COLONIALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM: THE CASE OF THE BRITISH AND KENYAN LABOUR MOVEMENTS

by

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The paper seeks to examine the relations between the British and Kenyan labour movements from the mid-thirties to the sixties. It is argued that as a result of its own internal contradictions the British TUC came to be closely identified with British colonial labour policy so that the congress's policies towards colonial labour movements were, at best, paternalistic. This paper also argues that the Kenyan labour movement, on the other hand, increasingly came to reject the British model of trade unionism as its key leaders began to articulate the ideology of 'African socialism'. The paper tries to analyse these issues in the context of the debate between dependency and Marxist writers on the question of international working class solidarity. It concludes that the possibilities of solidarity between workers in the capitalist metropoles and peripheries are quite limited.

In recent years the dependency school has become the butt of innumerable critiques made primarily by marxists who charge the school with serious theoretical, empirical and ideological shortcomings.[1] This paper does not intend to examine the debate between the dependency and marxist writers in any great detail, but rather to focus on one particular issue under contention: the question of international working class solidarity in the age of imperialism.

Dependence writers like Emmanuel, Rodney, and Samir Amin have vigorously argued that as a result of dependence, particularly through the operations of unequal exchange, the working classes of the metropolitan capitalist countries exploit or share in the exploitation of workers in the peripheries so that the objective basis of international working class solidarity is undermined.[2] Indeed, for them the world is almost divided into 'bourgeois' and 'proletarian' nations; the proletariat in the periphery take over from their privileged metropolitan brethren the role of a vanguard in the global socialist revolution.

Nabudere has attacked the dependence writers for propagating petty-bourgeois ideology which serves to weaken the working classes in both the metropoles and peripheries and thereby undermines international working class struggles against imperialism.[3] The workers in both the metropoles and peripheries, Woddis further insists, are exploited by the same forces

of monopoly capitalism so that they share a common interest in assisting one another to overthrow their common enemy.[4] And Bettelheim has gone so far as to claim that, in fact, the rate of exploitation is higher in the metropoles than in the peripheries and that metropolitan workers are a potent revolutionary force.[5]

It is sometimes not sufficiently recognised that the argument that imperialism tends to create conditions which mitigate against international working class solidarity has a long tradition in Marxist thought and is not a recent and insidious invention of dependence writers. As early as 1858 Engels noted that "the English proletariat is actually becoming more and more bourgeois" because Britain "exploits the whole world."[6] Over half a century later Lenin elaborated on his labour aristocracy thesis. "Imperialist ideology," he contended, "also penetrates the working class. No Chinese wall separates it from the other classes."[7] More concretely he identified a 'bourgeoisified' stratum of workers who receive "crumbs from their national capital, and are isolated . . . from the sufferings, miseries, and revolutionary sentiments of the masses."[8] And just before his death in 1940 Trotsky noted the trend in the metropolitan countries towards "the progressive degeneration of trade unions and their growing together with the imperial state."[9] Specifically he argued that in Britain "the bureaucracy of the trade unions is the backbone of British imperialism."[10] And more recently Panitch has identified "the emergence within the democratic capitalist state of new political structures which articulate trade unions with state administration and business associations in a broad range of economic policy-making."[11]

This paper will attempt to show that the British labour movement did become integrated into political structures of the British state so that relations between the TUC and colonial trade unions were rarely characterised by acts of genuine solidarity. At best the TUC generally exhibited paternalistic tendencies in its attitudes towards colonial labour movements. It is hoped the paper will demonstrate that the relations between the Kenyan labour movement and other labour movements had a longer and more tortuous history than is often presented by many writers, who have tended to refer to the period when ICFTU influence was at its height at the beginning of the sixties. Further, it will be seen that the relationship between the Kenyan and British labour movements underwent some changes and that during each phase the conditioning factors were invariably complex and contradictory. These cannot be reduced as is so often the case to the individual predilections of particular trade union leaders in Kenya, although of course, it was amongst the leadership and not the rank and file that these battles were fought, or the mere offer of financial

inducements by the international labour movements.[12]

Rita Hinden identified the contradictory premises and attitudes of the British socialist movement, of which the trade union movement was an integral part, towards the colonial empire, its peoples and their struggles when she wrote:

> *In the days when the socialist movement was growing to maturity British imperialism was at its zenith . . . What to do about Imperialism could never, therefore, be a mere academic question for British socialists . . . To understand the reactions of British socialists to such a problem, one must understand British socialism itself. Two major streams of thought have mingled in the making of its ethos. The first, of ancient lineage, is that of radical or humanitarian sentiment . . . The second stream of thought is more recent, more directly political, more materialist in its expression. It grew out of the horrors of the nineteenth century industrial revolution and their economic analysis by Karl Marx and his disciples . . . So it was that in the socialist attitude towards problems at home, a dual attitude emerged. There were those who accepted responsibility to succor and reform, and those who despised reform and sought only to overthrow. The duality sometimes revealed itself even in the same person.*[13]

This duality or contradiction was one which plagued the TUC in its dealings with colonial trade unions from the beginning and became sharper as the latter, not only grew in size and strength and ideological maturity, but also as they challenged the repressive labour and trade union policies of colonial governments and questioned colonialism itself and the assumptions behind it.

