relations in Africa and impacted the form of the labour force. It the distinct forms of labour shaped primarily by their accompanying production modes that distinguish these phases. They are:

1. Pre-colonial
2. Colonial and the creation of waged labour
3. Transition to independence
4. Early independence
 - a. One party interlude—first 3 decades—confiscation of freedoms; union incorporation into single parties (trade unions as single party organs-national-

centralised allegiance to single ruling party; used as instruments of worker control)

b. Some experiments: some post independence experiments –

5. Dictatorships—civilian and military—the era of economic mismanagement and the collapse of African economies
6. Neo-liberal economic reforms—Structural adjustment, liberalisation and deregulation
7. Globalisation and global financial crisis

The paper is structured around events in these epochs. Though largely political in form these were but the framework for the operations of production forms that regulated the conditions under which the various forms and conditions of labour emerge, operate and the subsequent relations with other players that follow suit. The works of Cohen et al as well as Kester (2007) and Kester and Sidibé (1994) have been useful guides for outlining these epochs in the history of labour formation in Africa. In their separate works, they trace how these epochs have largely transformed production relations and impacted the fortunes of labour in Africa.

This examination of labour fortunes in Africa will concentrate on three main players, labour, state and capital and what has regulated the relations among them. In this context I find two conceptual frameworks very insightful in terms of how they facilitate the examination of this labour-state-capital relations. I am referring to the concept of labour regimes used in various contexts by Andrae and Beckman (1998) and used by Cohen et al (1978) as well as Beckman and Sachikonye (2001) in their introduction to a collection of works examining the labour histories ... nations in Africa. The second is Roberts' notion of articulation a concept useful in explaining how colonial capital re-drafted pre-colonial forms of production relations to serve its interests (1982).

Beckman and Sachikonye (2001) drawing from the work of Andrae and Beckman (1992) use the concept labour regimes to explore economic policies and their corresponding forms of social orders that affect how labour is regulated. Labour regimes they explain are 'the complex of institutions, rule and practices through which relations between labour and capital are regulated both at the work-place as well as in society at large' (2001, p. 9). They go on to explain that the concept 'denotes the ways and means in which state and organized interests intervene and mediate in those relations' (*ibid*). In discussing the constituents of labour regimes one may be concerned with the manner in which the reproduction of labour is regulated, including how labour is trained, supported by family, community and state outside the workplace. Labour regimes can be specified with reference to different interlocking "arenas" such as the individual workplace, the industry or sector, the locality, region or national economy (*ibid*). The focus of any exercise attempting to outline labour regimes goes beyond production relations in workplace to detail how labour is itself reproduced in daily encounters and over the generations. Thus, it allows an interrogation of how capital ensures that there is a steady supply of labour within and between generations. The application of the concept labour regime, allows a connection of what happens in the workplace with broader society including the household and traditional political orders.

The central goal of within any form of labour regime according Beckman and Sachikonye, (2001) is to ensure that labour performs in accordance with the requirements of capital. The process ensures that labour that is available has the required characteristics that are functional for the requirements of production under a particular production mode. Thus, what usually appear as capital's interests in labour welfare are restricted to the conditions that allow workers to present themselves for work in the workplace in required quantities and with the desired qualities. Labour capital relations as a result are characterised by relations of contestation, resistance and domination. Labour is dominated either through despotism or through hegemony. In the later form, labour compliance to its domination is secured through its acceptance of the subordination. Forms of labour segmentation either on gender, racial or ethnic lines are but mechanisms for securing labour's compliance. In the same way interest mediation, such as the labour laws, workplace rules and regulations, that structure the existence trade unions, collective bargaining regimes are all ways of securing labour's compliance to the conditions under which capital can exploit it (Beckman & Sachikonye, 2001).

On the other hand, the concept can be used to explore the sources of labour power. Labour regime also allows the examination of forms of labour resistance and how labour's bargaining power can be enhanced. Thus it is possible to distil the skills, and availability of options, labour's ability to inflict costs on capital through various strategies of non-compliance or disruption of production. The concept therefore is useful for examining the way in social and production roles of labour is regulated. Labour regime is therefore a practical tool for exploring the nature of labour, the structure of relations between capital and labour and their representatives, organised labour and management or the state. It also allows an examination of the forms of labour that exist and the manner in which it is reproduced and how this reproduction is shaped by an ideology that allows dominant production mode to redraft itself onto existing production modes secure its interests.

The second, concept that informs the framework for examining events in this paper is Roberts' notion of articulation (Roberts, 1982). 'Articulation' for Roberts 'means the joining together of modes of production in such a way that the specific form adopted by each mode of production is a condition for the existence of the social formation, or the specific historical case.' (1982, p. 6). For him the concept of articulation provides the 'most persuasive conceptual apparatus for dealing with overlapping modes of production'. Capitalism he goes on to explain 'does not merely destroy pre-existing modes of production; it subordinates their processes of social reproduction to the needs of capital accumulation and capitalist relations of production. Pre-existing modes of production are maintained, but emasculated by the coercive instruments of the state' (Roberts, 1982, p. 6).

While Cohen et al's labour regimes theory explain how different forms of relations between capital and labour as well as the state and other interest groups function, articulation theory although largely used to examine colonial capitalism, allows one to explore the structural connection between the simultaneous existence of different production modes that have

persisted Africa. It is useful in explaining state role in balancing the contradictory demands of the varying modes of production that exist in a particular time in African history. In this case, articulation can represent a particular form of labour regime and their social reproductive capacity.

Studies on labour history have focused largely on waged labour its emergence and role in political transitions. Such studies have tended to portray waged labour as the significant force in African history. Such studies have been limited by their theoretical frames and it is in this light that the theory of articulation is useful for it allows a capturing of all forms of labour irrespective of their location to form part of the larger evaluation of labour history. Labour regime theory on the other hand situates place waged labour at the centre of their analysis and submerging the intricacies of these and other forms in their own right. This paper will therefore combine the two theories explain the present structure of the African labour market, levels of women's incorporation into the waged labour as well as the extraction of reproductive labour of women. It will also relying on the theory of articulation, show how the predominant proportion of the African labour force, informal economy workers have been part and parcel of the African labour history.

