

Global Histories

A Student Journal

Trade Union Pan-Africanism and Non-Alignment at the founding conference of the *All-African Trade Union Federation* 1961 in Casablanca

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/GHSJ.2025.658>

Source: Global Histories, Vol. 10, No. 1 (February 2025), pp. 81-99
ISSN: 2366-780X

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Publisher information:

Global Histories: A Student Journal is an open-access bi-annual journal founded in 2015 by students of the M.A. program Global History at Freie Universität Berlin and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. *Global Histories* is published by an editorial board of Global History students in association with the Freie Universität Berlin.

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The Founding Conference of the *All-African Trade Union Federation* 1961 in Casablanca: Trade Union Pan-Africanism and Non-Alignment

ABSTRACT

At the end of May 1961, the trade union world focused on Casablanca and the founding of the *All-African Trade Union Federation* (AATUF). Under the influence of the Pan-African movement, led by figures like Kwame Nkrumah, African trade unions gathered in Casablanca, with Moroccan trade union leader Mahjoub Ben Seddiq serving as host. The conference was held in light of the transitions of the decolonization processes in Africa in the 1950s and 1960s, the networking of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist actors, as well as the global systemic competition of the Cold War. The conference embodies a transitional space in the process of decolonization, a moment of in-between where new political and social identities were being formed and in which paths for a postcolonial and Pan-African future were negotiated from a trade union perspective beyond national boundaries. The central conflict at the conference was the question of non-alignment. The conference resulted in the establishment of exclusive membership for the AATUF, signifying the emergence of an independent trade union organization in Africa that explicitly opposed the membership of international trade union confederations from both the West and the East. As will be argued, the aim was not to exclude international cooperation and solidarity, but to autonomously shape Pan-African developments.

BY

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Introduction

In the late 1950s and 1960s, as Cold War dynamics and the process of African decolonization became more interconnected, the focus of anti-colonial struggles shifted towards the Global South. During the interwar period, cities like London and Paris were major centers of anti-colonial activities in Europe. However, in the 1950s and 1960s, new centers of decolonization emerged in the Global South, becoming crucial *hubs of decolonization*.¹ These hubs were notably shaped by conferencing, serving as epicenters for anti-colonial networking and gathering points for anti-imperialist activists. Examining conferences provides an opportunity to de-center Western perspectives on history and challenge Eurocentric interpretations of internationalism by focusing on actors from the Global South in these conferences.² Additionally, in the 1950s, the networking of national independence movements in Africa intensified, with the emergence of hubs contributing to the overall strengthening of these networks. The Pan-African movement aligned itself with African independence movements,³ highlighting the significance of non-state actors alongside governmental engagements in the anti-colonial and Pan-African movements across national borders. The historian Hakim Adi has illustrated that conferences have been a central aspect of Pan-African politics since the early twentieth century.⁴ From the Pan-African Congress in Manchester in 1945, diaspora movements began to unite with national independence movements, leading to a re-centering of Pan-Africanism around African actors and locations. This transition, as notably emphasized by Kwame Nkrumah and George Padmore and the establishment of the *All-African People's Movement*.⁵ Since then, the focus has shifted towards a continental perspective of Pan-Africanism, aiming for the unification of,

1 Eric Burton, "Hubs of Decolonization. African Liberation Movements and 'Eastern' Connections in Cairo, Accra, and Dar Es Salaam," in *Southern African Liberation Movements and the Global Cold War 'East'*, ed. Lena Dallywater, Chris Saunders, and Helder Adegas Fonseca (De Gruyter, 2019), 25–26, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110642964-006>.

2 I understand conferencing as: "The defining arena of modern internationalism precisely because it was simultaneously a space of scientific analysis and a forum for political action, a place where internationalism was both studied and implemented." Stephen Legg et al., ed., *Placing Internationalism: International Conferences and the Making of the Modern World* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 7–12.

3 In using the term "Pan-African," I make no distinction between the specific idea and movement of Pan-Africanism. The long history of Pan-Africanism illustrates the diverse viewpoints and heterogeneous perspectives within and about Pan-Africanism. Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism: A History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

4 Hakim Adi, "Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Comintern, the 'Negro Question' and the First International Conference of Negro Workers, Hamburg 1930," *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 1, no. 2 (2008): 237–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17528630802393711>.

5 Philmon Ghirmai, *Globale Neuordnung durch antikoloniale Konferenzen, Globale Neuordnung durch antikoloniale Konferenzen* (Transcript Verlag, 2019), 73.

“the whole of the African continent,” including North Africa and its Arab populations. The continental orientation has expanded the Pan-African idea of Black unity based on “race” to a broader concept, encompassing colonial history and geopolitical aspects.⁶ Pan-Africanism during this phase of global decolonization is closely tied to African nationalism⁷ and remains deeply connected to the African diaspora.⁸ From the 1950s onward, Pan-Africanism fully shifted its focus to the African continent. Various currents from the Anglophone tradition merged with Francophone movements, such as the Négritude movement, and with Arab and North African influences. These developments were profoundly influenced by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's strong alignment with Africa and the Algerian Revolution, which became a powerful symbol of the Pan-African movement.⁹ The Casablanca Conference, which is the focal point here, was framed by Kwame Nkrumah's conception of Pan-Africanism. For Nkrumah, this concept underscored the imperative of robust African collaboration in the struggle for independence from European powers and their neo-colonial ambitions.¹⁰ Among other things, South-South cooperation was seen as promising, while developmental models based on American or Soviet examples were deemed unsuitable for postcolonial societies.¹¹ This leads to a central question of this study and a key point of contention at the Casablanca Conference: the role and connections of African trade unions with international labor organizations from the West and the East. Although the conference endorsed the principle of non-alignment, it highlighted significant areas of conflict. This paper examines the interactions between African trade unionists and international organizations, as well as the discussions and debates that arose among them during the conference.