TUC relations with colonial trade unions were conditioned by the TUC'c incorporation into the apparatus of colonial labour policy formulation. With the setting up of the Colonial Advisory Committee in 1937, on which the TUC was represented, the TUC's advisory role to the Colonial Office finally became formalised. The committee sought to investigate the conditions of the "principal races of the Empire" and ascertain ways and means of improving their living standards.[14] The TUC leadership hoped that through this channel specific colonial labour problems could be handled and resolved in a regular and comprehensive manner. The formation of the Colonial Advisory Committee was a culmination of a process initiated in the 1920's to systematise colonial labour policy.[15] For instance, in 1930 the Passifield Memorandum had been issued in which,

for the first time, it was stated that trade unions in the colonies should be recognised. But unlike trade unions in the United Kingdom itself, the colonial Unions were to be subject to compulsory registration so that their activities could be easily monitored. It was feared, in Lord Passifield's words, that "without sympathetic supervision and guidance" these unions would "fall under the domination of disaffected persons by whom their activities may be diverted to improper and mischievous ends."[16] The West Indian Royal Commission reinforced these arguments for compulsory registration of colonial trade unions.[17]

It need not be questioned that the Colonial Advisory Committee did provide the TUC with a forum through which it could air its views, and occasionally influence changes in colonial policies. In its meetings the committee dealt with a very wide range of critical issues facing the colonies, such as labour and trade union legislation, working conditions and, last but not least, ways and means of helping colonial trade unions.[18] However, it can be argued that by playing such an active role in the formulation of colonial labour policy it became quite difficult for the TUC to establish formal links with colonial labour movements. Certainly in British colonial Africa trade unions did not develop as organic extensions of metropolitan unions as was the case in French colonial Africa. This can partly be explained by the fact that there were three trade union federations in France all competing for membership, instead of one, and the influence of the French Communist Party was relatively more pervasive so that it was correspondingly harder for the French labour movement as a whole to be incorporated into the apparatuses of colonial labour policy formulation and administration as was the case with the British labour movement.[19]

Not only did the British labour movement tend to refrain from challenging the main pillars of colonial labour policy, its paternalism towards colonial trade unions was often indistinguishable from that of the Colonial Office and its ideologues. "Trade Unionism," stated the Labour Committee of the Fabian Colonial Bureau, "is a comparatively new factor in colonial life. Like most youthful movements, it is lively, somewhat unrestrained, in need of mature guidance." The committee went on to argue that compulsory trade union registration did not lead to "undue interference with trade union organisation" but was for "the protection of the members and the good name of trade unionism."[20]

It is rather suggestive that during the inter-war period the unions with which British unions and the TUC maintained contacts in British colonial Africa were mostly European unions in South Africa, Southern and Northern Rhodesia.[21] The TUC's

connection with the emerging working class in East Africa and Kenya in particular during this period did not go beyond occasional and ineffectual complaints to the Colonial Office about settler abuses and forced labour.[22] Direct contacts with the burgeoning trade union movement in Kenya were not established until 1937 and, significantly, the initiative came from the Labour Trade Union of East Africa, established two years earlier, and not the TUC. The LTUEA asked the TUC to approach the Colonial Office to intervene and seek an amendment to the Kenya Trade Union ordinance, 1937, which was unduly restrictive.[23]

The TUC's relative negligence of colonial labour movements in African colonies before the Second World War can partly be attributed to the fact that the TUC virtually faced no external competition to its influence in the colonies. The contacts which the Kenyan labour movement, for instance, maintained with the outside world, apart from those with the TUC, did not go beyond occasional correspondence, mostly carried on by Makhan Singh in his unrelenting efforts to inform the outside world about labour conditions and the existence of a trade union movement in East Africa, as well as to express solidarity with the outside labour movements.[24]

The outbreak of the Second World War brought profound changes in colonial political economies which laid the roots for the formulation and implementation of new post-war colonial policies and relationships. During the war colonial workers displayed ever increasing organised militancy, and the development of trade unions was given a decisive boost.[25] Faced with such developments in the colonies, the British labour movement began moving towards establishing more direct and stronger links with colonial trade unions. In 1942 the Fabian Colonial Bureau candidly conceded:

> *The fact that labour in the colonies might have problems of its own to solve is only beginning to be realised. Until recently the aspirations of colonial workers were not taken very seriously . . . The average British worker is rightly horrified when he learns of the disadvantages under which his colonial brother lives and works, but even then it is little appreciated that our relatively high standard of living is maintained, in part, by the low standards obtaining in other lands, especially in colonial territories. The large body of poorly-paid colonial labour also constitutes a threat, conversely, to the higher standards at home, and forms an infectious centre of discontent and poverty. This is particularly true of colonies which are passing a minor industrial revolution of their own,*

a process which is being hastened by war demands for certain materials and the growth of local industries owing to shortage of imports . . . but there is no reason why the miseries of nineteenth century Britain should be produced . . . the beginnings of trade unionism in the colonies brings all these questions before us with a new urgency.[26]

There was little that could be done during the war itself, however, to forge meaningful solidarity with colonial workers. TUC assistance to the Kenyan labour movement during the war years consisted of criticism against the coercive emergency labour legislation enacted by the Kenyan government in order to ensure adequate labour supplies both for the military and public works programmes, and for private agriculture and industry. For sure, in 1941 the Kenyan government amended its Trade Union Ordinance of 1937, but it would seem that this was because the government was anxious to get loans under the 1940 Colonial Development and Welfare Act and not as a result of TUC pressure as such. It must be borne in mind that the settlers increased their power in Kenya during the war and that the subordinate relationship of the colonial state to the imperial state was transformed, so that the impact of 'pressure groups' in Britain, like the TUC, on Kenya through the Colonial Office was reduced.