Pre-colonial African labour force

Information on pre-colonial production forms in Africa is patchy largely gleaned from works reviewing other epochs. They are likely to be single country focus. Cohen et al explain that the main forms of production were hunting and gathering, subsistence farming, pastoralism and trading. The labour force was mainly based in agriculture producing largely for direct consumption (Hymer, 1970). The African economy however, was in touch with others especially by means of trade through the Northern African route, trading in gold, salt and cloth (Hymer, 1970). Such trade provided evidence of labour involved in mining, weaving and the development of industrial implements for production independent of European contact.

Our interest is in the evidence of the existence of labour in its own right away from subsistence that allowed others to expropriate the surplus production of others. According to Cohen et al 'favoured categories of certain anthropologists such as kin groups, age groups, and lineage groups were often little more than masks serving to conceal from observed and dispossessed alike relations of dominance and disability, of ... the expropriation of surplus value through "class-like" social institutions' (1978, p. 11). There was also evidence of slave labour within most cultural modes but these pale in comparison to the callous slave raids to feed the infamous trans-Atlantic human trade in slaves that lasted over three hundred years. The impact of the slave trade on the development of the African labour force and subsequent productive capacity is yet to be evaluated.

European contact before the imposition of colonial rule introduced other forms of labour and began the transformation of agriculture from subsistence production to cash crop. Cash crop production was undertaken either through plantation agriculture or in places such as Ghana the

existing land tenure system lent itself to support entrepreneurship in cash crop production for export without recourse to plantation production forms. Direct access to free land made plantation agriculture uncompetitive and the production levels within small peasant holding were able to meet the demands of European industry (Hymer, 1970).

Africa's Colonial labour force

Colonialism has been identified as the main mechanism for introducing the general laws of capitalist development into Africa. The operation and survival of capitalism was predicated on stripping Africans of their land. This process began outside Africa with the infamous Berlin conference of ... when European countries shared Africa and proceeded to take control over their self-allotted spaces through brutal force. Capitalism in Africa as imposed through colonial rule differed in several ways from its origins in metropolitan Europe. Roberts (1982) notes that a deeper interrogation of the continued existence of pre-capitalist relations of production is crucial for explaining the atypical nature of Africa colonial capitalism. Using the notion of articulation highlighted earlier, Roberts notes that colonial capitalism was unlike the European form in the sense that the viability of pre-capitalist production modes in Europe were gradually eroded in Africa on the contrary, such modes were rearticulated and systems set in place to maintain the simultaneous viability of pre and colonial systems. Existing pre-colonial production modes and relations were restructured in Africa to meet the demands of capital.

The striking feature of colonial imposition of capitalism in Africa was the methods used to redraft pre-colonial forms of production into the colonial order through arrangements like the peasant production of agricultural exports and retail trade (Beckman & Sachikonye, 2001; Roberts, 1982; Cohen, Copans, & Gutkind, 1978). Africans maintained their access to land and mutual aid from the kin group through subsistence production. For Roberts "access to the means of production reduced the wage bill such that a significant part of the costs of social reproduction (of the worker, of the next generation of workers, and of the generation no longer able to work) was borne by production in rural areas" (1982, p. 315). Rural subsistence production embedded in female care labour lowered the daily and intergenerational costs of African waged labour. Articulation is predicated on disarticulation. This is destruction of lives and property euphemistically termed pacification, that precedes the imposition of colonial rule, disrupts existing modes of production. Citing Posts' Roberts explains that the Algerian population was decimated to nearly half of its original size during by the French in 1830 and 1852. Re-articulation was necessary to restructure production relations to meet the demands of colonial agricultural capital imposed by the French.

Articulation though crucial in ensuring that labour was available under super-exploitation conditions was not without contradictions not least were pressures for the state to balance it labour requirements with that of private European capital. The coexistence of the two modes therefore, posed problems that required continuous state interventions leading to the emergence of what Roberts termed an 'over developed state' (1982, p. 319). The colonial state had to ensure that labour was not only cheap but also available in the required quantities.

Various means were utilized to reduce Africans from being totally dependent on land and subsistence production. These took the form of cash and labour taxes. Other strategies adopted to regulate labour size, quality and costs included restrictions on types of occupations and occupational mobility through systems such as the pass laws in Southern Africa. The domestic therefore served as the basis for the reproduction of African workforce. *These pressures sometimes resulted in a clash such as that in the Congo reported by Roberts (Roberts, 1982).*

European capitalism was not a homogenous system it varied from nation to nation. Based on the available resources and climatic conditions, it ranged from agrarian, through mining to commerce and in the instance Southern and parts of eastern Africa, Kenya to be precise it was accompanied by a significant proportion of European settlers (Roberts, 1982). Labour force in Africa as result varied across countries and regions responding largely to the nature of colonial capital. Cohen et al, (1978) identify three main forms of labour under colonialism resulting from the recourse to alternative cash income sources as well as the form European capital took. Utilising these forms outlined by Cohen et al. (1978, p. 12) and Roberts' (1982) notion of articulation one can discern nearly four forms of labour based on where their main means of income or subsistence were derived. These labour types largely account for the present structure of labour markets in most of Africa.

First, were workers located in the capitalist mode of production as full time permanent urban proletariat; though this was the dominant form, it represented a small fraction of the colonial labour force. Such labour forms operated mainly in the administrative, commercial, construction and manufacturing sectors as well as military services. Their relative strengths determined largely by the specific nature of the colonial state. The labour force here was recruited on voluntary or forced basis. Britwum's (2010) assertion that colonial rule changed the largely unwaged employment forms in Ghana with the introduction of formal sector employment holds true for most African states under colonial rule. Waged employment was concentrated in the colonial civil service, construction and rail transport, retailing outlets, the extractive mining concerns as well as plantation agriculture. The emerging urban spaces in towns and mining enclaves served as the location for formal economy workers. Social services like healthcare and education also provided avenues for formal employment.