Historian Frederick Cooper noted that insisting on a clear distinction between colonial and post-colonial African history is insufficient. Rather, it is the transitions and intermediate phases that define the developments for the African continent. At the heart of these transitions were the opportunities for workers, farmers, students, and elites to shape post-colonial futures, which emerged from the ruptures exacerbated after the Second World War. Various networks formed within, against, and around the colonial state, extending

6 Opoku Agyeman, *The Failure of Grassroots Pan-Africanism: The Case of the All-African Trade Union Federation* (Lexington Books, 2003), 21.

7 Imanuel Geiss, *Panafrikanismus. Zur Geschichte Der Dekolonisierung* (Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1968), 12.

8 Lisa Hoppel, *Internationalistischer Nationalismus: Lehren aus dem panafrikanischen Befreiungskampf*, Edition kritische Forschung (Promedia, 2019), 93.

9 Hoppel, 120–21.

10 Ghirmai, *Globale Neuordnung durch antikoloniale Konferenzen*, 129.

11 Ghirmai, 80.

across the entire continent and beyond.¹² The scholar Gerard McCann emphasizes the critical role of trade unionism in the African freedom struggle during the 1940s and 1950s, particularly in the aftermath of World War II. He highlights how trade unions served as vital platforms for organizing and mobilizing African workers, who played a key role in the broader anti-colonial movements. The unions not only fought for better working conditions but also became strongholds of political activism, advocating for independence and self-determination across the continent.¹³

This contribution focuses on the Pan-African trade union movement, highlighting the founding conference of the *All-African Trade Union Federation* (AATUF) in May 1961 in Casablanca. The conference in Casablanca and the associated attempt to institutionalize Pan-African trade union networks in the form of the AATUF represented an interstitial space of decolonization. At the conference, over 400 stakeholders from the labor union world convened, and the African delegates established the AATUF. The conference was imbued with the Pan-African ideals of Ghanaian Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah and saw conflicts between radical and moderate union representatives regarding post-colonial visions and the role of unions in achieving them. The history of the AATUF encapsulates various debates on the different trajectories of decolonization within the Pan-African movement. Unlike Opoku Agyeman, who sees the interests of the Western powers as the main reasons behind the failure of the Pan-African trade union movement,¹⁴ Gerard McCann identifies the reasons for the organization's dissolution in 1973 in the different

12 Frederick Cooper, *Africa since 1940: The Past of the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 7–8. The visions and networks were predominantly shaped by men, as formal politics remained a masculine domain during the phase of restructuring, both during and after the formal independence movements in Africa. The ‘masculinization of politics,’ evident in the leadership of politics, trade unions, and administration, reinforced the position of men. Frederick Cooper, “Possibility and Constraint: African Independence in Historical Perspective,” *The Journal of African History* 49, Nr. 2 (2008): 192.

In this study, the focus is primarily on the male actors at the conference. Studies that focus on the trade union activities of women include, among others: Immanuel Harisch, “African Trade Unions in the World of Organized Labor” (2023); Yvette Richards, *Maida Springer: Pan-Africanist and International Labor Leader* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000). Works on women in the Pan-African movement in Africa and the diaspora include, among others: Zoline Makini Roy-Campbell, “Pan-African Women Organising for the Future: The Formation of the Pan African Women’s Liberation Organisation and Beyond,” *African Journal of Political Science* 1, Nr. 1 (1996): 45–57; Erik S. McDuffie, “The Diasporic Journeys of Louise Little: Grassroots Garveyism, the Midwest, and Community Feminism,” *Women, Gender, and Families of Color* 4, Nr. 2 (2016): 146–70.

13 Gerard McCann, “Possibility and Peril: Trade Unionism, African Cold War, and the Global Strands of Kenyan Decolonization,” *Journal of Social History* 53, no. 2 (2019): 349, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shz099>.

14 Opoku Agyeman, *The Failure of Grassroots Pan-Africanism: The Case of the All-African Trade Union Federation* (Lexington books, 2003).

interests of the individual trade union centers, above all in Kenya and Ghana.¹⁵ Focusing on the founding conference of the AATUF, the current study reveals the origins of contentious issues driven by global interests, as reflected in the diverse positions taken by African actors. In exploring decolonization in North Africa, the transnational literature review predominantly focuses on Egypt and Algeria.¹⁶ With Casablanca at the center of this contribution, a focal point emerges that has received little attention in transnational research on decolonization so far.

The context of the interconnections under investigation here is shaped by the Bandung Conference of 1955 and the competition of the Cold War, as well as the history and ideology of Pan-Africanism. Pan-African activities from the 1950s onwards unfolded within the framework of the so-called “Bandung Era” (1955-1975), a period characterized by the negotiation and experimentation of alternative political and social projects for the post-colonial phase across national, linguistic, and ideological boundaries.¹⁷ Su Lin Lewis and Carolien Stolte, with their focus beyond the grand diplomatic stage of the Bandung Conference, open up the perspective on the “Other Bandungs” and the networking and solidarities of non-state actors in the course of decolonization.¹⁸ Stolte particularly emphasizes trade union networks as actors in local, regional, and global decolonization networking.¹⁹

These connections are evident in the movement of Pan-Africanism. Alongside the *All-African* movement initiated, among others, by George Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah, an important step towards an independent Pan-African trade union movement was the founding of the *Union Générale des Travailleurs d’Afrique Noire* (UGTAN) in 1957 in Guinea. As Immanuel Harisch argues, the founding congress of UGTAN marked, at the trade union level, the emancipation from the metropolises and the embedding of African

15 McCann, “Possibility and Peril,” 352.

16 Jeffrey James Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization, and the Third World Order*, Oxford Studies in International History (Oxford University Press, 2016); Reem Abou-El-Fadl, “Building Egypt’s Afro-Asian Hub: Infrastructures of Solidarity and the 1957 Cairo Conference,” *Journal of World History* 30, no. 1 (2019): 157–92; Eric Burton, “Hubs of Decolonization. African Liberation Movements and ‘Eastern’ Connections in Cairo, Accra, and Dar Es Salaam,” in *Southern African Liberation Movements and the Global Cold War ‘East,’* ed. Lena Dallywater, Chris Saunders, and Helder Adegas Fonseca (De Gruyter, 2019), 25–56, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110642964-006>.

