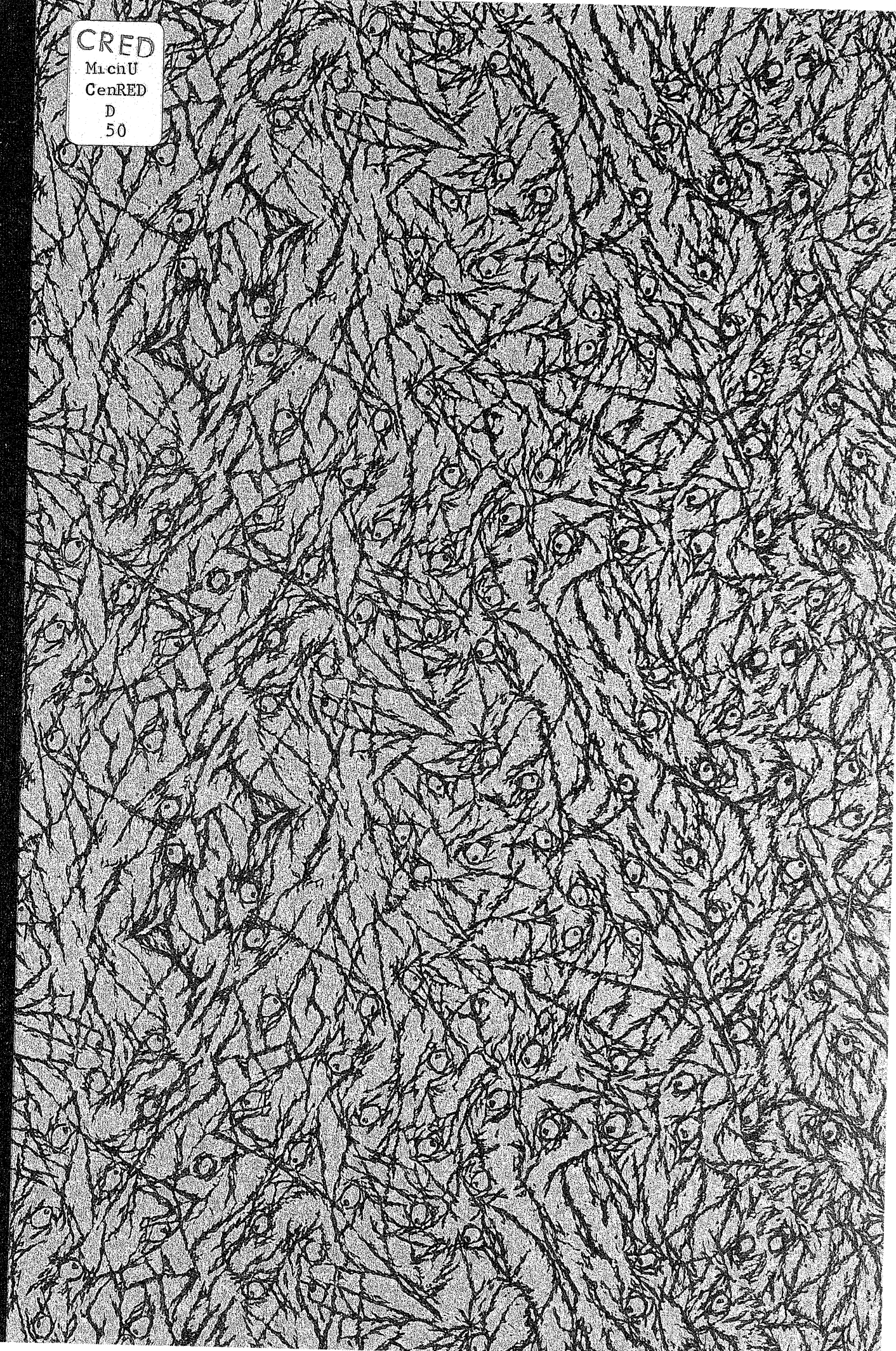


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A Survey of Labor Relations in Cameroon

by

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ABSTRACT

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Throughout most of the colonial era, Cameroonian workers, unprotected by any legal framework governing labor relations and without unions, were essentially defenseless against abuses by the Administration and private employers. Abuses did occur, since competition for the services of a limited labor force by Europeans in the private sector and the Administration, which might have been expected to raise wages, led the authorities to rely on forced labor, tax and police powers to help meet the colonial economy's manpower needs.