The colonial state, however because of its insatiable demand for labour for the construction of roads, rail, harbours and other forms of infrastructure necessary of the functioning of the capitalist economy, found itself in competition with private capital for labour. Roberts explains that the solution for the state was recourse to restrictions in recruitment. This was used in Belgian Congo for example to restrict the labour that could be recruited into the mines to only 25% of the rural population in certain locations (Roberts, 1982). Not all forms of waged labour were permanent or voluntary. The conditions of work, the nature of the labour market largely dependent on the nature of colonial capital brought in its wake the system of forced labour. Labour policies of colonial capitalism irrespective of their national origins shared common features. The common features identified by Gutkind as the widespread use of forced labour was deployed for rail, road and harbour construction as well as mine work in all colonies (1978,

p. 9). Gutkind cites the example of forced labour in Oubargi-Chari of French Equatorial Africa as well as the institution of labour tax which compelled adult males in French West Africa offer free labour to the colonial government for a certain number of days in the year. Echenberg also argues that the French armies in colonial West Africa were nothing but reservoirs of cheap, disciplined labour used to construct mainly infrastructure, posts and barracks. In some instances "the detested conscript labour brigades ... were turned over to private contractors for three-year stints under atrocious conditions on such projects as the Markal dam... or as maintenance labourers on the Dakar-Niger railway" (Echenberg, 1978, p. 110).

Forced labour which has been compared to slavery, was not the preserve of the French neither was it restricted to men. Forced labour was the hallmark of all colonising powers in Africa used by the Portuguese, British, Belgians and Germans. Forced labour euphemistically termed 'political labour' by the British was necessary as a result of the depressing low wages and what Mason terms 'scarcely tolerable' working conditions. Mason (1978) shows how the British used forced labour to construct the railway line in Northern Nigeria. In a similar vein Crisp (1984) explains that the labour force in the Ghanaian mines under colonial rule was forced labour. According to Roberts, forced labour was practiced well into the twentieth century, the British for example ended force labour in the 1920s, the French in 1947, and in the case of Portugal forced labour ended when it lost its wars with its colonies, Angola, Guinea Bissau and Mozambique. Women and children as young as eight years old were reported by Gutkind et al to be undertaking up to 18 months work as conscripts on road construction, mines and coffee plantations.

Roberts explains that African workers did not always comply with the dictates of the coercive means used to extract their free labour (1982). They sought through a variety of means to resist colonial exploitative working conditions. African workers used mobility between modes of production (like shifting from farming to craftwork) or moving from one industry to another to express their dissatisfaction with their working conditions. A potent tool employed was outright desertion termed *Chibaro* in Southern Africa (Crisp, 1984; Roberts, 1982). Workers just deserted their positions within the mines of southern Ghana or used the rail they had constructed in Nigeria of escape to urban centres away from the traditional system that structured their compliance to offer free labour (Crisp, 1984; Mason, 1978).

Low wages and deplorable working conditions were justified by colonial capitalists with the "lazy African" or "target worker" thesis. The notion was that Africans were tied to the traditional system of production or entered the capitalist labour market with a specific aim and once achieved left to return when another interest forced them back. Using the work of Hopkins Roberts explains that the persistence of such ideas only served to justify colonial super exploitation. Desertion as tool was effective for avoiding "not only low wages and exploitative practices, but also... death and disease rampant in the compound" (Roberts, 1982).

The most effective tool against super exploitative conditions of labour under colonial rule was the recourse to strikes. Notable examples were the Lagos strikes of 1897 and 1945 which

covered the provinces in Nigeria as well. Zimbabwe, and South Africa had their share of such violent strikes and in Ghana there was the 1945 strike of rail and meteorological workers. Such strikes and the innumerable ones not mentioned were examples of the exasperation of African workers in the face of continuous exploitation of a system that brought no benefits.

The second was the agricultural labour force made up of three types. There was those that had been drafted into the capitalist production mode in two ways; the more direct through the plantation system and indirect through peasant cash crop farming. The former operated on a relatively lower scale. The larger sections of colonial African agricultural labour force were incorporated indirectly, through the control of the marketing and distribution of cash crops by way of product quality control. Colonial quality control operated in the form of agricultural stations devoted to research on pest control, extension services and the sale of subsidised inputs such as fungicides, pesticides, hybrids and seeds. The last agricultural labour force consisted of the peasant subsistence farming producing food crops mainly for domestic consumption. Such staples were outside the product quality control of colonial agricultural stations.

The third, the mixed asymmetrical form consisted of coupling the capitalist and pre-capitalist or "... domestic," modes of production. This type was exemplified in the case of migrant labour which represented the principal means of exchange between the two modes (Cohen et al., 1978, p. 12). This type of labour force served the needs of the mines and plantation agriculture. The petty commodity retailing of imported produce derived from the commercial concerns of colonial trading outlets formed the fourth labour force type. This in addition to the artisanal activities designed to serve the needs of poorly paid waged labour force located in the urban centres or production enclaves created by the mines served as the incubators for the now sprawling urban informal economy activities.

Colonial rule set the frame for women's employment as well, in fact the present nature of women's employment in much of Africa today is based on the system of set in place under colonial rule. Colonial governments transposed the dominant Victorian values and norms about female and male gender roles wholesale into Africa. Men were considered breadwinners with ultimate responsibility for providing for the households women were homemakers and did not need to earn income. If they had to it was only to supplement male income. Roberts, Brown, Anokye and Britwum (1996), as well as ISSER/DPPC (1996) show how women were selectively admitted later in the colonial waged labour market after their initial exclusion. Their initial exclusion notwithstanding women made their niche in the pre-capitalist sector where they played instrumental roles in labour articulation carrying responsibility for the reproduction of waged labour. Women's economic activities especially in the urban centres assisted in the proletarianisation of African workers. Women in several African countries moved to the peripheries of mining enclaves and urban centres serving as "petty entrepreneurs" trading petty commodities, their brewed alcoholic beverages, and commercial sex. Such services have been acknowledged as supplementing the low wages of workers and minimise the impact of the poor working conditions. The provision of alcohol, sex and meals were important services

that mitigated the depressing conditions of the mines and other waged work in the urban centres (Brown, Anokye, & Britwum, 1996; ISSER/DPPC, 1996; Roberts, 1982).