After the war the stage was set for the TUC to cement its relations with colonial trade unions. First, the latter had grown in number and strength and the British and Colonial governments had, in response, adopted the policy of controlling their development less by outright prescription and more by legal mechanisms, and by encouraging the growth of economistic and apolitical trade unionism.[27] The TUC was to help in fostering the development of this brand of 'responsible' trade unionism by sponsoring 'safe' British trade union advisers to the colonies. Second, in the immediate aftermath of the war, a new situation on the international labour scene emerged when the World Federation of Trade Unions (W.F.T.U.) was formed, which shook the TUC out of any lingering complacency in its dealings with trade unions in British colonial Africa. The WFTU included within its ranks not only trade unions from the countries of the West and Japan, but also trade unions from the socialist countries of Eastern Europe, as well as some from a number of colonial and ex-colonial territories. According to Woddis the WFTU's "declared policy was, from the very outset, one of moral and material help to colonial workers and opposition to every form of imperialist oppression . . . In the light of these developments they (movements like the TUC) were compelled to seek new methods of rule. First, they strove to disrupt and destroy the WFTU . . . Secondly, they had to find new methods of dealing with the growing trade

union movement within the colonial territories."[28]

The Labour Party's victory in 1945 ensured that the TUC would be further incorporated into the machinery of colonial labour policy formulation. And given that the post-war period witnessed mounting nationalist militancy in the colonies and growing anti-colonial sentiments in many parts of the world the TUC's collaboration with the colonial office, albeit under a labour government, only served to undermine the TUC's credibility in the colonies.

The sharpening contradictions which bedevilled the TUC in its relations with colonial labour movements can be seen in the careers of the TUC-sponsored colonial trade union advisers themselves. "These advisers," Woddis disclosed, were "safe right wing trade union officers, or more often, Ministry of Labour officials with no trade union background at all."[29] By the late 1940s there were over 400 of them operating in about fifteen colonies. Their role, Woddis maintained, was "to spread ideas of class collaboration; to prevent strikes; to safeguard profits; to help governments frame anti-trade union legislation; to prevent trade unions participating in the struggle for national independence . . ."[30]

Such a characterisation fits the career of James Patrick, a Scottish trade unionist and the first British trade union adviser, sent to Kenya by the Colonial Office with the TUC's approval in 1947. He worked indefatigably to disseminate the ideology of economistic and apolitical trade unionism through his pamphlets and trade union classes.[31] In fact he tried his best to discourage would-be trade unionists from organizing trade unions. Instead, he advised them to form staff councils. As might be expected from a salaried government official, Patrick was actively involved in framing Kenya's restrictive and repressive trade union legislation enacted in the late 1940s and early 1950s. He also engineered the removal of union leaders whom he found too militant and disagreeable and rewarded and promoted those he found moderate like Meshack Ndisi, the General Secretary of the Transport and Allied Workers Union, for whom he secured a scholarship to study trade unionism at Ruskin College, Oxford, and who on his return became Patrick's deputy in the Labour Department. He could not imagine, Patrick declared categorically before a group of abour 100 settler leaders, to their obvious satisfaction, "anything more disasterous to the progress of the Colony than the development of trade unionism by uneducated people and it will be my constant endeavour to prevent such a possibility . . . I shall take such steps as are necessary to have those trade unions which are unsatisfactory deregistered."[32] True to his word, he was instrumental in the eventual dissolution of the powerful African Workers Federation which had emerged in the course of the 1947

Mombasa General Strike.[33]

It is interesting to note that when Patrick was specifically attacked by a delegate at the TUC 1952 Annual Conference for "working hand in glove with [a] reactionary government like that of Kenya, which only permit[s] government controlled trade unions and forbid[s] any independent trade union activity,"[34] the TUC General Secretary lashed back in defense of the TUC-sponsored trade union advisers. "Contrary to what the speaker has said," he declared, "I am going to pay my tribute to the magnificent job which is being done by them."[35] The TUC leadership proceeded to claim that as a result of its criticisms of the Trade Union Ordinance, 1952 which, incidentally Patrick had had a hand in drafting, "the Ordinance is now one which will give the workers in Kenya the opportunity to develop bona fide trade unions."[36] To judge from the actual reality and the wishes of Kenyan trade unionists, the truth of the matter was quite the contrary.

