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Opoku Agyeman. *The Failure of Grassroots Pan-Africanism: The Case of the All-African Trade Union Federation.* Lanham: Lexington Books, 2003. xx + 371 pp. $125.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7391-0620-4.

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How Likely Was Pan-African Labor Solidarity? AATUF and Unfulfilled Promise

Writing about African organized labor usually involves lists of trade union organizations that are, at times, hard to differentiate because of the similarity in the names of ideologically opposed groups. In Nigeria, for example, the Nigerian Trades Union Congress (NTUC) jockeyed for influence and membership with the Trades Union Congress (Nigeria) (TUC[N]) before coming together in the United Labour Congress. Furthermore, when an author tackles multiple unions and union federations across the continent it becomes even more complicated. In the case of Opoku Agyeman's *The Failure of Grassroots Pan-Africanism*, it necessitates almost four pages of abbreviations to list the relevant unions, union federations, and international confederations.

This lengthy book sets out to chronicle the highly debated activities of the All-African Trade Union Federation (AATUF) which existed, in name if not in fact, from its founding in 1961 until it united with the African Trade Union Confederation (ATUC) at the behest of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1973; the successor body was the Organization of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU). Over the almost twelve years of its existence, AATUF had three different headquarters in three different countries. At times an important player in helping to shape pan-African political and labor developments, and at other times a moribund mouthpiece for the Communist-dominated World Federation of Trade Unions, AATUF never lacked fiery pan-African rhetoric even when its actions flagrantly belied those pronouncements.

Professor Agyeman, a political scientist at Montclair State University and the author of a number of books on Kwame Nkrumah and pan-Africanism, is well suited to evaluate AATUF's performance against its rhetoric and the structure of his book is clear and logical. An introduction relates the background of pan-African philosophy and some of the ideological roots of the nationalist and pan-African sentiment that have informed many African trade unionists since the 1950s. Lengthy quotes from W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Nkrumah, and others establish the tone of many of the hallmarks of AATUF's vocabulary, such as autonomy, nonalignment, African socialism, the African personality, and others. Agyeman goes on to suggest how AATUF could or should have worked given its self-imposed mandate. He concludes the introduction by outlining a case study approach; Ghana, Kenya, and Tanzania, all of which played important roles in the AATUF saga, are the principal nations studied.

Chapter 1 sets out the colonial context in which African workers struggled for better wages and conditions and how nascent African unions operated within often severe limits placed by British and French authorities. There is relatively little that is revelatory here; the fact that colonial authorities were less than enthusiastic about any kind of labor activism was no secret, even in colonies like the Gold Coast where there was less open hostility than there was in Kenya from white settlers and officials. Agyeman begins to craft his argument based on what he feels should have been the emphasis on North-

South polarities, rather than the Cold War East-West divide, when he indicts the British Trades Union Congress (TUC) for aiding and abetting the policy of the Colonial Office (pp. 53, 60-61). When he turns to French colonial labor policy, the French Confederation Generale du Travail (CGT) earns equally faint praise for its own efforts to control workers' organizations in Algeria, Tunisia, and elsewhere. All of these machinations made an already challenging organizational task even more difficult.

In chapter 2, Agyeman examines African labor activism throughout the first half of the twentieth century, focusing upon those incidences that showed the existence of a restive labor force long before independence, such as strikes in the mines and on the railroads in Ghana, strikes on sisal estates in Kenya, and dockworkers' actions in Tanzania. His analysis emphasizes the colonial labor departments and their responses to the strikers. The author divides his examples between those which occurred before World War II and the often more overtly politicized actions which occurred after. A very brief section addresses labor actions in French colonial territories.

The AATUF finally arrives in chapter 3, which addresses not only its creation but also that of the Union Generale des Travailleurs d'Afrique Noire (or UGTAN), which united several trade union federations in French West Africa several years earlier. Agyeman cites the UGTAN, led by Guinea's Sekou Toure, as the first pan-African trade union confederation; importantly, it chose to reject the control and influence of metropolitan federations like the CGT and the "duopoly of influence ... exerted by the Internationals of the East and West" (p. 120).