17 Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective, “Manifesto: Networks of Decolonization in Asia and Africa,” *Radical History Review*, Nr. 131 (2018): 176.

18 Su Lin Lewis und Carolien Stolte, “Other Bandungs: Afro-Asian Internationalisms in the Early Cold War,” *Journal of World History* 30, Nr. 1–2 (2019): 1–19.

19 Carolien Stolte, “Introduction: Trade Union Networks and the Politics of Expertise in an Age of Afro-Asian Solidarity,” *Journal of Social History* 53, Nr. 2 (2019): 331–47.

nationalism and Pan-Africanism in the African anti-colonial struggle.²⁰ The principle of independence from the international trade union federations, the *International Confederation of Free Trade Unions* (ICFTU) and the *World Federation of Trade Unions* (WFTU) set the tone for the question of non-alignment in trade union Pan-Africanism, which was then extensively debated and decided upon in Casablanca in 1961. In the case of the AATUF, the question of non-alignment pertains to the affiliation to those international federations. The ICFTU was established in 1949 after a division within the WFTU, which had originally been created in 1945 as the leading organization connecting labor unions across Europe, America, and colonial and dependent territories. Amid rising geopolitical tensions and growing ideological differences regarding the relationship between industrial trade unionism and anti-colonial liberation movements, a fierce competition for influence in Asia and Africa began between the communist-dominated WFTU and the newly formed, anti-communist ICFTU.²¹ The ICFTU was the international trade union federation of the Western liberal capitalist countries.²² In the ICFTU, unlike the WFTU, American liberalism and European social reforms predominated.²³

Whether or not unions belonged to either federation, the internationalist sphere became another battleground of the Cold War. However, when it comes to the unions of the decolonizing world, it is not sufficient to solely use the Cold War as a reference point for rivalry. A “third” way and an “interstice” emerged alongside the two major international federations, as Afro-Asian and Pan-African trade union movements developed.²⁴ One of the largest endeavors along this path is the founding of the *All-African Trade Union Federation*.

The source material for this contribution is derived from the archive of the *International Institute for Social History* (IISH) in Amsterdam. The IISH houses the archive of the *International Confederation of Free Trade Unions* (ICFTU). Carolien Stolte describes the ICFTU archive as a, “goldmine of ‘grey literature’” regarding global labor union activities.²⁵ The trade union archive provides an important mirror to African trade unions and access to

20 Harisch, “African Trade Unions in the World of Organized Labor,” 125.

21 Anthony Carew, “Conflict Within the ICFTU: Anti-Communism and Anti-Colonialism in the 1950s,” *International Review of Social History* 41, no. 2 (August 1996): 148–49, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859000113859>.

22 Harisch, “African Trade Unions in the World of Organized Labor,” 6.

23 Kurt P. Tudyka, “Internationaler Bund Freier Gewerkschaften (IBFG),” in *Internationales Gewerkschaftshandbuch*, ed. von Siegfried Mielke (Leske und Budrich, 1982), 4.

24 Stolte, “Introduction,” 334.

25 Carolien Stolte, “Introduction: Trade Union Networks and the Politics of Expertise in an Age of Afro-Asian Solidarity,” *Journal of Social History* 53, no. 2 (2019): 342, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shz098>.

correspondence from African trade union representatives.²⁶ The material for this work primarily consists of correspondence between the ICFTU Secretariat and various trade unions associated with the ICFTU from Europe, the USA, and Africa. In addition to the correspondence, the two central folders also contain the union's own reports, newspaper clippings, and press releases in the months before and after the conference, which have been incorporated into the study. The box pertaining to the Casablanca conference also includes the bound final report on the agenda item regarding the role of unions by the conference chair, Mahjoub Ben Seddiq. The ICFTU maintained active contact with trade unions in Africa and consistently sought to expand its influence across the entire African continent: therefore, it monitored the founding of the AATUF closely. Although the ICFTU delegation was only invited to observe the conference in Casablanca, the issue of affiliation with international trade union federations was a central and contentious topic at the conference and therefore significant for the overall establishment of the AATUF. Following the Afro-Asia Networks Research Collective, I was able to rely on collaborative assistance in this work.²⁷ Immanuel Harisch shared archival material about the Conference in Casablanca of the *Free German Trade Union Federation* (FDGB) in the SAPMO (Foundation Archive of Parties and Mass Organizations of the German Democratic Republic) collection from the Federal Archives in Berlin Germany.

The Path to Casablanca and the Invitation Policy

On May 25, 1961, union representatives from national trade union centers gathered in Casablanca. Delegations invited as observers, including the ICFTU and WFTU, along with associated unions from Europe, witnessed a contentious conference where the question of membership in the two federations of the East and West, and thus the issue of non-alignment, took center stage. The inception of a Pan-African trade union organization can be traced back to the Francophone trade union developments of the UGTAN in 1957, influencing the Anglophone movement and the pivotal Pan-African conference, the *All-African Peoples' Conference* (AAPC) in Accra in 1958, where the establishment of an organization under the name AATUF was first formally decided.²⁸ The conference in Accra was chaired, among others, by the young trade union

26 Immanuel Harisch, "African Trade Unions in the World of Organized Labor," (Dissertation, University of Vienna, 2023), 43.