In the years immediately following the war, differences between the TUC and the Kenyan trade union movement increasingly centered on the latter's desires to exercise its autonomy and have relations with trade union organisations other than the TUC. As the 'Cold War' got hotter, so did the position of the TUC in its relations with the colonial trade union movements become more complicated and contradictory. Following the sweeping victory of the Labour Party in the 1945 General Elections, for example, there was a ringing endorsement by the TUC, at its first post-war annual conference, that colonial trade unions should enjoy "the same rights and privileges as British trade unions."[37] But two years later Arthur Deakin of the TUC, then President of the WFTU, vetoed a Soviet proposal to set up a fund to assist colonial trade unions, and in the following year the TUC delegation turned down proposals that colonial workers should enjoy working conditions equal to those in metropolitan countries.[38]

But even in these early years of the Cold War the TUC leadership was not entirely oblivious to the potential challenge posed by the ICFTU and American labour organisations to the influence of the TUC in the colonies. Accordingly, while the Free World Labour Conference was in progress to set up the ICFTU, the TUC convened an extraordinary meeting of colonial delegates. Sir Vincent Tewson, the TUC General Secretary, strongly cautioned against expecting too much from the ICFTU. It was a mark of the times that he was forced to defend the TUC's policies towards the colonial trade unions. He urged the need for restraint on the grounds that unless they were all able "to secure economic stability in what is a very grave crisis, it is not only a question of what will happen to Great Britain but what will happen to the whole sterling area."[39]

He did not hesitate to add that the TUC had had such a long experience that it was probably the only organisation that could provide these colonial unions with a well tested model to follow, a mirror of their own future. His speech was certainly a recipe for moderation, an attempt to dampen the militancy engulfing the labour movements of the colonial world, and a plea for colonial trade unions to close ranks with the TUC which was finding itself on the defensive as it increasingly became identified with British colonial labour policy.

The East African Trade Union Congress (EATUC) had been invited to this conference by the TUC but had declined to attend mainly because of suspicions about the motives behind the formation of the ICFTU. Interestingly enough, when an invitation was received from the WFTU to attend its Milan Congress just a little later the EATUC considered sending representatives. In the end none went, which was a triumph for those who advocated strict neutrality between the two internationals.[40] But the TUC obviously did not see it that way. As a reprisal for the snub, it ceased answering any correspondence from the EATUC, while, in contrast, "trade union literature and communications . . . continued coming from the WFTU," despite a similar refusal to attend its congress.[41] From then on the EATUC found itself branded with the communist tag. During his East African tour Edgar Parry, the Assistant Labour Adviser to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, and a former district organiser of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers in Britain with experience as a trade union adviser in Sierra Leone, warned the EATUC to stop flirting with the WFTU and make their attitude to the ICFTU more forthcoming if they wanted to avoid trouble. Singh, who was widely known as a self-confessed communist, denied that the EATUC was controlled by the WFTU or infiltrated by communist agitators.[42]

Singh was, of course right, for with a few notable exceptions there were hardly any trade unionists in Kenya with more than a faint acquaintance with Marxist - Leninist ideas. Rather, a number of them espoused a variety of radical and populist tendencies. Thus the smear-campaign against the EATUC in official and settler circles was more a reflection of the paranoia of colonial capitalist society than an indication of the real measure of the WFTU's penetration and communist influence among trade unionists in the country. It seems reasonable to assume that the punitive attitude of the TUC towards EATUC, in 1949 and 1950, deprived the latter of a valuable ally and gave a cloak of respectability or credence to the communist charges against the EATUC which were clearly being used by the colonial state and the settlers as a convenient weapon with which to harass, undermine and possibly proscribe trade union activities in the country. Patrick, in fact, worked hard to undermine the position of pro-WFTU leaders like

Singh within the Kenyan trade union movement. Not only were such leaders arrested after the 1950 Nairobi General Strike, the Kenyan government, with the blessings of Patrick, also moved to eradicate any sources of WFTU influence in the country when it banned all WFTU publications in 1951.[43] Other colonial governments also undertook similar efforts to break contacts between colonial trade unions and the WFTU. Colonial trade unionists were prevented by various means from attending WFTU conferences like the Third World Trade Union Conference held in Vienna, October 10-21, 1953, and "in the West Indies, WFTU representatives, themselves natives of the West Indies, were prevented from visiting Trinidad, British Guiana and Barbados to discuss trade union problems with the workers."[44]