Comments by contemporary observers, cited in this paper, indicate that self-employment in service trades and cash-cropping for export tended to be more remunerative for Cameroonians than employment on European plantations. Hence the supply of manpower to European-owned enterprise could have been expected to be insufficient in absence of the measures mentioned.

This situation did not really change until after World War II. For various reasons noted in this paper, unions, controlled by rival French labor federations, emerged at this point and gathered strength during the period between the end of the war and Independence. Union programs tended to identify improvement of labor's situation with the fight for independence from colonial rule. The period between World War II and Independence also saw creation of the first comprehensive legal structure governing labor relations (the 1952 Labor Code), two components of which--labor inspection and resolution of disputes through arbitration--have retained importance as mainstays of the post-Independence legal and administrative framework governing labor relations to the present day.

Following Independence, unification of rival labor federations occurred, on the initiative of the President, who wanted labor unions free from foreign domination and capable of providing effective support for Party-defined national goals. This seems to have contributed to, or has coincided with, a weakening of links between grassroots membership and union leadership, discussed in this paper. At the same time, a potentially important role has been given to union leaders in formulating national labor policy. This policy is defined by the Labor Code and enacting decrees.

The system of labor relations puts heavy emphasis on the role of labor inspectors and the courts in enforcing standards, and on procedures for conciliation and binding arbitration in settling disputes. Its effectiveness depends above all, therefore, on the capability of the administrative structure--shop stewards, labor inspectors and the courts--to adequately defend workers' interests while balancing these with national priorities.

This paper is to be published as a chapter in a forthcoming book, Industrial Relations in Africa, edited by Ukandi G. Damachi for the International Institute for Labour Studies in Geneva.

Pendant la plus grande partie de l'ère coloniale, les travailleurs camerounais, protégés par aucune structure légale de travail gouvernant les rapports dans le travail et sans syndicat, étaient essentiellement sans défense contre les abus des employeurs privés et l'Administration. Des abus se sont produits, car la concurrence par les Européens dans le secteur privé et l'Administration pour les services d'une population active limitée, qui aurait dû amener une augmentation des salaires, a conduit les autorités à plutôt compter sur le travail forcé, les impôts et les pouvoirs policiers pour aider à satisfaire les besoins en main-d'oeuvre de l'économie coloniale.

Des commentaires faits par des observateurs contemporains, cités dans ce document, indiquent que l'indépendance économique dans les services et l'exploitation agricole tendaient à être plus rémunératrice pour les Camerounais que l'emploi dans les plantations européennes. On aurait pu s'attendre à ce que l'offre faite aux entreprises européennes en main-d'oeuvre soit insuffisante en l'absence des mesures citées.

Cette situation n'a pas vraiment changé jusqu'après la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale. Pour différentes raisons notées dans cette étude, les syndicats, contrôlés par les fédérations françaises de travail rivales, sont apparus à ce moment là et ont rassemblé leurs forces pendant la période entre la fin de la guerre et l'Indépendance. Les programmes des syndicats tendaient à identifier l'amélioration de la situation du travail avec la lutte pour l'Indépendance. La période entre la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale et l'Indépendance a aussi vu la création de la première structure légale compréhensive gouvernant les relations dans le travail (le Code du Travail de 1952), dont les deux composants--inspection du travail et résolution des conflits par arbitrage--ont conservé de l'importance en tant que point d'appui de la structure légale et administrative gouvernant les relations dans le travail de l'Indépendance jusqu'à nos jours.

Suivant l'Indépendance, est survenue l'unification des fédérations de travail rivales, sur l'initiative du Président, qui voulait les syndicats libres de toute domination étrangère et capable de procurer un support effectif aux buts nationaux définis par le Parti. Ceci semble avoir contribué à, ou a coïncidé avec, un affaiblissement des liens, discutés dans cette étude, entre les syndicalistes membres et dirigeants. Egalement, un rôle qui promet d'être important, a été donné aux dirigeants des syndicats dans la formulation d'une politique nationale du travail. Cette politique est définie par le Code du Travail et les décrets promulgués.