27 Afro-Asian Networks Research Collective, "Manifesto: Networks of Decolonization in Asia and Africa," *Radical History Review* no. 131 (2018): 179–80, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-4355317>.

28 Opoku Agyeman, *The Failure of Grassroots Pan-Africanism: The Case of the All-African Trade Union Federation* (Lexington Books, 2003), 129.

leader Tom Mboya from Kenya, who would emerge as an important voice in the debate on non-alignment during the conference in Casablanca.²⁹ The significance of a continent-wide trade union federation was underscored by Kwame Nkrumah, who referred to a Pan-African trade union federation as a “dynamic and positive instrument in the realization of a United States of Africa” in his opening speech at the 1958 congress.³⁰ Delegates of the first AAPC recognized that establishing a sustainable movement and conducting effective conferences required the institutionalization of the network and the transnational negotiation space under the name *All-African Peoples' Conference Organization* (AAPCO).³¹

In November 1959 Nkrumah, in collaboration with Abdoulaye Diallo, who was tasked with the role of Secretary-General of the AAPC, invited various representatives of trade unions to Accra. This move aimed to bring the official founding of the AATUF closer and to emphasize the necessity of trade unions being non-aligned. A preparatory committee was established during a conference, with its headquarters in Accra.³² This committee consisted of nineteen members, led by Mahjoub Ben Seddiq of the *Union Marocaine du Travail* (UMT). Alongside him, six others formed the preparatory secretariat, deciding to hold an inaugural congress in May 1960 in Casablanca.³³ Invitations had already been sent to the ICFTU for a conference scheduled from May 6th to 12th, 1960.³⁴ Tom Mboya, who was not part of the committee, wrote to the ICFTU, informing them that the congress had been postponed. He noted that this postponement occurred without consultation with the committee and was attributed to a decision by Ghana and Kwame Nkrumah.³⁵ However, in 1960, the second AAPC took place in Tunis, where just like on the first AAPC in Accra, numerous trade unions participated. These included the *Union Générale des Travailleurs Algériens* (UGTA), the *Gambia Labour Union*, the *Kenya Federation of Labour* (KFL), the Moroccan UMT, the *Nigerian Trade Union Congress*, and the *Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens* (UGTT). In Tunis, the contrasting positions on the non-alignment of trade unions within international trade union federations had already become distinctly evident. Since Tom Mboya did not attend the conference, Ahmed Tlili, the chairman of the AAPC and head of the UGTT, recommended that the ICFTU send as many

29 Zeleza, “Pan-African Trade Unionism,” 164.

30 Kwame Nkrumah, cited in Zeleza, 174.

31 Ghirmai, *Globale Neuordnung durch antikoloniale Konferenzen*, 136.

32 Imanuel Geiss, *Gewerkschaften in Afrika* (Verlag für Literatur und Zeitgeschehen, 1965), 71.

33 Agyeman, *The Failure of Grassroots Pan-Africanism*, 130.

34 Invitation by Ben Seddiq to ICFTU, March 27, 1960, IISH 3914.

35 Letter, Tom Mboya to ICFTU, Mai 27, 1960, IISH 3914.

representatives as possible to Tunis to influence the trade union issue in favor of the ICFTU.³⁶

At the third AAPC in Cairo in March 1961, the significance of the AATUF for the Pan-African project was once again emphasized, “The Conference [...] [c]alls for the immediate launching of the All-African Trade Union Federation as an effective means of counteracting neo-colonialism.”³⁷ The convening of a founding congress for the AATUF was agreed upon and described as an important means for the post-colonial future. In April 1961, the committee set the date for the founding congress on May 25, 1961, in Casablanca, during another preparatory meeting.³⁸ Unlike the first AAPC, the organizers of Casablanca implemented a more exclusive invitation policy, primarily involving members of the Casablanca Group.³⁹ The CIA report on the conference reveals who was ultimately invited as voting delegates: *Union Marocaine du Travail (Morocco)*, *Ghana Trade Union Congress (Ghana)*, *Union Générale des Travailleurs Algériens (Algeria)*, *Egyptian Confederation of Labour (Egypt)*, *Confédération Nationale des Travailleurs de Guinée (Guinea)*, *Union Nationale des Travailleurs du Mali (Mali)*, *Union Générale des Travailleurs d’Afrique Noire (UGTAN)*, and *Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens (Tunisia)*.⁴⁰ The selection of invited participants reflected a tendency toward a more radical Pan-African faction.

The conference directly revealed the dissatisfaction of African trade unions, which stemmed from either being excluded entirely or being invited merely as observers under the existing invitation policy. In the entrance hall of the conference in Casablanca, three representatives from the *Congress of Industrial Organizations* from Liberia stood with a sign that read: “Liberia is in Africa.” In this way, they expressed their frustration that they were only invited as observers and not as delegates.⁴¹ The differences also surfaced during the opening speech of King Hassan II of Morocco. Outside the hall, clashes occurred between the *Union Marocain de Travail* (UMT) and smaller groups

36 Philmon Ghirmai, *Globale Neuordnung durch antikoloniale Konferenzen, Globale Neuordnung durch antikoloniale Konferenzen* (Transcript Verlag, 2019), 150–51.

37 Colin Legum, *Pan Africanism: A Short Political Guide*, Rev. ed., Pall Mall Series of Short Political Guides 3 (Pall Mall Pr., 1965), 257.

