OAU and ILO 1963-1973
A DECADE OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION
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Studies on labour relations in various African countries have, undoubtedly, made notable contributions to the sociology of the localities described, and have invariably also provided the basis on which other larger social policies could be formulated. Nevertheless, it is still possible that this overconcentration with micro-analysis of situations, even when absolutely necessary, has not always succeeded in placing the overall African social landscape in its proper historical perspective. Moreover, the absence of studies on institutional relations could be forgiven when no institutions exist; but it cannot be easily explained when they exist. Thus, if the Organisation for African Unity is still an important force to be reckoned with in contemporary African history, it should be rewarding to examine the nature of the relations between this continental organisation and the International Labour Organisation if only to illuminate the social dimensions in the diplomatic experience of African states and their involvement in international organisation.

The necessity for close co-operation between the Organisation for African Unity and the United Nations Specialised Agencies was recognised by the charter of the former and statutorily adopted as a policy by the United Nations. In consonance with the declared aim of fostering such international co-operation, the OAU has striven to participate in the deliberations of the ILO which on being founded in 1919 had adopted a constitution based on the precept that 'universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based on social justice'. Many years afterwards, the Philadelphia Conference of the ILO, held towards the close of the Second World War, re-affirmed that “poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere”. By 1944, the ILO had adopted a detailed “Recommendation” which defined, among other policies, “the basic aims and standards for promoting the well-being and development of the peoples of dependent territories”. This “Recommendation” provided “the basis in 1947 for several Conventions directed specifically towards non-metropolitan territories and dealing with freedom of association, labour inspection and social policy in general”. The Convention on social policy was revised in 1962 to make possible its ratification and continued application by independent African states. Thus, even before accession to independence, African states had participated in the work of the ILO.

As we have seen, the participation of African states in ILO affairs was based on the conviction that this forum offered unique opportunities not only to prove Africa's devotion to the high ideals of social justice, but also to demand international assistance in coping with their social needs. It was natural that the OAU, whose character was the embodiment of these needs and ideals should play a significant role, not only in maintaining an institutional relationship through an agreement of co-operation with the ILO, but that it should also address itself to one aspect of its charter, difficult to achieve without such active involvement, that is the harmonization of African policies in international organisation.

Despite its work in the interest of youth, women, safety and health of workers, vocational rehabilitation and discrimination between the sexes in employment, despite the ILO commitment to comprehensive programmes of human resources, social institutional development and conditions of life, the most spectacular role of the OAU was in inducing the ILO to condemn the racial policies of South Africa, to call on the South African Government to take measures to end apartheid, and to demand an annual report from the Director-General on the subject. South Africa was forced to withdraw from the ILO, yet African states had induced the ILO to resolve to co-operate with the UN “in seeking and guaranteeing freedom and dignity, economic security and equal opportunity for all the people of South Africa”.

No doubt, a crusade against racial discrimination anywhere and at all times could be an issue fraught with great difficulties and liable to arouse much controversy. In the final analysis, it is the successful effort to co-ordinate African policies with respect to this particular international organisation that is the most noteworthy and most positive aspect of co-operation between the OAU and the ILO.

With increased membership, due to the ILO's principle of universality of membership and tripartism of representation, the history of the Organisa-
tion since 1963 had been marked by a profound transformation of its activities and working methods in response to the changing needs of a rapidly changing world of which the formation of the OAU was one aspect. For example, the balance of power principle on which the ILO had based its operations would have to be made applicable to the new situation brought about by the fact that over half the total ILO membership came from Africa and Asia. Adjustments had to be made both in the ILO Conferences and in its Governing Body. At the same time, independent African states, on joining the Organisation, had to confirm the obligations in respect of the ILO Conventions accepted on their behalf by the colonial powers previously responsible for their international relations. Thus by 1965, the ILO Director-General could report no fewer than 759 ratifications by African states, more than half having been made since 1960.\textsuperscript{9}

It is worthy of mention that before the OAU began to reinforce them, some machinery for co-operation between the ILO and Africa had already existed, and were even being progressively improved and enlarged to meet the challenges of new circumstances. The hub of that machinery was the ILO's African Advisory Committee. Established in 1958, it was composed of twenty governments, ten employers' members and ten workers' members, and advised the ILO Governing Body on African problems. It also made recommendations on the advisability of ILO meetings in Africa and on the composition and agendas of such meetings.\textsuperscript{10}

After the formation of the OAU in 1964, African participation in the ILO became marked by more militancy. Even before that, the 1963 session proved to be the most stormy session so far of the ILO when African delegates withdrew in protest against the presence of the South African delegation and demanded the expulsion of South Africa from the Organisation. Consequently, in 1964, the ILO adopted a unanimous Declaration condemning the policy of apartheid, and also approved an amendment to the ILO Constitution which now for the first time provided for powers of suspension and expulsion.\textsuperscript{11}

At the same Conference, a resolution was adopted calling on the Governing Body of the ILO “to assist African countries in development generally and to promote schemes for workers' education and vocational and technical training”. The resolution specifically invited the ILO to review its whole regional policy, in relation to the role of regional advisory committees and conferences, and the problems of implementing international standards. It requested the Governing Body to ensure that the ILO programme and structure were fully adapted to African needs, to speed up the appointment of Africans to regional posts, and to aim at a greater degree of decentralisation in its regional activities.\textsuperscript{12} Three offices dealing with technical co-operation were subsequently established at Lagos, Addis Ababa, and Dar es Salaam to negotiate programmes of technical co-operation, supervise those being executed and to follow up and evaluate their activities.\textsuperscript{13}