One remarkable feature of colonial exploitation of African labour was the emergence of organised labour as a form for collective protests against the ultra-exploitation. The collective protest against colonial capitalism was total in the sense that workers in all the production forms outlined above organised in one form or other. The origins of the dominant form, trade unions can in some African countries such as Ghana and Malawi, be traced to the informal economy (Britwum A. O., 2007; Chinguwo, 2011). In the early years of trade union development, employer hostility to trade unions in colonial Africa was intense and there was constant recourse to all means possible to frustrate the development of unionism in Africa especially among black workers. Where it could not be stopped, all kinds of impediments were erected in the way of unions to render them as ineffective as possible (Piet, 2006; Yahaya, 2001; Siebert, 1987; Ananaba, 1979; Jeffries, 1978). According to Ananaba (1979) trade union trade union centres made up of black Africans were non-existent before 1939. Existing unions on the continent were mainly composed of Asian and European employees. The reasons were not difficult to find. First, industrial activities were relatively low and the proportion of the African labour force in waged employment small. The depression following the First World War further exacerbated the unemployment situation in the colonies. Colonial racial discriminatory policies expressed in outright hostility to worker militancy was however a major factor depressing the propensity and desire of African workers to organise under colonial rule.

European colonial powers differed in the details of their attitudes to the development of trade unions in their colonies. British attitude to unionism has been noted to be the most accommodating. This accommodation however was derived from not out of political largesse and the acceptance of the right of workers to representation, but more as a tactic to prevent more radical formations of workers representation (Britwum A. O., 2007; Akwetey E. O., 1994; Ananaba, 1979). Their accommodating attitude was based on their experiences in the West Indies during the 1920s, that saw widespread violent revolts on the part of workers. In the 1930s Lord Passfield famous circulars of 1930s demanding that colonies allow union formation went unheeded. Ananaba mentions five such dispatches in the 1930s alone. There was consistent efforts on the part of colonial administrators and employers as well as settlers to sabotage any attempt at creating an environment for trade union growth and development. But subsequent events however undermined this attempt and led to the acceptance of unionism albeit under specific conditions.

The demands of the Second World War, led to industrial expansion and job creation for African workers thus enlarging the African waged workforce. The British Colonial Development Act enacted in 1940 made the existence of protective legislation for trade unions in the colonies a condition for accessing Aid. Few countries such as Kenya, Nigeria and Sierra Leone had such provisions. Other colonies had to follow suit. The existence of regulatory provisions stimulated the emergence and growth of unionism. The British closely guarded the development of trade unions in the territories to ensure that their activities were limited to workplace issues within a

bureaucratic system that made recourse to militancy impossible. The industrial relations regimes set up to oversee union development included a labour department with a trade union wing and industrial relations law. Such structures had the blessing of the British Trades Union Congress, but Ananaba explains that a world of difference existed between official posturing in favour of strong unions and practical demonstration of assisting African unions to achieve that goal. The British insisted that trade unions in the colonies remain non-political and set out to implement that directive. J. S Brandie for example was dismissed from Uganda for acting against 'official [trade union] policy'. Joan Davies, quoted in Ananaba observed that in British colonial Africa, unions were not given the leeway to freely grow and develop, rather they were:

Closely supervised by the labour departments, accounts ...scrutinised, political affiliation ...discouraged and offices closed, and ...the right to strike ...severely circumscribed by the emergency actions of Governors or by the introduction of long lists of 'essential services' in which strikes were illegal... (1979, p. 4).

African workers in French colonies faced similar frustrations in their efforts to organise though the methods deployed were slightly different (Kester & Sidibé, 1994; Ananaba, 1979). The right to organise was also granted in the 1930s with Northern African countries receiving this right earlier in 1932 than their counterparts located in West Africa. This right was however limited to Africans literate in French and possessing elementary school certificate, and was only in 1944 that this restriction was abolished (Ananaba, 1979). A significant turning point came with the introduction of the Lamine-Gueye Law in 1950 which prescribed the working conditions. The machinery for collective bargaining was established later through the enactment the overseas Territories Labour Code in 1952 (*ibid*). In the Belgian territories unionisation for African workers was granted in 1946 selectively to those who had a minimum of three years continuous service and authority to form federations granted in 1957 (*ibid*).

Whereas the British system relied on the colonial administration and employers for implementation in the French colonies popular movements provided the impetus (Ananaba, 1979). The Belgian provisions were however the most restrictive resisted granting Africans independent representation till 1959. Like in British colonies, union records, files and accounts could be inspected at will and local authorities had right of access to meetings and determined which members had the right to attend these meetings (Ananaba, 1979).

Ananaba attempts in a characteristically pro-imperialist manner, to justify the strict circumscription of union development in the colonies. In his discussion on the British situation he notes the need to avoid the West Indian experience where 'where disaffected person [manipulate] workers to attain their personal gain' (Ananaba, 1979, p. 2). He tries to suggest that workers or in particular African workers were passive agents incapable of perceiving injustices of colonial working conditions and even further organising to protest. It is clear from the persistence of worker protests that at a certain level of repeated coercion workers face their oppressors no matter the costs. For Beckman & Sachikonye (2001) the main outcome of regulation is to determine the price of labour. Union organisation on the other hand is critical

for workers everywhere to mediate the regulation process and determine the price at which labour is ready to make itself available in compliance with the working conditions so determined by capital. The conditions is of course dependent on the ability of existing labour movements to inflict costs on capital and its workplace representative management such as to extract concessions to its demands. The process of union 'recognition' granted by the state through legal instruments and supporting institutions, they go on to explain, can serve as a power source for unions. Where effective, legislation can allow unions to bypass their members support in their bid to extract concessions from capital.