Although the TUC almost certainly collaborated with the ICFTU in a world-wide campaign to undermine the influence of the WFTU, relations between the ICFTU and TUC were far from smooth. From the early 1950s the ICFTU began making serious inroads in British colonies including Kenya, at the TUC's expense. From the very beginning Kenya was earmarked by the ICFTU as an important centre for its operations in East Africa. Faced with the ICFTU challenge the TUC tried to consolidate its relations with the Kenyan trade union movement. Moreover, the 1950s began with militant trade unionists like Singh, who tended to be suspicious of TUC intentions, safely behind bars. Thus for the first time the TUC began offering the Kenyan trade union movements material help in the form of office equipment and stationery.[45] Kenyan trade unionists also received modest grants from the TUC's Colonial Fund,[46] which had been established in the late 1940s,[47] and by 1951 stood at £36,900.[48] Moreover, the TUC's colonial training programme was expanded, thus in 1953 books, periodicals and pamphlets on trade union subjects were sent to Kenya and 37 other colonial trade union centres.[49] In 1955 Mboya, with TUC support, took up a scholarship offered by the Workers' Travel Association, at Ruskin College, Oxford.[50] Seven years earlier, Ndisi had also gone to Ruskin on a scholarship secured by Patrick. The fact that Mboya did not return from Oxford and sink into the relative obscurity of an administrative post in the Labour Department as Ndisi did, was as much an indication of the times as a reflection of Mboya's greater resourcefulness and dynamism.[51] If Ndisi was a product of Kenyan trade unionism in the 1940s and the cautious attitudes of the TUC at the time, Mboya exhibited the confidence of the era of militant nationalism and the cosmopolitan brashness nurtured by wider horizons opened up by the ascendency of American and ICFTU influence.

The 1950s in Kenya were defined by the Mau Mau national liberation struggle as much as anything else. It was Mau Mau, therefore, which presented the TUC with its greatest challenge in Kenya. It brought out, clearly, the inherent contradictions

of the TUC position, that is, its involvement in the formulation of colonial policies, on the one hand, and its efforts to establish direct contacts with colonial trade unions, on the other.

To be sure, when the State of Emergency was declared in Kenya in 1952 the TUC spoke out against the way in which the situation was being handled by the Kenyan Government as well as the Conservative Government in London, which had come to power following Labour's defeat in the 1951 election. In 1953 the TUC urged the colonial office to recognise that the basic problem in Kenya was "not merely to put down terrorism, but to develop conditions which will enable people of all races to work together in close harmony and to develop the country's social, economic, and political conditions along lines which will benefit the population as a whole."[52] More specifically, the TUC made representations over the arrest of trade union officials. And in March 1956 the TUC General Secretary himself flew to Kenya in order to try to prevent the government from deregistering the Kenya Federation of Labour (KFL).[53]

Such acts of solidarity, however, were more than undermined by the tendency of the TUC leadership to be "swayed by the Colonial Office view of Mau Mau and its allegations of trade union complicity in the insurrection . . . the TUC accepted the premise that the war had to be won since Mau Mau, in their view, represented a retreat to barbarism."[54] It was such convictions which led the TUC General Council to offer the smug regret that it "realised that the State of Emergency would create difficulties for the trade unions,"[55] at the same time that the Council was making representations to the Colonial Office deploring some aspects of the Emergency. This would explain why a motion at the TUC Annual Conference of 1953 calling upon the British and Kenyan governments to grant the people of Kenya "complete independence as in the case of India" was soundly defeated.[56] And in the following year the TUC complacently congratulated itself that as a result of its representations over the arrest of trade union officials "there is much better understanding by the local government in Kenya, and trade union officials have been given permits to go on tour into the country districts to meet their branch officials."[57] To say that this was an overstatement would itself be making an understatement. As one delegate at the TUC Annual Conference in 1955 lamented:

> *It is a tragedy that the General Council did not demand the release of all trade union officials under detention . . . it falls far short of what we are entitled to expect in British trade union solidarity with the Africans in Kenya. We should declare our support for every form of struggle against the Euro-*

pean robbery of African land in Kenya and for higher standards for the people . . .[58]

That this was a minority voice within the TUC cannot be in much doubt. As late as 1956 the TUC was still endorsing the Kenyan Government's denials, couched in legal niceties that detainees were not being used as forced labour, despite evidence to the contrary offered by the Kenyan Federation of Labour (KFL) and discussed at the ICFTU Congress of 1955.[59]

Given such limitations, it becomes easier to understand why Kenyan trade unionists increasingly became suspicious of the TUC, particularly in the face of the anti-colonial postures of the ICFTU. Lubembe's comments after attending an ICFTU Conference is typical:

> *I am extremely unhappy with the way the British delegation had led themselves during the preceedings of the Conference. It appears that the British TUC leaders who were sent to the Conference still live in the 1920s. They regard some people at their ex-colonies and this makes their position more unpopular in the African circles.*[60]

Apart from the TUC's paternalism and less than enthusiastic support of decolonisation there was another factor which was both a source and product of the strained relationship between the TUC and the KFL: the TUC model of trade unionism lost much of its appeal, although, of course, not from lack of trying.[61] From the mid-1950s when the KFL entered into close working relationship with the Federation of Kenyan Employers (FKE) and it was agreed by the two parties that the emerging collective bargaining system in the country should be based on industrial unionism and not the 'chaos' of British industrial relations where craft, general and industrial unions co-existed somewhat uneasily, the appeal of British trade unionism steadily declined for the new breed of Kenyan trade unionists. It has to be remembered that many of these trade unionists had risen to positions of influence during the harshest days of the emergency and, therefore, had little experience of, or interest in the powerful omnibus unions of the Kenya of the 1940s.

