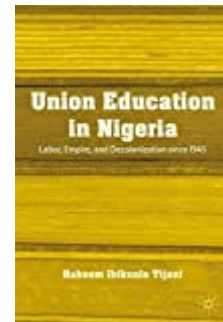




Hakeem Ibikunle Tijani. *Union Education in Nigeria: Labor, Empire, and Decolonization Since 1945.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 176 S. ISBN 978-1-137-00358-4.



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H. I. Tijani: Union Education in Nigeria

In the context of devolving political authority to African personnel, British officials in colonial Africa worked to ensure that sound industrial relations would be maintained in government and industry after Independence. By this they meant that trade unions would function relatively smoothly so that the economies of Britain's former colonies still dominated by foreign firms would not be disrupted by strikes or other labor disturbances. They also meant quashing labor movements that sought to radically reorient production or that were affiliated with international communism. Frederick Cooper's *Decolonization and African Society* (Cambridge University Press, 1996) showed clearly that establishing predictable, anti-communist labor relations was an integral part of decolonization. Hakeem Tijani's study of *Union Education in Nigeria* offers a specific focus on how this transpired in Nigeria in the period just before and after independence in 1960. His focus is on training programs for staff of the Nigerian Labour Department (later Ministry of Labour), Nigerian union leaders, and labor officers for various foreign companies operating in Nigeria, as well as the larger political context in which they operated.

The topic is significant, because it shows one of the ways that colonial officials endeavored, and were able, to shape Nigeria's economy and society after independence. Through anti-communist labor education, labor policy makers aimed ultimately to benefit Western companies doing business in Nigeria and to preserve the country as a pro-Western political ally.

Though other studies have extensively treated the history of industrial relations in colonial and postcolonial Nigeria, Tijani has drawn on newly available archival materials, including Foreign Office and Colonial Office files on "Countering Communist Policy in Nigeria," declassified in 2006. These make clearer than ever before the active efforts of British officials to suppress left-leaning labor leaders and organizations and support pro-Western ones. In particular, they aimed to keep Nigerian workers away from the leftist World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) and close to the London-based International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) as well as the British Trades Union Congress (TUC). Newly available records from the British Communist Party and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) also shed

light on international interest in trade union organization in Nigeria after Independence.

This book is organized into eight chapters, which develop chronologically. The first presents as background material an overview of the different international organizations with an interest in Nigerian trade unions. Chapter 2 focuses on Nigerian leftists in the 1950s, who reached out to allies in Western and Eastern Europe, including the WFTU, and organized education and training sessions for workers. For their part, British colonial officials set up the Nigerian Department of Labor as part of a program of modernization and development. They offered opportunities for Nigerians to undertake training locally and overseas and set in motion a Nigerianization program (that is, replacing European with Nigerian personnel in government industries) that excluded leftists.

Chapter 3 offers a narrative of decolonization in British Africa to serve as background for further chapters. It highlights the importance of the 1940 and 1945 Colonial Development and Welfare Acts, which funded some investment in physical and human capital. In Chapter 4, "The Colonial State and Organized Labor," Tijani focuses on government anti-leftist policies at the end of the colonial period as well as official strategies to shape the development of industrial relations in Nigeria. In collaboration with officials of the British Trade Union Congress, the Nigerian private sector, pro-government labor leaders, and the American AFL-CIO, the colonial state worked to marginalize leftists within the Nigerian labor movement. Chapter 5, "Labor Union Education before 1960," argues that government-sponsored workers' workshops, training by public and private employers, and the opening of labor training centers in cities and towns during the late colonial period were motivated as much by anticommunism as by a desire to create sound industrial relations. Indeed, the two motivations were considered as inseparable. Here, the account of the labor education offered by the Extra-Mural Centre at the University College, Ibadan, is a particularly interesting example.

While the preceding chapters largely considered policies and institutions, the following two undertake specific case studies. Chapter 6 centers on "Champions of the Working Class: Samuel Grace Ikoku and Other Noble Men," highlighting the views of labor apparent in the writings of leftist intellectuals in the 1950s. A core of committed Marxists, including Ikoku, Nduka Eze, and

Gogo Chu Nzeribe, not only produced a newspaper and other writings, but also met weekly to discuss ideological education and Marxist perspectives on trade unionism and labor education. The following chapter considers the last strike organized by Nigerian workers before independence, the Nigerian Union of Seamen Strike in 1959, which took place en route to Liverpool on the *MV Apapa*. It resulted in the creation of several government and private-sector organizations emphasizing the education and training of union representatives in the maritime sector.

The book's final chapter examines "Labor Union Education since 1960," arguing that Independence did not fundamentally change labor education's role in the struggle against communism, nor did it change how that education took place. Here, Tijani is concerned with attempts at creating labor unity through umbrella organizations, which splintered into ideological and personal rivalries. The chapter also considers the influence of international organizations like the WFTU, the ICFTU and the ILO on Nigerian labor unions. The chapter concludes that "the division between the mainstream labor organizations and the government continues in conceptualization and curriculum" (p. 121).

The strength of this book is in its insight that labor education helps us to understand decolonization. Specifically, it suggests the on-the-ground ways that departing colonizers sought to ensure the stability of capitalist production after Independence and the ideological commitment of Nigerians to anticommunism. Yet there are some weaknesses in the details. Stronger editing is needed to eliminate repetition and promote clarity. More importantly, the evidence underlying the author's conclusions is largely alluded to rather than fully presented in the text, depriving readers of a strong sense of these rich materials and their historical implications. Lengthy quotations and tables from official documents are reproduced both in chapters and in two appendices ("The Industrial Fund, 1971" and "NLC Labour/Education Policy Document, 2000"), but these would be more compelling if they were conjoined more closely to the author's interpretations and arguments, and perhaps supplemented with oral histories from participants who are still living. They and other readers interested in how policies conceived and implemented during the era of decolonization continue to shape Nigeria's working people will find much to appreciate in this book.

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