Transition to independence: the nationalist struggles

According to Sidibié and Venturi (1994) the formal waged workplace served as the closest contact with colonial exploitation and therefore exposed colonial vulnerability. It is in this context that that labour movements in Africa as elsewhere played a pivotal role in the struggle for independence. The expectation everywhere was that was that independence form colonial rule will lead to enhanced freedoms for working people of Africa and their organisations (Sidibié & Venturi, 1994).

Several independent regimes rode on the backs of workers' struggles to power. In most cases waged labour was not in the leadership but their impact was immeasurable partly due to the involvement of non-waged workers based in the peasant cash crop production as well as retailers of imported European goods (Britwum A. O., 2007). The famous stay aways of South Africa, boycotts, produce holdups were also employed by the non-waged based in the domestic and mixed modes in combination with the strikes of waged workers. Such actions led to the crippling of the colonial state, rendering pre-independent stat incapable in some instances of maintaining control. The intensity of actions differed and so did the repressive reaction of the colonial governments. Where the actions of workers failed there was a recourse to arms struggle as in the case of South Africa, Angola, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Namibia as well as Zimbabwe. In the forefront of such struggles were workers and workers leaders (Baskin, 1991). The devastation of war on human lives especially the African labour force re-drafted into war on both sides of the conflict either directly or indirectly is yet to be accounted for.

Perhaps the words of the Chairperson of the South African Congress of Trade Unions inaugural conference in 1955 best sums up the active involvement of workers in national liberation struggles. Baskin captures the Chairperson as saying:

You cannot separate politics and the way in which people are governed from their bread and butter, or their freedom to move to and from places where they find the best employment, or the houses they live in or the type of education their children get. (Baskin, 1991, p. 13)

The involvement of various workers groups and individual workers in the struggle against apartheid represents one of the most intense connections between organised labour and

political overthrow. Workers protest were led in most instances by organised labour in its default form the trade unions (Ananaba, 1979).

According to Konings there are varied positions on the role of trade unions in the decolonisation of Africa (2006). While some like Berg and Butler he explains have argued that the political significance of trade unions in Africa have been exaggerated, others insists that African trade unions have operated beyond parochial interests in securing economic benefits for their members through collective bargaining. Kester (2007), Konings (2006), Kester & Sidibé (1994) Adu-Amankwah and Tutu (1997) as well as Adu-Amankwah (1990) note that even though African waged labour force and their representative organ trade unions happen to cover a small fraction of existing active labour force they wield considerable power. Through their strategic location they are able to paralyse national operations politically, administratively as well as economically by threatening the very survival of the regime in power. Their visibility in cities and location in strategic sectors of the economy gave them a peculiar position in African politics (Piet, 2006). They in addition worked to secure the interests of other workers such as located in the pre-capitalist system of production, like peasant cash crop and subsistence farmers, migrant workers, as well artisans and traders. Through this capacity African trade unions have mobilised beyond their direct members and in other instances forged alliances with nationalist movements to topple colonial and other authoritarian regime. Examples abound everywhere on the continent.

Women's peculiar location in labour market brought them into persistent conflict with the colonial regimes. Beer and other alcoholic beverage brewing, commercial sex and petty commodity retailing brought women into constant contact with colonial capital in peculiar ways. Through their unusual connection with the colonial regimes arising out of the double exploitation of women, their reproductive as well as their productive and productive labour, women everywhere on the continent organised with men to overthrow colonial rule in its many guises. In other instances, they organised separately against colonial subordination in whatever form and colour it took (Chinguwo, 2011; Orr, 2011; Baskin, 1991; Tsikata, 1989). Orr explains that women in South Africa organised actively with men and separately to protest pass laws and restrictions on beer brewing (2011). In this manner Orr shows that there was consistent organising by women around issues that directly impinged on their lives as women. Struggles led by women in the run to independence took the form of bus boycotts, beer hall protests, anti-pass campaigns as well as commodity hold ups (Chinguwo, 2011; Orr, 2011; Tsikata, 1989). The process of articulation and heavy reliance on migrant labour for mining brought in its wake demands for services that women provided. In their quest to expand their income, sources the informal or sometimes illegal settlements that developed around enclave mining concerns were the nascent forms the sector of most African countries, captioned the informal economy.

In Malawi Chinguwo (2011) explains that colonial agitation got trade unions to align directly to the nationalist movement and goes further to link heightened strike activity to political protests and the imposition of the Rhodesia Nyasaland Federation of 1953. Politicians everywhere were apt to exploit the situation which so degenerated compelling the government to institute a state

of emergency. In the same vein, Sechogele (2011) show how Namibian workers' struggles were linked with the fight to overthrow apartheid. Just as their South African counterparts, Namibian workers could not separate their workplace struggles from that against the oppressive apartheid regime. This is aptly captured in the words of Mbuende as which Sechogele quotes thus; the 'class struggle waged by workers was seen as one and the same as the liberation struggle of South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO)' (Sechogele, 2011, p. 148). The case is similar in Zambia and Zimbabwe (Chakanya & Siwela, 2011; Muneku & Phiri, 2011). Increase agitation on the Zambian copper belt led to the formation of trade unions that finally aligned itself with the political party that eventually took over the government after colonial rule. By this act, African workers pledged their aspirations to better working conditions within the nationalist struggles aligning with nationalist groups to secure these benefits.