It is a little ironical that the basis for solidarity between the TUC and the KFL should have been undermined precisely at this time when the dominant fraction of the Kenyan labour movement was being incorporated into collaborative arrangements with the colonial state and capital. The KFL fiercely rejected the TUC's position that colonial trade unions should be built from the bottom up in order to safeguard them from being dominated by 'crooks' or 'unscrupulous politicians',[62] especially now that the influence of American unions, with

their long and unenviable record of corruption and infiltration by gangsters, was growing, and decolonisation was leading to the intensification of political power struggles among the nationalist leaders. The TUC's advice that union dues should be collected by the unions themselves "so that members were kept regularly in touch with the union and express their consciousness of the union by this payment" was similarly rejected. "We became convinced," Mboya argued, "we would like to move to the American and Canadian system of a 'check-off' payment of union dues, with employers deducting the dues before paying wages."[63]

These differences reflected a basic divergence of what trade unionism was all about. "In traditional British thinking," Mboya contended, "a trade union movement is only formed to fight for better conditions for its members -- especially higher wages, better housing, social security and the like. In the new thinking in Africa, the trade union movement should itself be involved in an economic interest, running its own cooperatives and even running large companies and banks."[64] It was from the Scandinavian and particularly Israeli labour movements that the KFL sought and drew its inspiration on how to establish this new pattern of trade unionism. It was in partial concession to this view that the TUC made a contribution of £2,000 to finance a number of scholarships to the Afro-Asian Institute ran by Histadrut in Israel in 1963.[65] Israel was "obviously able to offer some experience to people from underdeveloped countries," the TUC justified its decision to make the contribution, because it was "a country which started from scratch and has acquired a lot of experience in development."[66] Nobody was, of course, prepared to admit that Israel was being used to mediate Western interests as direct metropolitan involvement in the colonial labour movements became increasingly untenable.[67]

The repudiation of the British model of trade unionism and the adoption of models from elsewhere, blending them with local experience, underscores the point that the TUC's influence in Kenya waned dramatically from the mid-1950's. In a sense, the Kenyan labour movement, or rather the dominant section of the Kenyan trade union leadership, was renouncing the tennents of socialism as understood in the British socialist movement. "African socialism," Mboya wrote:

> *has an entirely different history from European socialism. European socialism was born of the agrarian and industrial revolutions, which divided society into the landed and the capitalist on the one side and the landless and the industrial proletariat on the other. There is no division into such classes in Africa, where states came to nationhood through the pressure*

of mass movements and where governments consist of the leaders of the workers and peasants, rather than the nobility who have ruled Europe. So there is no need in Africa to argue over ideologies, or to define your actions in terms of doctrinaire theories.[68]

There is no space here to offer a detailed critique of the ideology of 'African socialism'. As the above passage shows, as a concept 'African socialism' cannot explain the development of African society without degenerating into a historical obscurantism; indeed, it resurrects a mythical and idyllic African past, glosses over the profound impact of colonial capitalist penetration on African social formations, grossly over-simplifies the processes of nationalist struggles and decolonisation, and celebrates the multifacted bankruptcy of the African middle classes so eloquently portrayed by Fanon's devastating critique in 1961 and many others since then.[69] As developments since the 1960s have shown 'African socialism' as a guide to action has sunk into a morass of confusion and ignoble failure. All that it has to show for its record are dictatorships wallowing in greed and corrupt coups and countercoups, poverty and squalor, famines and refugees. But it would be missing the point if we, with the advantage of hindsight, were to dismiss the powerful ideological pull that 'African socialism' had on so many in the labour movement in Africa, including Kenya. It provided them with an ideological construct with which to explain and justify their growing assertion of aloofness from movements like the TUC. "There is a growing tendency," the TUC noted with regret in 1959, "for African trade unions to be subordinated to the aims of political Pan-Africanism, to the detriment of genuine trade union activity."[70] The KFL would have begged to differ with such a characterisation of their activities.

Thus the TUC's influence in Kenya was eclipsed as a result of the growing ability by the dominant fraction of the Kenyan trade union leadership to articulate a distinctive ideology of 'socialism', as well as their increasing involvement in the intricate world of Pan-Africanist trade unionism. The TUC's own internal contradiction in its dealings with colonial labour movements were, of course, also partly responsible for the decline of TUC influence, as were the calculated and aggressive tactics of the ICFTU and the AFL-CIO.

TUC complaints against the ICFTU and the AFL-CIO were not new. In 1952, for instance, the TUC report stated:

The ICFTU leaders, and especially the American trade union leaders in that body, are working unashamedly as the representatives of big business, and the American State Department. Their activity in France,

for example, amply bears this out.[71]

The TUC-ICFTU conflict over Africa soon started in earnest. By 1959 when the influence of the AFL-CIO in the ICFTU had risen to virtual control of the organisation,[72] the TUC noted sourly that it had "become increasingly disturbed at the differences of approach as between a number of organisations, including the ICFTU and the AFL-CIO on the task of assisting African trade unions."[73]