38 Geiss, *Gewerkschaften in Afrika*, 88.

39 The division within the Pan-African movement of that time can be categorized into a radical Casablanca Group and a moderate Monrovia Group. Casablanca was synonymous with radical Pan-African positions at that time, under the leadership of Ghana and Guinea. Amzat Boukari-Yabara, *Africa Unite!: Une histoire du panafricanisme* (La Découverte, 2017), 177.

40 Central Intelligence Agency, “The All Africa Peoples Conference in 1961,” 1 November 1961, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP7800915R001300320009-3.pdf> (latest access: July, 2024).

41 “Goodbye to ICFTU,” *Link*, June 11, 1961, IISH 3915; CIA Report, “All Africa,” 15.

from the *Union Générale des Travailleurs du Maroc* (UGTM), who supported the king and were not invited to the conference,⁴² resulting in 17 people being injured.⁴³ This confrontation epitomized the conference, which was marked by national and international fault lines. The issue of national trade union centers joining the international trade union federations, WFTU and ICFTU, was particularly contentious. These conflicts were closely scrutinized by the observers who were as numerous as the officials from the African states. Representatives from other trade unions, women's associations, and Christian labor associations from around the world, as well as international representatives from embassies in Rabat⁴⁴ and delegates from East Germany, Italy, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia were in attendance as observers.⁴⁵ According to *The New York Times*, a total of 38 nations and approximately 400 trade union representatives were present at the conference.⁴⁶ The number of participants and observers underscores the international significance and interest in the conference and the development of the Pan-African trade union movement.

The World of Organized Labor Focus on Casablanca – The Critique of the ICFTU

The eyes of the world are turned on this Congress which has a vital contribution to make not only to the development of African Personality and of African trade unions consistent with the genuine will of workers and nobody else's, but also to the history of the world.⁴⁷

The General Secretary of the ICFTU, Stefan Nedzynski, emphasized in his speech at the conference in Casablanca the significance of the founding of the AATUF for the international organized labor movement and the “history of the world.”⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the ICFTU explicitly opposed the AATUF. Tensions between the ICFTU and the idea of an independent African trade union federation began to escalate as early as 1957 with the first *African Regional Trade Union Conference* in Accra, where union allies of the ICFTU within Africa from Tunisia and Kenya convened with the aim of establishing regional

42 “The All Africa Peoples Conference in 1961,” CIA Report, 15, November 1, 1961.

43 “Goodbye to ICFTU,” *Link*, 11. Juni 1961, IISH 3915.

44 “Afrikanische Gewerkschaften zwischen West und Ost,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, June 10/11 1961, IISH 3914.

45 “La neutralité: remporte la victoire au congrès africain des ouvriers,” *Journal Al-Akhbar*, June 1, 1961, IISH 3914.

46 “Africa. He who controls Labour,” *New York Times*, June 9, 1961, IISH 3914.

47 Speech ICFTU Stefan Nedzynski, SAPMO Barch DY 34/11405.

48 Ibid.

organizations affiliated with the ICFTU on the continent. At the second *African Regional Trade Union Conference* in 1959 in Lagos the decision was made to accelerate the establishment of a corresponding organization named the *African Regional Trade Union Organisation* (AFRO), that would undermine the necessity of an independent African trade union organization led by Africans, such as the AATUF. AFRO was eventually founded in November 1960 in Tunis.⁴⁹ The efforts to establish their own Pan-African networks like AFRO demonstrate that Pan-African and Afro-Asian ideas and practices played a central role for the ICFTU, albeit in a temporary and subordinate position, rather than as non-aligned organizations.⁵⁰

Another key actor representing the ICFTU in the world of organized labor was the *American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations* (AFL-CIO). The Secretary-General of the federation, Irving Brown, observed the conference in Casablanca and the general labor developments in Africa with great interest. His activities, which were funded in part by the CIA, aligned with an US-American anti-communist strategy against Soviet influence in the Third World.⁵¹ Brown sought to find as many partners as possible in the colonies for his interests.⁵² In his report on the conference in Casablanca his criticism towards the Ghana-Guinea Union⁵³ was evident both in content and language, as he derogatorily referred to the actors as “boys.”⁵⁴ In the same report to the ICFTU, Irving Brown expressed his concerns about the AATUF and the organization's co-optation by Ghana and Guinea.⁵⁵ The ICFTU itself went so far as to claim in a press release two weeks after the end of the conference, “The Casablanca Conference was rigged.”⁵⁶

The accusation of manipulation by the preparatory committee was loudly voiced after the conference by the ICFTU and associated unions, such as the

49 Tiyambe Zeleza, “Pan-African Trade Unionism: Unity and Discord,” *Transafrican Journal of History* 15, (1986): 175.

50 Leslie James, “George Padmore and Decolonization from below: Pan-Africanism, the Cold War, and the End of Empire,” in *Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies Series* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 381.

51 Ted Morgan, *A Covert Life: Jay Lovestone; Communist, Anti-Communist, and Spymaster* (Random House, 1999), 285–86.

52 David Stenner, *Globalizing Morocco: Transnational Activism and the Post-Colonial State* (Stanford University Press, 2019), 43.

53 The Ghana-Guinea Union was a political association. What is particularly noteworthy was that, for the first time, national sovereignty could be subordinated to the sovereignty of a united Africa and its corresponding political project. Colin Legum, *Pan Africanism: A Short Political Guide*, Rev. ed., Pall Mall Series of Short Political Guides 3 (Pall Mall Pr., 1965), 45; Hoppel, *Internationalistischer Nationalismus*, 128.