Post independence

Independence for several African countries was attained on the wave of considerable euphoria. Workers and indeed all citizens were optimistic of a better future under leaders drawn from their own kind. There were varying degrees of local opposition to nationalist struggles for independence or majority rule in terms of intensity and levels of violence deployed. Anglophone Africa with the exception of settler colonies, was characterised by 'civil disobedience' or what Nkrumah described as 'positive action', using non-violent constitutional means to press for independence. The case of East Africa particularly Kenya as well as Southern Africa, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe were peculiar, characterised with protracted civil strife and recourse to arms. Portuguese Africa suffered such irreparable damage in their quest for independence. Without exception the three major colonies Angola, Guinea Bissau and Mozambique were split up in protracted civil wars in the run up to independence that split over to their neighbours like Congos. These countries are still struggling to overcome the costs of these civil wars.

The expectations of nationals were largely met in the immediate aftermath of independence. Subsequent events quickly dispelled the euphoria to be replaced with despondency and later outright hostility to the ruling class that replaced the colonial rulers. Several factors account for the economic fortunes of Africa and subsequent political turmoil that followed. The brunt of these events were borne by the working people. We examine the situation of the African labour force after independence in specific political economic phases. The characterisation of these phases borrowed from Kester (2007), are the post independence honeymoon of the late 1950s to the early 1960s, followed by the period of tension or the pre-reform of economic mismanagement within the framework of high political instability. There followed the adjustment era of the 1980s to the 1990s and subsequent poverty reduction era.

The wave of independence from colonial rule proceeded in earnest from the late 1950s specifically in 1956, peaking in 1960. Only five African countries were on record to have attained independence before this period. Between 1956 and 1968, 37 African countries had

gained political independence. This period was followed by a lull of about six years which open up again when the rest 10 in all, gained their independence between 1974 and 1990. Namibia is the last country in Africa on record to gain independence from South Africa. The overthrow of apartheid in 1991 in South Africa however, marks the official end to all forms of authoritarian rule in Africa. The independence agenda was nation building based on western modernisation through industrialisation. Industrialisation was devoted to import substitution of consumption goods previously obtained from colonial Europe. According to Kester and Sidibé (1994) the pivotal role African trade unions played in struggle for independence was based on the expectation that freedom from colonial rule would lead to their enhanced freedoms (1994, p. 11).

Their expectations for improved living and working conditions were met largely as the immediate period after independence brought massive expansion in the colonial economy and therefore its labour force. The quantitative expansion in the waged workforce was matched with the quality of the working conditions as well as skills. Increased investments in the infrastructure, roads, industries and social investments in the population meant a heightened need for higher educated and skilled workforce. Women's access to waged work also increased as did their educational opportunities together with their male counterparts. The government was the main economic player and state dominated in production and as a result set the stage for production relations. The expansion in social development, education, health, housing was on the notion that nations had to invest in their most crucial asset, their human resource. The remarkable feature of the new states in Africa was the restructuring of the labour market through massive investments in infrastructure, education, health, housing as well as industrialisation within a deliberate effort at Africanising workplace and its management. Waged employment increased dramatically. Whatever the effect however large proportions of Africans still remained within the pre-capitalist mode of production. State attitude was that it was only a matter of time when such populations would be drawn into the so-called modernising sector.

With independence came the process of decolonisation the nationalisation of the ownership of major enterprises accompanied by a philosophy of social relations to production that was directed at striking at the roots the traditional domination of foreign capital (Kester, 2007). The political landscape in some instances, were bent towards the left with some flirtations with socialist oriented production modes. The idea was political non-alignment and a search for a third way. The Yugoslav's attempts at workers self-management constituted an attractive alternative that some African countries tried to copy. Such attempts gained expression in experiments such as the humanist philosophy of Zambia which was predicated on the notion of a transition from a society in which capitalist enterprises were held in the hands of a few, towards workers self management, characterised by human dignity and social justice (Kester & Sidibé, 1994; Cohen, Copans, & Gutkind, 1978). The second was the Ujama of Tanzania based on the notion of communalism built the spirit of self reliance and state ownership of enterprises (Kester, 2007). Algeria introduced formal structures for workers to be involved in workplace decision making giving them a voice in determining the outcome of their labour. Egypt also

engaged similar practices to give workers greater decision making and supervisory roles in the workplace. Ghana had its own version of pro-leftist political orientation expressed in the form state capitalism.

Most post independent governments transformed into single party regimes under the rationale that continuous rule was a requirement for ensuring successful implementation of the decolonisation nation building agenda. Governments of the post independent states were quick to question the unconditional availability of workers' loyalty and support. Steps were taken to ensure that workers would always comply with the dictates of ruling governments by neutralising their opposition or putting in place strict rule to demobilise and moderate their power (Webster & Glenn, 2001). These included the amalgamation of trade unions into single federations and their incorporation into ruling parties (Kester, 2007). Worker's movements, the trade unions, were turned into organs for worker control ostensibly to ensure worker discipline. Governments' expectations were that unions would play productionist roles, stimulating productivity and at the same time moderating the wage demands of workers in national interests. This idea was aptly captured in francophone Africa as 'responsible participation' (Kester, 2007; Cohen, Copans, & Gutkind, 1978).

This form of union/state relations referred to as corporatism and has been utilised in several contexts and forms across the globe (Akwetey E. O., 2001; Kester & Pinaud, 1996; Piet, 2006). Union incorporation was rewarded by state largesse in the form of physical resources as well as labour friendly legislations governing working conditions, union representation and regularisation of union structures as well as bargaining structures. These took the form of closed shop and check-off for dues payment and the tripartite system; Ghana, Zambia and Tanzania are significant cases in the midst of several (Muneku & Phiri, 2011; Britwum A. O., 2007; Akwetey E. O., 1994; Masta & Omolo, 2011). State generosity extended into material provisions like physical structures, buildings, land for housing as well as land and funds and office space. Public sector workers enjoyed a high degree of employment security, the accompanying social wages like subsidised housing, healthcare, education and utilities were shared by all workers irrespective of their employment location. Unions gained strength organisationally and thus increased militancy (Chinguwo, 2011; Masta & Omolo, 2011; Muneku & Phiri, 2011; Britwum A. O., 2010; Kester, 2007; Akwetey E. O., 2001). These gains, however, were not secured through the munificence of ruling governments and not the efforts of organised labour (Kester, 2007). In countries such as Togo and Senegal however, labour had little gain from the incorporation of union into the ruling party.