The AATUF had its roots in several conferences in Accra, the Conference of Independent African States and the All-African People's Conferences, both held in Accra in 1958, at which Nkrumah pressed for the need for African solutions to African problems and, more specifically, for an African labor confederation beholden to neither the WFTU nor the Brussels-based International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). Agyeman spends relatively little time discussing the variety of controversies surrounding the actual founding of the organization. Those included the critical issue of mandatory disaffiliation from all other international trade union structures, the site for AATUF headquarters, and the structure of its leadership. Each of these issues suggests the obstacles facing the fledgling organization and could have been addressed in greater detail. The chapter ends by illustrating how labor organizations overseas reacted to the founding of the AATUF, as well as reaction from around the continent itself.

Chapter 4 addresses the issue of how the AATUF could become a viable organization. As Agyeman rightly notes, the only way for the AATUF to legitimately sustain non-aligned status would be to derive its funding and guidance from its own constituency. Given that many African labor organizations had difficulties sustaining their own unions and federations, let alone the AATUF, it is clear that such funding had to come from somewhere else. In the case of countries like Ghana, where the Ghana Trades Union Congress (GTUC) and Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP) enjoyed an increasingly cozy relationship, that funding came from the state. Agyeman focuses upon the power dynamics between newly independent African nationalist governments and national trade union centers, dynamics that often resulted in "labor-party dissension" in his three case studies. He dissects how tensions among competing union groups like the KFL and KTUC in Kenya, and the ambivalent reactions toward both by Kenyatta's KANU, further complicated matters.

The next two chapters chart the slide of the AATUF first into the orbit of Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana and then, after Nkrumah's ouster in 1966, even further into the arms of the WFTU. The first evolution was perhaps more natural since Nkrumah sought primacy in sub-Saharan pan-African affairs, particularly in contrast to the efforts by Nasser in Egypt to assert similar leadership. Agyeman focuses on both Western and Eastern responses to these moves, concluding that neither the Soviet bloc countries nor the West had any sincere interest in fostering a strong, independent pan-African body, despite protestations to the contrary.

Chapter 5 ends with a look at how the ICFTU stepped up its anti-AATUF efforts, especially as AATUF's non-alignment came into question given its ties to the WFTU. In addition to its own confrontational rhetoric, which stated that non-alignment should not preclude national centers from having friendly relations with the ICFTU, the ICFTU also pressured its African affiliates to subvert or block AATUF's efforts to gain support. Agyeman then changes focus to the United States and its own efforts to affect political developments. Agyeman links the AFL-CIO's Irving Brown to CIA efforts to bolster anti-TANU campaigns in Tanzania and the efforts of Holden Roberto in Angola. Perhaps most importantly for the AATUF, he claims that the United States sponsored the military coup against Nkrumah in 1966, which "was tantamount to the

overthrow of the AATUF" (p. 242).

After being forced out of Accra, the AATUF established a less stable home in Dar es Salaam and found its affiliates under siege in Kenya, Uganda, Morocco, and Mali. Its financial situation worsened and the federation became even more directly dependent on the East. Agyeman notes that the AATUF could not afford to keep satellite offices open, fund much-needed projects around the continent, or publish its own organ, and had furthermore overdrawn its bank account (pp. 272-273). In the seven years following Nkrumah's exile, the AATUF largely became a propaganda instrument for the WFTU and more radical elements in Tanzania, Kenya, and elsewhere. While it still publicly retained its non-aligned posture, the federation's avowals fell on deaf ears.

Given the depleted state of its own coffers after the departure of the AFL-CIO, the ICFTU was lucky that the AATUF found itself in such a precarious state. In both chapters, Agyeman devotes considerable space to American efforts, via the African-American Labor Center (AALC), to further weaken the AATUF and its supporters. The AALC's supposed emphasis on manpower and development issues, the author claims, masked its collusion with the U.S. government to protect pro-American governments and foster a climate favorable to business development (pp. 236-243, 286-291). Finally, Agyeman notes with sorrow the pressure from the OAU that resulted in the creation of the OATUU, which became "as much the arm of the 'moderate majority' of African States for conservatism as the AATUF had been the instrument of the 'radical majority' for 'partial revolution' " (pp. 306-307).

In general, this book pays as much homage to what could have been as to what went wrong with AATUF's quest to create a pan-African workers' organization. The author's own pan-African inclination pervades throughout, complicating what is otherwise an impressive effort to marshal a huge amount of information into a comprehensible whole. Basing much of his research on secondary sources (with the exception of AATUF's own records), Agyeman relies on the anti-Western propaganda of Soviet and Chinese sources, as well as the anti-Eastern propaganda of the ICFTU and its supporters, in shaping his conclusion that both blocs exploited and manipulated African countries for their own ends.