It is not surprising, therefore, that the TUC was opposed to the setting up of an African wing of the ICFTU when the idea was mooted, ostensibly because this would detract from "genuine trade union activity."[74] The fact that from the mid-1950's the ICFTU's representative in Nairobi began assuming greater influence with the Kenyan trade unionists than the TUC-sponsored and government-employed trade union advisor is ample testimony to the fact that there had been an important shift in the external linkages of the Kenyan labour movement. Thus from the mid-1950s the influence of the TUC in Kenya waned significantly and the battle for the soul of the Kenyan trade union movement, as it were, would be between the ICFTU and AFL-CIO, on the one hand, and Pan-African trade unionism, on the other.[75]

This shift reflected the crystallisation of a new post-war international division of labour characterised by the hegemony of American capital and the gathering storms of decolonisation. It has been argued in this paper that the foreign policies of the British TUC were not only conditioned by the internal contradiction within the TUC itself, but were also determined by the colonial policies of the British imperial state. In other words, the TUC exhibited a high degree of integration into the policy-making apparatus of the British state. This raises serious questions about the possibilities and limits of international solidarity between workers in the metropolitan centres and the colonial and dependent peripheries. Perhaps Thomson and Larson are not being facetious in talking of "trade union imperialism."[76] And dependence writers, despite their many shortcomings, may after all be right in not taking international working class solidarity for granted.

Footnotes

[1]See particularly Bill Warren, Imperialism: Pioneer of Capitalism; Robert Brenner, "The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism," New Left Review, 104, 1077; Gabriel Palma, "Dependency: A Formal Theory of Underdevelopment or a Methodology for the Analysis of Concrete Situations of Underdevelopment?" World Development, vol. 6, 1978;

and Colin Leys, "Underdevelopment and Dependency: Critical Notes," Journal of Contemporary Asian, vol. 7, no. 1, 1977. Also see P.T. Zeleza, "African History, Underdevelopment, Modes of Production, and Workers," in Dependent Capitalism and the Making of the Kenyan Working Class During the Colonial Period, Ph.D. Thesis, Dalhousie, 1982.

[2]Arghiri Emmanuel, Unequal Exchange: A Study of the Imperialism of Trade, M.R.P., New York, 1972; Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, Tanzania Publishing House, Dar es Salaam, 1972; Samir Amin, Accumulation on a World Scale: A Critique of the Theory of Underdevelopment, M.R.P., New York, 1972, vols. 1 & 2.

[3]D. Waddada Nabudere, The Political Economy of Imperialism, Zed Press, London, 1977; and Essays on the Theory and Practice of Imperialism, Onyx Press, London, 1979.

[4]Jack Woddis, New Theories of Revolution, International Publishers, New York, 1977, pp. 301-2.

[5]Charles Bettelheim, "International Solidarity of Workers," Monthly Review, June 1970; and his appendix in A. Emmanuel, op. cit. For a persuasive critique of Bettelheim's contention that the rate of exploitation is higher in the metropoles than peripheries see Emmanuel, including his article "International Solidarity of Workers," Monthly Review, June 1970, and R. Owen and B. Sutcliffe (eds.) Studies in the Theory of Imperialism, Longman, London, 1972, pp. 324-5.

[6]As quoted in M. Nicolaus, "The Theory of the Labour Aristocracy," Monthly Review, April, 1970, p. 92.

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

[8]M. Nicolaus, op. cit., p. 94. Also see Eric Hobsbawm, "Lenin and the 'Aristocracy of Labor,'" Monthly Review, April, 1970; and Lenin himself in Against Revisionism, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1959.

[9]Leon Trotsky, "Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay," in The Trade Unions, Pathfinder Press, New York, 1975, p. 71.

[10]L. Trotsky, "The Errors in Principles of Syndicalism," ibid., p. 28.

[11]Leo Panitch, "Trade Unions and the Capitalist State," New Left Review, 125, p. 21.

[12]See particularly the work of Alice Amsden, International Firms and Labour in Kenya, 1945-70, Frank Cass, London, 1971; Anthony Clayton and Donald C. Savage, Government and Labour in Kenya 1895-1963. Frank Cass, London, 1974; and Richard Sandbrook, Proletarians and African Capitalism - the Kenyan Case, 1960-1972, C.U.P., London, 1975.

[13]Rita Hinden, "Socialism and the Colonial World," in Arthur Creech Jones, New Fabian Colonial Essays, The Hagarth Press, London, pp. 9-12. For a general account of Fabian socialism see Margaret Cole, The Story of Fabian Socialism, John Wiley, New York, 1964. And for a more detailed analysis of the attitudes and policies of the British labour movement towards the colonial world, see P.S. Gupta, Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914-1964, MacMillan, London, 1975, and David Goldsworthy, Colonial Issues in British Politics, 1945-1961, OUP, Oxford, 1961.

[14]See Colonial Advisory Committee, Memorandum for Inaugural meeting, 22nd Dec., 1937, TUC Library, HD 6866K.

[15]See B.C. Roberts, Labour in the Tropical Territories of the Commonwealth, Bell, London, 1964.

[16]Walter Bowen, Colonial Trade Unions, Fabian Publications Ltd., London, Research Series No. 167, p. 4.

[17]Report of the West Indian Royal Commission, pp. 199, 438.

[18]Minutes of the Colonial Advisory Committee, 1937-47, TUC Library, HD 6866K.