The majority of African states were the main economic players and their economic landscape were dominated by state owned concern with majority of the waged labour force based in the public sector. Kester using figures from the World Bank shows the remarkable economic gains attained from the 1960 to 1970s. The figures indicate high economic growth, high employment rates, high worker incomes and a labour friendly industrial environment. According to Kester, economic

...growth rate was initially greater than population growth rate from 1961 to 1973; and by 5.6 percent between 1970 and 1975 (World Bank 1990). As a consequence of growth, achievements were made, especially in the industrial sector: the percentage of industrial production with regard to GDP rose between 1960 and 1980 (2007, p. 11).

There was as a result littered across the continent national trade union confederations with centralised allegiance to ruling political parties. Union leaders were appointed into government and in some instances, governments controlled the election of trade union officers. African governments he explains got the best out of their investments (Kester, 2007) as national development gains made impacted directly on the welfare of most nationals. The most significant state/trade union alliances are Ghana TUC under the regime of Nkrumah and Zambia under Chiluba. As we speak however, such forms of labour/political party alliance only exist in South Africa and its basis gets shaky by the day.

Post independent economic decline

Union incorporation into ruling parties a process Beckman and Sachikonye capture as one party/single union interlude or 'confiscated freedoms' had its flipside (2001). As time went on increasingly, union compliance had to be secured involuntarily or with coercion. If the 1960 to '70 was a period of remarkable economic gain, the following period, 1975 to the mid 1980s however represents the lost development decade for Africa (Kester, 2007). The dismal economic fortunes of African countries during this era has been attributed to a concurrence of factors. The oil price hikes of the period, economic mismanagement complicated by capitalists struggle for supremacy as contained the so-called cold war. World economic crisis precipitated by OPEC oil price increases led to a reduction in the prices of the primary products of Africa as a result of reduced productivity in the industrial west (Hoogvelt, 2001). The reduction in import revenue was exacerbated further by an increase in oil imports for most non-oil producing African countries. The result was an overnight increase in budget deficits making the industrialisation projects of most countries appear overtly ambitious and unsustainable. The self seeking activities of the African ruling political class further worsened whatever short term economic difficulties that the world financial crisis imposed on the continent. Here one is referring to the active illegal accumulation of wealth through the confiscation of political power, (Rathbone, 2003).

Workers' struggles in Ghana against the abuse of political office for personal gain discussed in Britwum (2010) is symptomatic of the political history of the majority of African countries and still pervasive in current times. This is phenomenon is described as kleptocracy (Gyimah-Boadi & Jeffries, 2000). Works like Jeffries (1978), Crisp (1984), Akwetey (2001), Ananaba (1979), Andrae & Beckman (1998), Sachikonye (2001) and Silga (1994) show how the kleptocratic tendencies of African political leadership affect workers directly through its impact on enterprises and the economic conditions in the country. Rathbone attributes the pervasiveness of kleptocracy within Ghanaian political history to the dearth of resources 'which acquire a

heightened value simply because of their scarcity' (2003, p. 399). Luckham, Gyimah-Boadi, Ahadzie, and Boateng explain that,

...the political elites that controlled the state lacked secure and independent sources of income and status. They therefore used the state to accumulate wealth for themselves, rather than to advance a genuine programme of national development. State management shifted surpluses from the rural economy into government hands, introduced severe distortions in the economy and created an environment which was far from conducive to business investment and wealth creation (2005, p. 2).

Riding on the shoulders of kleptocracy Galarraga and Gogu  (1994) explain are dictatorships both civilian and military assailed by clientelism, corruption and internal dissent. The state is no longer preoccupied by national development but the survival and interests of the occupiers of power. The resulting impact of the economic decline on labour was immediate and so was the exhibition of their discontent. Kester drawing on the works of Vandemoortele (1991, 84), Mihyo and Schiphorst (1995) as well as Colclough (1991) estimated that,

...the extent of open and disguised unemployment in Africa increased by 17 per cent between 1980 and 1988, which was four times faster than during the 1970s ... real wages declined by 25 per cent between 1980 and 1985. ... In some countries like Ghana, Sierra Leone and Zambia, the decline was sharper. For the overall region, real wages were halved between 1970 and 1985 (2007, p. 5).

Governments' attitude to unions only worsened the political environment. When it became obvious that there was little to be gained from the incorporation of labour within the ruling parties the leaders of organised labour lost their credibility. Economic decline therefore undermined the legitimacy of development corporatism but the tragedy was the absolute lack of foresight on the part of union leaders. They failed for several reasons to withdraw their support for discredited often times corrupt and despotic rulers.

The national discontent to economic hardships brought in its wake political instability characterised by opportunistic military takeovers (Kraus, 2007; Beckman & Sachikonye, 2001; Yahaya, 2001). Wangome states that the period between 1960 and 1970 has been captioned the decade of coups in Africa (1985). From 1960 to 1969, about 21 African countries had experienced successful military takeover. Marshall assessing conflict trends in Africa between 1946 and 2004 notes that by 1990 nearly 37 African countries had either experienced some form of military interventions. He observes that

... experiments in democratic forms of governance in Africa were relatively rare and short-lived during the Cold War period. ...Within ten years from their date of independence, six of the ten new African democracies had failed and those states seized were by autocratic rule: Lesotho, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, and Uganda. Only Botswana and Namibia have maintained democratic regimes since their inception (Marshall, 2005, p. 8).

Akwetey insists on the need to remember that the dynamics of capitalist accumulation differed from country to country and as a result the emerging conflicts between state and capital on one hand and labour on the other differed (2001). In some it was purely an internal affair in most it was the need to stem the influence of progressive leanings towards the political west. The cold war between communist Europe and the western capitalist world turned into heated wars in Africa. Congo and the fate of Patrice Lumbar is a case in point so were the wars in Angola and Mozambique. The active involvement of the CIA in the first coup in Ghana is supported by several scholars who draw on declassified CIA files to make their case. Bofo-Arthur quotes Beckman, (1984: 228), Stockwell (1978) and Seymour (1980) to support the claim of CIA compliancy (1999).