Le système des relations dans le travail insiste tout particulièrement sur le rôle des inspecteurs du travail et des cours pour faire respecter les normes établies et sur les procédures pour la conciliation et l'arbitrage dans les conflits à résoudre. Son efficacité dépend surtout, par conséquent, de la compétence de la structure administrative--à savoir les délégués syndicaux, inspecteurs du travail et les cours--pour défendre d'une façon acceptable les intérêts des travailleurs tout en maintenant un équilibre avec les priorités nationales.

Cette étude sera publiée en tant que chapitre d'un prochain livre, Industrial Relations in Africa, édité par Ukandi G. Damachi pour l'Institut International d'Etudes Sociales à Genève.

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding labor relations in Cameroon requires attention to the historical perspective. Throughout most of the colonial era workers were defenseless against abuses. They were effectively without protection under the law and had no economic power by which to exert pressure on employers. The administration used forced labor on its own public construction projects--sometimes conscripting labor for the private sector as well--and employed its taxing and police powers to insure an adequate and stable supply of labor to colonial enterprises.

Against this background the strong identification of workers' interests with anti-colonialism, in the post-World War II era is understandable. Legalization of union activity at the end of World War II opened a lively era of rapid union growth. There was eventual conflict among vying union centrals over the orientation which the nationalist movement and worker defense should take. It was in this period immediately preceding Independence that the first comprehensive legal structure of labor relations was put into place--a system, two components of which, labor inspection and conflict resolution through arbitration, have continued to be mainstays of the post-Independence legal and administrative framework up to the present day.

Following Independence, political forces were consolidated into a single Party, whose will for a single national voice was eventually to lead to the transformation of a labor movement, until then divided but independent with respect to the government in power, into a unified front under the aegis of the Party. Control by the Party, detailed codification of labor law and additional centralization of virtually all negotiations at the national level (under administrative control) have left to local level leadership of the unions only the role of union stewards. This process has given the federation of unions a potentially important role at the national level, but left the links between union leaders and grassroots members frequently too weak to register worker needs, control conflict, and thereby promote worker or national welfare.

These are some of the themes which will be developed in the present study. Part I concerns first, economic conditions and the evolution of labor relations in the historical context of the French colonial era, second, the post-World War II

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pre-Independence development of unions, and labor legislation, and finally, the eventual post-Independence unification of all unions in a single labor federation. Many of the interesting details of the section dealing with the colonial era are the fruit of a confrontation of official government reports on labor to the League of Nations, with exchanges between the Cameroon Chamber of Commerce, Agriculture, and Industry and the colonial administration, appearing in the Chamber of Commerce Bulletin. This sort of "view from the inside" is all the more valuable because in recent years, especially since Independence, no similarly candid views are available.

Part II outlines the legal and administrative framework of labor relations which is meant to set and enforce labor standards, and to provide for peaceful conflict resolution. Since it is always interesting to compare what is provided in the law with what in practice takes place, frequent reference will be made to another insider's view--this time, that of the labor administration--in the form of internal quarterly reports made by regional and departmental labor inspectors.

I. HISTORY OF THE LABOR SITUATION AND LABOR RELATIONS IN THE FRENCH COLONIAL PERIOD

A. 1914 - 1943

1. Tenor and Structure of Labor Relations Determined by the Dominant Position of Employers.

In the early years of the French administration of Cameroon,¹ there was little concern over labor. This was in marked contrast to protests raised by German planters who, when faced with keen competition for labor at the height of export demand and railroad construction, even talked of employing Chinese labor. (At this time in the private sector alone, close to 20,000 workers were employed mostly on cocoa and rubber plantations). From 1917 through 1922, with export demand greatly reduced, and in the absence of any large public construction projects, total labor demand was easily met. Only 4,000 workers were required in the private sector in 1920.² And hence, little interest was attached to labor by the French in Cameroon initially. Not until a decree in August of 1922 did any labor regulation appear. The August 1922 decree set forth requirements of a legally binding contract between employers and native workers. It provided for an arbitration board to settle disputes, and also specified penalties for infraction of work contracts by either party. However, the law had no practical impact on the situation of workers, since virtually no contracts were submitted for administrative visas. (26:1920-1922; 12)³.

¹This historical survey of labor relations in Cameroon is restricted to the former East Cameroon under French Tutelage, until the late sixties are discussed, when mention will be made of former West Cameroon in connection with efforts which were undertaken to harmonize laws and institutions for the two federal states of West and East Cameroon. Coverage of labor relations in the former British-administered territory would require a much longer study. We may simply note that West Cameroon institutions evolved in the British tradition and for most of its history were directly linked to those of Nigeria.