It may be inferred that these far-reaching developments were a positive result of the efforts by African Ministers of Labour, under OAU auspices, to present a united African front at international meetings. Despite the difficulties confronting diplomatic co-ordination among African states, the African Ministers of Labour, after the foundation of the OAU, had nevertheless made a number of concrete recommendations one of which was that the secretarial aspects of their annual conferences should be undertaken by the OAU Secretariat. As Diallo Telli later reported to the Ministerial Council, “they had fully understood the necessity of associating labour as well as the ILO in their Conference”.\textsuperscript{14}

Henceforth, each session of the ILO Conference was preceded by an African Labour Ministers' meeting which provided an important forum for the harmonization of African states' points of view on various social problems. During most of these conferences, the OAU Secretariat closely co-operated with the African Group in producing information directly obtained from competent authorities to enable the group to thoroughly prepare studies requested by the Specialized Commissions of the ILO, thereby furthering co-operation in the social field.\textsuperscript{15} By October 1966, these efforts had enabled Africa to increase the number of its representatives in the ILO Governing Body,\textsuperscript{16} and to obtain a substantial increase in the volume of general assistance granted to Africa by the ILO.\textsuperscript{17} And despite the Council of Ministers' reproach of the OAU Secretary-General, in December 1965, for signing agreements of co-operation in October that year with the ILO and ECA without explicit instructions,\textsuperscript{18} one may infer that the ILO agreement was a factor in eliciting a favourable response from the ILO to the pressing demands by the African states for greater attention.

Thereafter, the OAU Secretariat never relented in its efforts to achieve co-ordination of African strategies concerning social questions in international forums. For instance, it helped to convene the meeting of the African ministers and officials responsible for social affairs in Cairo in April 1967 with the intention of preparing a united African platform for the World Conference scheduled for 1968.\textsuperscript{19} Although twenty-six African states were represented at the Cairo Conference, the time devoted to it was regrettably short, and insufficient attention appears to have been given to African co-operation, the harmonization of African views,
and the preparation of a single African platform for the world conference.

The Cairo Conference, nevertheless, made one recommendation which indicated the important role of the OAU in mapping out effective strategies. It requested the OAU to invite, “subject to the approval of the Council of Ministers, a small group of experts from Six Countries to meet at Addis Ababa in order to formulate an African platform and harmonize African views on social welfare and community development”.20 As a result, when the African Labour Ministers met in Geneva for the 51st Session of the OAU, they took this recommendation into consideration, and laid stress on the “imperative necessity” of harmonizing relations between Governments, employers and labour.21

By the end of 1968, it was even more evident that the OAU was becoming more actively and more closely associated with the Conferences of African Labour Ministers, not only in respect of social development, but also in the world setting. For example, the OAU had pressed the Seventh Session of the Conference of African Ministers to reach clear decisions before the ILO Conference scheduled for that year.22 However, due to a number of obstacles, the Ministers’ Conference could not be held in Africa and only managed to gather in Geneva just a few days before the 52nd ILO Conference. As a result, their collaboration could not go beyond the then burning preoccupations of the ILO in 1968, most of which were connected with the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Therefore, in spite of the determined efforts of the OAU Secretariat, the African delegates could not take a distinctive stand of their own and divorce themselves from the prevailing mood in Geneva, and only succeeded as the OAU Secretary-General reported, “in aligning their position as to the best means of strengthening the practical action of the ILO in promoting (and controlling) human rights”.23 However, on the racial question, the African delegates could not but focus their activities “on a more decisive orientation of the work of the ILO on behalf of the victims”.24

This active role, already strengthened by the personal attendance of three Heads of State at the ILO Conference in Geneva,25 was further emphasized by the solid front presented by the Africans in their demand that the structure of the ILO be improved so that “justice, equity and democracy should be introduced”. This active policy was also reflected in the persistent pleas by the OAU that, “substantial qualitative and quantitative improvements be made for the benefit of African peoples and governments.”26 The OAU in February 1972 provided African Labour Ministers with well-informed advice on the problems of the International Labour Office, in particular those concerning the proposed regionalization of the activities of the Turin Centre for Technical and Vocational Training,27 and mapped out a strategy for survival when a serious crisis arose in the ILO out of the unilateral decision of the United States authorities to reduce their normal financial contribution to the Organisation.28 In 1972, the OAU co-ordinated the position of African states at the Ninth Session of the Conference of African Labour Ministers held in Geneva before the 56th Session of the ILO in which the OAU also participated.29 It was instrumental in the decision by that Conference to hold the Tenth Session of the African Ministers Conference at Kampala (rather than at Geneva) so as to enable African states to elect their representatives on the ILO Governing Council for the period June 1972 to 1973.30

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See 1974-1975 Volumes of the International Labour Review which concentrated on these micro-studies.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p. 13.
12. It is significant to note that in 1952, only 2.7 per cent of the total expenditure on ILO programmes was incurred in Africa; it increased to 10.2 per cent in 1950; 27 per cent in 1962; and 33 per cent in 1964. By 1965, Africa had the largest number of ILO assignments.
16. In June 1965, Oumar Baba Diarra, Secretary of State for the Civil Service and Labour of Mali was unanimously elected Chairman of ILO Governing Body for the year 1965-1966. He was the first African to hold the post.
17. CM/119, p. 15-16; see note 12 also.
23. CM/212 (Part 2) Sept. 2968.
24. Ibid.
25. Emperor Haile Selassie, Presidents Ahidjo and Kaunda were present at the 50th Session; thus demonstrating Africa’s interest in the ILO.
28. The USA had decided to reduce her contributions by five per cent.
30. Ibid, p. 16.
32. D. Morse, op. cit., p. 88; and ILO Pamphlets.
34. Morse, op. cit., p. 39.