54 Report AFL-CIO by Irving Brown, IISH 3914.

55 Ibid.

56 Press Release ICFTU, June 15, 1961, IISH 3915.

prominent Kenyan Federation of Labor under Tom Mboya. The accusations began with the invitation policy. In a press release, the KFL accused the organizers of explicitly inviting, “splinter and non-existent” unions to the conference, which would then vote according to the organizers’ interests, but lacked a real basis in the national centers.⁵⁷ In the same announcement, the KFL further alleged that the conference venues were not only occupied by numerous delegates and international observers, but also by individuals specifically tasked with actively promoting the organizers’ interests during the sessions.⁵⁸ A sense of division permeated the entire conference, leading Lawrence Bohra from the *Nigeria Trade Union Congress* to propose an agenda item stating that there were, “first-class” and, “second-class” Africans at the conference.⁵⁹ Some states are alleged to have attempted to assert their interests manipulatively during the founding conference of the AATUF, such as the allegation that, “the seats left vacant by [the ICFTU] were filled with observers.”⁶⁰ Criticism of the conference went so far as to accuse the Casablanca Group, particularly Ghana and Guinea, of now acting as colonizers in Africa for European purposes, following the Europeans.⁶¹ The accusations and positions of the ICFTU and its affiliated unions are extensive. The following section will outline the viewpoints of the WFTU and its affiliated unions, especially those from the German Democratic Republic.

The Support of the WFTU for the Establishment of the AATUF

The World Federation of Trade Unions considers the creation of the All-African Trade Union Federation to be a great success of the forces fighting for the unity of the Trade Union Movement in Africa. [...] The All-African Trade Union Federation and the African workers have ... a sincere friend – The World Federation of Trade Unions.⁶²

According to this quote from the *African Communist* from September 1961 cited in the CIA report about the conference, the WFTU welcomed the establishment of the AATUF. The *Free German Trade Union Federation (FDGB)*, as a member of the WFTU, sent a delegation to Casablanca as observers and confirmed the WFTU's support for the establishment of the AATUF. From this observing role, the FDGB report on the conference emphasized, “the pan-

57 Press Release KFL, June 1, 1961, IISH 3914.

58 Ibid.

59 “Goodbye to ICFTU,” *Link*, June 11, 1961, IISH 3915.

60 Letter Nedzynski to Mboya, June 1, 1961, IISH 3914.

61 Press Release Union Syndicales Libres du Cameroun, June 16, 1961, IISH 3915.

62 “The All Africa Peoples Conference in 1961,” CIA Report, 15, November 1, 1961.

African character and the [...] will of the workers of the entire Africa for unity in the struggle against imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism.”⁶³ The establishment of the AATUF was considered significant not only for the role of trade unions but also for the African Liberation Movement as a whole.⁶⁴ According to the FDGB, delegations from Mali and Guinea, as well as the *Trade Union Congress* from Kenya and Angola, most convincingly represented the interests of the communist bloc.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the contributions of African union representatives, who were in close contact with the WFTU and specifically the FDGB, and some of whom had attended trade union schools in East Germany, were highlighted by the FDGB delegation. The FDGB regarded the conference as a success for the labor movement in Africa. The influences of the ICFTU were cited at the conference as the reason for the division of the working class. The WFTU accused the ICFTU or the United States of causing division.⁶⁶

By the time of the Casablanca conference, the influence of the WFTU in Africa had already waned due to conflicts with the French *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT) and the formation of the UGTAN. One can observe a restructuring of WFTU’s strategy after the withdrawal of many West and North African trade unions from the CGT and thus also from the WFTU; as a result, the influence of the WFTU had become practically extinguished by the year 1960. Therefore, there was a shift within the WFTU towards a more pragmatic African policy, moving away from orthodox European Marxist standards and adopting a more tailored and realistic approach for the continent.⁶⁷ The WFTU went as far as to oppose membership in other international trade union federations apart from the AATUF, aiming to counter the influence of the Western ICFTU in Africa, which had become more significant until then. For the WFTU, the establishment of the AATUF was therefore a new opportunity to strengthen its connections with African trade unions. The WFTU expressed solidarity with the people of Africa in their struggle against colonial oppression, racial discrimination, human exploitation, and capitalist development.⁶⁸ The WFTU’s policy towards trade unions in Africa was influenced by the recognition of the role of trade unions in the struggle for independence and social transformation of society. This was partly because there were only a few communist parties in African countries, as they were often banned, and so the trade unions were expected to fill their place ideologically and theoretically.⁶⁹ This led to

63 Einschätzung, [undated], SAPMO Barch DY 34/11405.

64 Historische Übersicht der AATUF vom FDGB, SAPMO Barch DY 34/11405.

65 Einschätzung, [undated], SAPMO Barch DY 34/11405.

66 Ibid.

67 Geiss, *Gewerkschaften in Afrika*, 65–66.

68 Zeleza, “Pan-African Trade Unionism,” 175.

69 Geiss, *Gewerkschaften in Afrika*, 66.

increased support for Pan-African trade unions and the AATUF from the WFTU, as well as trade unions from the Communist bloc in general.⁷⁰ In this context, it becomes evident how trade union internationalism became an arena of the Cold War. The following will focus on the positions of African actors regarding the question of non-alignment around the founding of the AATUF.