²The drop in the labor force from 20,000 to 4,000 is misleading in that most of the 20,000 were employed on German plantations which were to be found on the British side of the new territorial division -- private employment being minimal in what became the French administered territory. A large share of the labor force on German plantations undoubtedly had been supplied by populations now in French territory.

³These notes on sources refer to the number of the entry in the bibliography, the date (where applicable), and the page (number: date, page).

The French administration, unlike the German one, did not forcibly recruit workers for the private sector except in the case of head-porters, who were required by Europeans for moving from one locale to another. The Administration did regulate any labor recruitment made by private persons in a locality far removed from the place of work; this, mostly for sanitary purposes. The Administration sometimes contracted with indigenous groups for small operations such as brick-making and ferry construction. (26:1922). For large public works projects, however, the French used forced labor¹. Glowing reports made by the French colonial Administration to the League of Nations, concerning the exemplary working conditions said to be provided to conscripted laborers, are contradicted by bitter memories of the generation of Cameroonians who suffered under this system. Betrayed by chiefs who cooperated in their recruitment, transported long distances, ill-paid, forced to work under unhealthy conditions, and abused by Cameroonian foremen, many died and large numbers deserted, thus becoming fugitives from the law. (10:17:18).

When exports rose sharply in 1923, causing the work force in the private sector to more than double to 8-10,000 laborers, the administration began to feel a labor shortage for public works projects, which by then engaged some 5,000 workers on railroad construction, 3,000 on road construction, as well as 500 for dredging the port of Douala. It was this squeeze which led the administration to set certain limits by region on private hiring. Furthermore, it began to enforce the 1922 decree, particularly with respect to those measures intended to prevent labor pilferage. (26:1923)

In the next few years, private demands for labor grew, while the administration continued to require large numbers of workers for railroad construction. This tight situation led to a new decree in July of 1925 regulating native labor. The decree (1) limited private labor recruitment outside the subdivision in which an enterprise was located, (2) introduced strict control of population movement by means of laissez-passer, (3) prohibited the administration from engaging in recruitment activities for private persons, and (4) set certain standards for labor contracts concerning the manner of wage payment, worker housing, and health measures. The requirement that work outside a worker's region of origin be subject to contract, together with the requirement of a laissez-passer for movement outside the region, backfired somewhat. Many workers deserted rather than sign a contract, either for fear that of being found

¹See appendix for Note on Colonial Labor Force: Forced and Voluntary.

without the laissez-passer, or to avoid a loss of freedom which they associated with contracts, based on their experience with public works conscription where deserters were pursued and punished. In fact, most provisions of the decree were not observed, due to adverse reactions by employers. The territorial High Commissioner quickly published a circular advising all concerned that the new regulations were to be "interpreted loosely." (26:1925)

The labor shortage disappeared again in 1927, due to a decline in the rubber market and completion of the railroad to Yaoundé. Still, demand was sufficiently high by 1929 for wages to have increased from a range of 35 to 90 francs a month for a laborer in 1926, to a range of 1.5 to 5 francs a day. (26:1926, 1929)

In April of 1929, an administrative decree called for the creation of a Labor Bureau. French planters expected that the bureau would be able to distribute the available work force in such a way as to eliminate the high turnover rates which led them to recruit double the required number of workers. It seems that the bureau was, in fact, never effective as a labor exchange. (3: August 1928)

The world economic crisis in 1930 caused export prices to fall and the work force to be reduced by as much as five-sixths in some sectors. It was in this year, for the first time, that official notice was registered of work stoppages and strikes. (26:1930) These took place in the Douala port. The head of a navigation company complained to the Chamber of Commerce that workers were refusing to receive their food ration in kind, and furthermore that they were abandoning cargoes and destroying property. Noting that the territorial administration had claimed to be powerless to intervene, because workers were not under contract, the employer insisted that he had a right to protection, since under the indigenat (laws governing natives) work stoppages and property destruction were subject to penal sanctions. [The employer's position in this regard was to be reinforced by a decree in June 1932, which applied legal sanctions against any workers who abandoned their job after having received wage advances. (26: 1934)]

Between January 1931 and the end of 1932, the private sector work force had fallen from about 25,000 to 18,000. Wages also fell over the period. The wage index for laborers (base year, 1929) fell to 46 in 1932. Over the same period, the index of food prices fell to 29 and that of cloth to 40; so that the standard of living for those able to find work apparently did not worsen.