Marshall in his analysis of conflict in Africa from 1946 to 2004 observes a

...fairly constant increase in the magnitude of warfare in Africa during the Cold War/decolonization period, 1946-1989 The upward trend continued through the early years of the 1990s; over forty percent of the region's countries were experiencing wars at the peak in 1993. The upward trend is mainly attributable to the protracted duration of wars during the Cold War period Upon gaining independence, about half of the anti-colonial wars degenerated into civil wars. Of greatest importance in this regard is the issue of transnational support for both government security forces and anti-state militants (2005, p. 2 and 3).

Military coups did not solve the economic problems of African states, the impact of war on workers was more devastating. Even though Wangome (1985) remains skeptical about an immediate end to military takeovers in Africa he states that, '[r]ather than solve African contemporary political and socio-economic problems, military coups d'etat in Africa have tended to drive the continent into even further suffering and turmoil. This has been the case in Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, Togo, Congo and several other African states.'

State incorporation however saw the weakening of trade unions with leaders increasingly isolated from their members. Labour centres and unions ceased to play a representative role and the centre of organised labour's action shifted from the federations where they existed to the workplace. Unions that attempted to sever relations with the ruling parties suffered severe repercussions. In Burundi for example the government cut union funding, terminated compulsory check-off for paying dues and withdrew all facilities bestowed on the central federation. In Cape Verde an outright ban was imposed on workers right to strike (Beckman & Sachikonye, 2001).

As various factions of the ruling elite vied to gain political control there was increasing recourse to repressive tactics to maintain a semblance of internally coherent society. Military regimes were often more brutal than the civilians they came to replace. In no time, therefore workers in several African countries found themselves collaborating with civilian groups for the

replacement of military regimes. In the second wave of struggle to end authoritarian rule workers found allies in the very western powers who had been ousted by their predecessors at turn of independence.

Neo-liberal adjustment and plural democracies and the globalisation threat

If the 1970s to the 1980s were characterised as failed economic development in Africa, the late 1990s to 1990s were devoted to 'economic resuscitation of the national economies, destroyed by economic mismanagement, civil and regional wars as well as the world economic crisis. The need to restore collapsed economies of African states became all the more imperative to stem national discontent and also to manage unsustainable external debts. The period coincided with the debt crisis precipitated by Mexico. The framework for managing the debt of developing countries was developed within the contest of the ultra liberalism under the rule of the conservative governments of Thatcher in the UK and Regan the US. Caption Regan-Thatcherism world economic policies saw an increasing tendency to the right insisting on state withdrawal from production, reduction or removal of subsidies and the move away from production for domestic markets to production for export (Abugre, 2001).

Neo-liberal economic reform had two aspects, the political and economic. In all instances economic reforms preceded political reforms. There are records of efforts at introducing economic reforms in Africa before the 1980s but such efforts were met with stiff resistance often used as an excuse for military intervention (Boafo-Arthur, 1999). The 1980s however provided he needed political context for the successful implementation of IMF World Bank sponsored structural adjustment, known as SAPs for short. By the mid 1990s some 30 African countries had implemented some aspect of SAP under the auspices of World Bank and the IMF (Beckman & Sachikonye, 2001).

Economic reform attacked waged labour as a social category (Beckman & Sachikonye, 2001). Liberal adjustment policies led to retrenchment of waged labour from the public sector as well as the privatised public enterprises. Social wages were withdrawn and labour friendly legislation repealed and replaced with more stringent labour laws under the notion of attracting foreign investment the panacea to the economic malaise in Africa. The resistance on the part of workers and their organisations to the draconian measures of structural adjustment was further coercion and brutal repression. There has been considerable hyping of Ghana for example as an adjustment miracle. Boafo-Arthur explains that this credential is based on the successful implementation of stringent adjustment measures and not on the extraordinary economic outcome for the large masses of Ghanaians. The successful implementation he explains was only possible under brutal repression of labour which was only possible under a military dictatorship. He therefore concludes that economic adjustment contingent on dictatorship and that repressions in Ghana had World Bank/IMF support. Beckman and Sachikonye (2001) concur with Boafo-Arthur and note that liberalising adjustment programmes entailed the intensified exploitation of both the urban and rural poor.

Conclusion

I set out in this presentation to explore the fortunes of labour in Africa in the context of how dominant economic frames have shaped the African workforce and the implications of the different labour market structures have held for the working conditions and rights of workers. The presentation also examined labour's response particular the representatives of labour the organised labour in the form of trade unions. Throughout history, African workers have sought through a variety of means to enhance their political strength particularly through alliances to build, expand and deepen their political power to exact compliance from capital or the state to its needs. Labour has been unable in most instances to identify the real problem at the base of its repression by the political power holders be they foreign or national. This failing has led to several disappointments. In their quest to secure better working conditions waged workers and their movements have perused regime change in the hope that the new rulers will respond better to their interests. In two specific instances that this the transition from authoritarian rule from colonial to single party, military or apartheid labour has always replaced on form of exploitation for another. Though there has always been some evidence that workers and their leaders lay the problems to the economic framework within which nations are operating in seeking alternatives they have hardly pushed for fundamental restructuring of the economic base of their countries. It is therefore contradictory that in its seemingly short sightedness labour should invest in a political system that superintends an economic system that undermines its very survival. One is referring to plural democracies and their accompanying neo-liberal export promotion liberalisation. Till the representatives of organised labour recognise the true nature of their problems and refocus their energies at their true enemies they will continue to toil in vain. But perhaps the responsibility for building true democracies that ensure that those whose sweat feed the nationals of Africa countries should be the prime beneficiary of its products. It is time that union leaders took up the biggest challenge of the century in the face of historic cracks in capitalism and the deep crack in the Greek economy and elsewhere.

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