The Issue of Affiliation

The major conflict line that was already brewing before the conference was the question of non-alignment with international trade union federations. The issue of affiliation in international trade union federations, especially the ICFTU and the WFTU, played a role in all decolonizing regions, but particularly in Africa, where international organizations defined the lines of the Cold War.⁷¹ The South African journalist Colin Legum had already observed that the question of affiliation with the international trade union federations became “the source of the angriest of all divisions on the pan-African front.”⁷² At the conference, delegate Dialossida from Guinea criticized the, “beating around the bush,” and called for a concrete discussion on this issue.⁷³ Already in 1957, the UGTAN had positioned itself as a transnational organization against dual membership of unions. This meant that unions that were members of the UGTAN could not also be affiliated with the ICFTU or the WFTU.⁷⁴ These conditions set by the UGTAN paved the way for the *Ghana Trade Union Congress*, which until 1957 was a close partner of the ICFTU in Africa, to adopt a radical Pan-African position and evolve, “from an ICFTU favorite to a Pan-African bulwark.”⁷⁵ The experiences of the UGTAN and the emphasis on independence from international affiliations influenced Ghana’s Trade Unions withdrawal from the ICFTU towards a Pan-African policy.⁷⁶ Regardless of interventions by the WFTU, the UGTAN's positions influenced the stances of Nkrumah and other union representatives regarding independence from the two international organizations. Following Harisch’s argument, who has extensively covered international Networks of African Trade Unions, this shift towards non-aligned Pan-African trade union politics should not be attributed

70 Ibid., 86.

71 Gerard McCann, “Possibility and Peril: Trade Unionism, African Cold War, and the Global Strands of Kenyan Decolonization,” *Journal of Social History* 53, no. 2 (2019): 351, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shz099>.

72 Legum, *Pan Africanism*, 81.

73 “La neutralité: remporte la victoire au congrès africain des ouvriers,” *Journal Al-Akhbar*, June 1, 1961, IISH, 3914.

74 Harisch, “African Trade Unions in the World of Organized Labor,” 304.

75 Harisch, 301.

76 Geiss, *Gewerkschaften in Afrika*, 87.

to the influence of the WFTU. Instead, it reflects the Ghana Trade Union Congress' spontaneous decision to join the UGTAN at the 1959 Congress in Conakry, which suggests minimal active influence from the Communist trade union bloc and underscores the agency and self-determination of African actors.⁷⁷

Opoku Agyeman and Gerard McCann both point out that the central point of contention was primarily the differing positions of Ghana and Kenya, with Kwame Nkrumah, a key architect of contemporary radical Pan-African politics under the label of “All-African,” and Tom Mboya, a significant partner of the ICFTU in Africa, at the forefront of this dispute.⁷⁸ Influenced by the experiences of the UGTAN and Casablanca, Nkrumah advocated in 1963 for the independence of the Pan-African trade union movement:

The development of a united African trade union movement will give our working classes a new African consciousness and the right to express themselves in the councils of world labour unfettered by any foreign view and uncoerced by external forces. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the World Federation of Trade Unions are organizations committed to the ideological policies of West and East. The All-African Trade Union Federation will give the world a new force independent of both of them, and loyal not only to the needs of the new Africa and the new African, but also to the international working class.⁷⁹

Nkrumah remained committed to the idea of non-alignment, which excluded affiliation in one of the existing international trade union federations such as the ICFTU and the WFTU. Non-alignment was a central tenet in the international movement of the Third World and was a key aspect of Nkrumah's Pan-Africanism, where the struggle for political freedom and independence was linked with the trade unions. Therefore, connections with non-African organizations could pose a threat to the Pan-African project.⁸⁰ For Nkrumah, there was a danger that trade unions could be drawn into the dynamics of the Cold War through financial support, which is why he opposed affiliation: “This is a dangerous situation as it can drag Africa into active participation in Cold

77 Harisch, 304.

78 Opoku Agyeman, “Kwame Nkrumah and Tom Mboya: Non-Alignment and Pan-African Trade Unionism,” *Présence Africaine* 103, no. 3 (1977): 59–85, <https://doi.org/10.3917/presa.103.0059>; McCann, “Possibility and Peril.”

79 Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite* (Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), 128.

80 Opoku Agyeman, “Kwame Nkrumah and Tom Mboya: Non-Alignment and Pan-African Trade Unionism,” *Présence Africaine* 103, Nr. 3 (1977): 62.

War politics and deprive us of our safeguarding weapon of independent non-alignment.”⁸¹

Tom Mboya, who was appointed by Nkrumah as the chairman of the AAPC in Accra in 1958, evolved into a counterforce against Nkrumah's Pan-African ideas and the AATUF with his resistance to the termination of membership in the international federations.⁸² For Tom Mboya non-alignment and membership were not mutually exclusive. He built helpful relationships with the ICFTU through the trade union movement in Kenya, which he did not want to abandon due to the requirements of the AATUF.⁸³ As Philmon Ghirmai illustrates, for Mboya and his supporters, these memberships were closely tied to personal gains, assistance for independence movements, and support for the development of young nation-states and their economies, benefits they were unwilling to relinquish.⁸⁴ At the conference, these differing views were fiercely debated. Diallo Seydou from Guinea had strong words for those advocating membership in other international federations than the AATUF, accusing them of continuing “treacherous agreements with former colonial masters.”⁸⁵ The subsequent debate was conducted through 27 official speeches.⁸⁶ The meetings of representatives from the delegations were held throughout the day, but they did not reach a clear conclusion. Due to this conflict and the aforementioned accusations of manipulation against the conference organizers, many ICFTU-affiliated unions like the KFL ceased to attend meetings, and left the conference before the final report was adopted. In these conflict situations Mahjoub Ben Seddiq, chairman of the Casablanca conference, emerged as an important mediator, “who declared that he guaranteed complete freedom of expression to every delegate and observer,” as the newspaper *Link* wrote about him in the aftermath of the conference.⁸⁷ The final report of the conference contained the following wording regarding the issue of membership in international trade union federations:

AATUF is an independent organization, rejecting all foreign interference in African trade union affairs. It consists of independent national trade union organizations which may not be affiliated to international trade union organizations. However, as an interim measure, the national trade

81 Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite*, 127.

82 Agyeman, “Kwame Nkrumah and Tom Mboya,” 59.

83 Agyeman, 63.

84 Ghirmai, *Globale Neuordnung durch antikoloniale Konferenzen*, 151.

85 “Afrikanische Gewerkschaften zwischen West und Ost,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, June 10/11, 1961, IISH 3914.