Source issues, however, raise some important questions. Much of the research seems to have been completed in the 1970s and therefore leaves out some critical new sources that have added rich new perspectives on international labor developments. Frederick Cooper's 1996 *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* is only one such example. More current primary source research would also benefit Agyeman's work. While the author notes that he struggled to secure interviews with relevant figures in the later 1970s (p. xiv), the absence of such data from the book, as well as more recent updates on figures like John Tettegah of Ghana (who among other things served the Rawlings administration as ambassador to Nigeria in the mid- to late-1990s) makes the study seem dated at times.

Additionally, the author makes some claims for which there is simply not yet credible evidence. His claim that Irving Brown recruited Holden Roberto for the CIA (p. 240) is not substantiated sufficiently, nor is the claim that American responsibility for the coup against Nkrumah "is now well established" (p. 241). While more recent revelations confirm that the United States was probably aware and supportive of various anti-Nkrumah plots, to lay direct responsibility on the doorstep of the United States is an exaggeration; Agyeman himself chronicles growing dissatisfaction in Ghana with Nkrumah's policies. Anthony Carew's work on AFL-CIO connections to the CIA, however, would lend some texture to claims of labor-state collaboration in Europe, if not in Africa.[1]

In his attempt to reorient East-West dichotomies to those of North-South, the author often lumps together the components of "the West" in an essentialized, undifferentiated whole (pp. 140, 162, 238-241). Ignoring differences between labor federations in the same country, among the members of the ICFTU, and significant albeit not universal conflicts dividing national centers and their respective governments, Agyeman creates a picture in which the AFL-CIO necessarily approved of various African developments, like those in the Congo and Ghana.[2]

Professor Agyeman's significant contribution comes in three main areas. First, few sources attempt such a sweeping review of the creation and evolution of an early African NGO. His source material, while largely secondary, is impressive in scope; his assertion that what he has seen of AATUF financial records confirms the allegations made in some of the more propagandistic anti-AATUF records and lends much-needed credibility to those biased polemics (pp. 353-354). Many GTUC (and ostensibly AATUF) documents simply disappeared after the 1966 coup and there may never be any way of absolutely confirming much of AATUF's actions prior to that

time.

Despite his often justified criticism of external interference in African labor developments, Agyeman also does not hesitate to take the AATUF to task for its flaws, contradictions, and inconsistencies. In his conclusion, for example, he identifies a number of reasons for the failure of the pan-African venture. These include the venality and opportunism of African labor leaders like John Tettegah and Tom Mboya; on the contrary, those like Michael Kamaliza "who were principled ... were soon scourged by the political system within which they operated" (p. 330). Other critical weaknesses included AATUF's hypocrisy regarding its relationship with the WFTU (p. 334), the "inadequacy of commitment to Africa's dignification" by political leaders (p. 326), and the structural weaknesses afflicting African unions (pp. 329-330).

The final way in which Agyeman makes a significant contribution is also one of the major weaknesses of the work; his obvious passion for pan-Africanism both provides a convincing model for Africa while at the same time limits his ability to objectively deconstruct the motives and actions of external actors. Despite his conclusion that the legacy of the AATUF was "essentially negative" (p. 333), Agyeman contends that "Pan-Africanism and the labor movement were, and remain, reconcilable" (p. 328). At an historical moment when Africa is in "the hyperbrutal phase of neo-colonial underdevelopment under the aegis of capitalistic globalization" (p. 339), Agyeman's analysis provides hope that Africans can still assert themselves across political and national divides to protect their own interests and craft a better future. AATUF's experience simply serves as a corrective example of how not to do so.

Notes

[1]. Anthony Carew, "The American Labor Movement in Fizzland: The Free Trade Union Committee and the CIA," *Labor History* 39 (1998): pp. 25-42.

[2]. In the case of the Congo, for example, Irving Brown perceptively advised that the AFL-CIO work with Patrice Lumumba, argued that Lumumba's seeming attachment to the East was pragmatic rather than ideological, and claimed that Lumumba had the best chance of winning popular support in the newly independent Congo. See Irving Brown to Jay Lovestone, July 30, 1960, in folder, "Brown, Irving, 1960," box 356, Jay Lovestone Papers, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford, California.

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