[19]See Joan Davies, African Trade Unions, Penguin, Harmondsworte, 1966, Chapter 2, and J. Meynand and A.S. Bey, Trade Unionism in Africa, Methuen, London, 1967. For an account of labour conditions and practices in French colonies see Jean Suret-Canale, French Colonialism in Tropical Africa, C. Hurst, London, 1974.

[20]Labour in the Colonies: Some Current Problems, reports submitted to the Labour Committee of the Fabian Colonial Bureau, V. Gollanchz Ltd. and Fabian Society, London, 1942.

[21]D.I. Davies, "The Politics of the TUC's Colonial Policy," Political Quarterly, vol. 35, no. 1, 1964. p. 25. For some references to the relationship between the British labour movement and the trade union movement in South Africa see H.J. and R.E. Simons, Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1969.

[22]A. Clayton and D.C. Savage, op. cit., p. 126.

[23]See Makhan Singh, History of Kenya's Trade Union Movement to 1952, E.A.P.H. Nairobi, 1969, p. 104.

[24]See Makhan Singh Records classified as Mak B/1/4-7 held at the Institute of African Studies, University of Nairobi.

[25]P.T. Zeleza, Dependent Capitalism . . .; chapter 3.

[26]Labour in the Colonies . . ., pp. 3-4.

[27]See, for example Orde Browne, Labour Adviser to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, in his report on Labour Conditions in East Africa, 1946, and R.E. Luyt, who was once trade union adviser in Northern Rhodesia and later became labour Commissioner in Kenya, Trade Unionism in African Colonies, 1949.

[28]See. J. Woddis, The Mark is Off! An Examination of the Activities of Trade Union Advisers in the British Colonies, Thames Publications, London, n.d.

[29]ibid., p. 9.

[30]ibid., pp. 11-12.

[31]See P.T. Zeleza, Dependence Capitalism . . ., Chapter 4.

[32]East African Standard, 14-1-49.

[33]J. Patrick, Memorandum on Trade Unions Developmeny Policy, 1949.

[34]TUC Annual Report, 1952, pp. 351-2.

[35]ibid., p. 352.

[36]ibid., p. 213.

[37]TUC Annual Report, 1946, p. 211.

[38]See D.I. Davies, op. cit., p. 30.

[39]Minutes of Extraordinary Meeting with Colonial Delegate Attending the Free World Labour Conference, Colonial Advisory Committee, 13-12-49 TUC Library, HD 6866K.

[40]Singh, op. cit., p. 206.

[41]ibid., p. 245.

[42]ibid., p. 224.

[43]ibid., p. 296.

[44]Woddis, op. cit., p. 39.

[45]KFL General Secretary Annual Report, 1960. Also see KFL Newsletter, Nos. 1-19.

[46]KFL General Secretary Annual Report, 1960. The TUC gave £750 to the Railway African Union and the Dockworkers Union, see TUC Annual Report, 1956, p. 220.

[47]Minutes of the Colonial Advisory Committee, 8-5-47. TUC Library HD 6866K.

[48]D.I. Davies, op. cit., p. 25.

[49]TUC Annual Report, 1953, p. 248.

[50]Tom Mboya, Freedom and After, Andre Deutsch, London, 1963, p. 56.

[51]For a brief evaluation of Ndisi's and Mboya's careers see P.T. Zeleza, Dependent Capitalism . . ., pp. 536-6. Also see D. Goldsworthy, Tom Mboya: The Man Kenya Wanted to Forget, Heinemann, London, 1982.

[52]TUC Annual Report, 1953, p. 213.

[53]TUC Annual Report, 1956; and Annual Report of the Labour Department (Kenya), 1956.

[54]Clayton and Savage, op. cit., p. 390.

[55]TUC Annual Report, 1953, p. 213.

[56]ibid., pp. 464-5.

[57]TUC Annual Report, 1954, p. 228.

[58]TUC Annual Report, 1955, p. 474.

[59]TUC Annual Report, 1956, p. 220. Also see G.E. Lynd, The Politics of African Trade Unionism, Praeger, New York, 1967, p. 66.

[60]KFL Press Release 23-7-62. COTU Archives (CA) KFL File 270.

[61]Mboya, op. cit., p. 199.

[62]D.I. Davies, op. cit., p. 28.

[63]Mboya, op. cit., pp. 190-1.

[64]ibid., p. 200.

[65]TUC Annual Report, 1963, pp. 228-9.

[66]ibid., p. 362.

[67]For more details on Israeli - Kenyan Labour relations see P.T. Zeleza, Dependent Capitalism . . . pp. 603-606.

[68]Mboya, op. cit., pp. 167-8.

[69]Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, Grove Press, New York, 1963.

[70]TUC Annual Report, 1959, p. 209.

[71]TUC Annual Report, 1952, p. 353.

[72]D. Thomson and R. Larson, op. cit., pp. 20-1.

[73]TUC Annual Report, 1959, p. 209.

[74]D.I. Davies, op. cit., p. 31.

[75]See P.T. Zeleza, Dependent Capitalism, Chapter 7.

[76]D. Thomson and R. Larson, Where Were You, Brother? An Account of Trade Union Imperialism, War on Want, London, 1978.