86 “La neutralité: remporte la victoire au congrès africain des ouvriers,” *Journal Al-Akhbar*, 1. Juni 1961, IISH, 3914.

87 “Goodbye to ICFTU,” *Link*, June 11, 1961, IISH 3915.

union organization affiliated to international trade union centers at the time of this Congress, will be allowed a period of 10 months in which to disaffiliate.⁸⁸

The neutrality of AATUF in the Cold War competition was emphasized, and a deadline of ten months for withdrawal from all international trade union federations was decided.

Bandung Spirit in Casablanca

The understanding of non-alignment by AATUF in the final report also emphasized the importance of international solidarity within the Pan-African trade union movement.⁸⁹ The first item on the conference agenda addressed the developments of trade unions in Africa and the role of the working class. Mahjoub Ben Seddiq presented the programmatic report titled “1st All African Trade Union Conference: Doctrine and Orientation,” emphasizing an internationalist stance. He advocated that the common struggle of “workers of the world” against exploitation should serve as the foundation for the AATUF:

[...] the Pan-African Center will maintain brotherly and egalitarian relations with the workers of the world. All isolationism on the level of African struggle would, in fact, be a backward step and would be false [...] Thus the international relations of the Pan-African center will be founded on free collaboration with all the workers of the world within the framework fixed by its Charter.⁹⁰

Later in the report he argues that at the same time, the concrete demand for new ways and concepts to shape and produce societies in Africa is crucial for its decolonial character, as only its own African perspective can determine the shaping of the future.⁹¹ This perspective did not only encompass the national borders within their own countries but was informed by a view of the entire African continent. This analysis was fueled by Kwame Nkrumah's Pan-African ideas concerning the workers:

Nkrumah believed that there was much more uniting African labour than merely exploitation and alienation. His call for trade union solidarity

88 Charter of the AATU, ICFTU Report on the “First All-African Trade Union Conference,” 26. Juni 1961, IISH 3914.

89 Agyeman, “Kwame Nkrumah and Tom Mboya,” 76.

90 Legum, *Pan Africanism*, 222.

91 Mahjoub Ben Seddiq, *1st All African Trade Union Conference. Doctrine and Orientation*, Casablanca 1961, 8-9, IISH 6233/8.

was more than Marx’s workers of the world uniting. Nkrumah believed that African workers would set aside their racial, ethnic, and religious differences and unite to take power from capitalist exploiters who had perverted Africa’s indigenous socialistic world.⁹²

Nkrumah's hope was that with the establishment of the AATUF, a practical platform for the internationalism of workers in Africa would emerge, advocating for a post-colonial and sustainably independent Africa.

With explicit reference to Bandung, the connection of the working masses in Asia, Africa, and Latin America was emphasized, highlighting the associated task of solidarity. In understanding the role of trade unions, the Third World character of the AATUF becomes evident, “at the same time, and almost the same circumstances, similar masses are leading the same courageous struggle in Asia and Latin America against the same enemies: Imperialism, Feudality and Reaction.”⁹³ The doctrine reiterated the principle of non-alignment and emphasized independence from foreign ideologies, including independence from European powers. The demand for independence from existing trade union federations stemmed from the risk of being drawn into the dynamics of the Cold War, from which the African continent explicitly sought to distance itself. This included the general trend of the Bandung Era, reflecting the position of non-alignment, “in fact the African Trade Unionism must be an authentically African Expression, and not an African Version of a foreign trade union policy.”⁹⁴ Ben Seddiq emphasized “intercontinental solidarity” as a historical task.⁹⁵ This comprehensive position paper on the orientation of labor movements in Africa highlights primarily African contexts and internationalist solidarity.

Conclusion

The founding conference of the All-African Trade Union Federation in 1961 marked a significant moment in the decolonization process. In Casablanca, prominent African trade union representatives came together to exchange ideas, develop common visions for further decolonization, and strengthen trade union cooperation. This conference was more than

92 Robert Anthony Walters, “Kwame Nkrumah and the All-African Trade Union Federation: Labour and the Emancipation of Africa,” in *Visions of African Unity: New Perspectives on the History of Pan-Africanism and African Unification Projects*, ed. Matteo Grilli and Frank Gerits (Springer Nature, 2021), 78.

93 Ben Seddiq, *Doctrine and Orientation*, 4.

94 *Ibid.*, 7.

95 *Ibid.*, 9.

just a “manipulated” event by the Casablanca Group. It was rather a step forward in the institutionalization of Pan-African trade union networking in the context of the Bandung Era. The founding conference illustrates how conferences in the sense of *conferencing* became places of negotiation on trade union internationalism beyond national borders. Casablanca has since become a central *hub of decolonization* at the trade union level, laying the foundations for further Pan-African trade union organizing on the continent. The conference became a battleground for influence to the ICFTU, which sought to strengthen its influence and that of its allied unions, and the organizers of the AATUF. While the WFTU supported the establishment of an independent African trade union federation, the ICFTU struck conciliatory tones during the conference. However, serious accusations against the organizers after the conference indicated that the ICFTU rejected the establishment of an independent Pan-African trade union organization and continued its efforts to extend and strengthen its influence across Africa. The question of non-alignment and international trade union federations showed how the dynamics of the Cold War politically influenced Pan-African trade union networking and inter-African debates on the issue of cooperation at trade union level. The much discussed resolution rejecting membership in international federations laid the groundwork for independently operating trade unions in Africa and emphasized the principle of non-alignment. The conference signaled independent trade union organization in Africa, explicitly rejecting the membership to international trade union federations from the West and East. Its goal was not to exclude cooperation but rather to promote independent anti-colonial and Pan-African development.