Work under contract practically disappeared during this period, since there was no need for enterprises to recruit workers outside their locale (the only circumstance in which a contract was required by law). The labor force was thus composed almost exclusively of day-laborers, whose working conditions were not a matter of concern under the law.

By 1933, employment had begun to pick up, especially in timber cutting and in expanded banana and coffee production. Wages had stabilized at their 1932 level. Again, trouble was noted among dockers, whose crew bosses were demanding higher wages. This prompted another request by employers for intervention by the authorities. The appeal led to a proposal that a placement bureau be created on the docks, to channel the work force, so that "troubling intermediaries" would be eliminated. (3:June-July 1933) In spite of these labor troubles, the official view, as expressed in the 1933 report to the League of Nations, was that perfect harmony reigned between workers and employers. The report cited as evidence the fact that no cases had appeared that year before arbitration councils. It seems, however, that the absence of cases is rather to be attributed to unfamiliarity by workers with procedures and general mistrust. (26:1930; 9:28)

2. Tensions Between Employers and Colonial Administrators Over Appropriate Measures to Deal With Labor Shortages

By 1936, the work force had doubled over the pre-Depression peak of some 25,000 in 1930. In the West, South, and East indigenous coffee, cocoa, and peanut production was rising rapidly.

Tensions began to develop in 1935 between the French High Commissioner and colonial entrepreneurs over labor policy. The Commissioner investigated reports of irregularity of pay to workers, insisting to employers that regular pay would insure them the work force stability they so much desired. Employers, however, maintained that it was they, not the workers, who were in need of protection, since workers regularly broke implicit contracts by absconding once they were paid their wages. A labor crisis was developing in which recruitment was increasingly difficult; falling productivity was accompanied by unrestrained demands of workers who could leave one job and easily find another without

fear of sanctions being taken against them.¹

The Chamber of Commerce addressed an urgent appeal to the Commissioner to take all necessary steps to end the growing crisis. In particular, they recommended that the system of laissez-passer be ended. It was held to be responsible for work force instability, since many workers left the job site once they were paid, knowing that they were being sought by authorities for being outside their district without authorization. It was felt that this step must be accompanied by new measures to facilitate tax payment and collection, so that village chiefs would no longer prevent their people from leaving the village in order to insure collection of the taxes required of them for their villagers. Employers further recommended that planter cards be issued to those natives planting for export or for extra-family consumption, thus permitting the authorities to chase "idle" men into "productive" employment. Finally, they urged that court costs to indigenous workers be raised so as to limit the number of cases submitted and consequent inavailability of workers called to testify. (3: February 1936)

The Coffee Producers Union in one region urged the administration to employ every means at its disposal to augment the number of workers--raising taxes, increasing police control, and creating labor exchanges. Furthermore, they called upon the Commissioner to refuse permits for any new European or indigenous plantations or cooperatives. They severely criticized the administration for having contributed to the crisis by heavily subsidizing native cooperatives (subsidies, mostly in the form of technical advice), rather than channeling labor toward European plantations. (3: June 1936) The Commissioner bent to their plea, and in August suspended the offer of rural concessions in two departments. In March of 1937, it was decreed that no new agricultural or timber concessions would be granted in all the territory.

In 1937 the Commissioner asked that a study be made of means to alleviate the labor crisis in order to meet estimated manpower needs in the private and public sectors totalling nearly 50,000. (3: March 1937) The study commission concluded that the labor crisis was being aggravated by the appearance of large

¹In fact, many of these so-called desertions can be explained by the fact that export prices had risen high enough to attract natives into commercial production of cocoa, palm nuts, and rubber. These in turn hired their own workers. Between 1926 and 1936, the number of rural concessions had risen from 92 to 510. The production of native plantations had doubled in tonnage over the same period. Prices of cocoa, palm nuts, and peanuts tripled between 1933 and 1936. (26:1936, 1937)

numbers of vagabonds who were said to be hiding behind the appearance of a small trade as market boys. In order to force them into "productive" employment, it was recommended that a heavy tax be imposed upon them. This recommendation was acted upon immediately. (26:1937) The commission also called for (1) creation of regional labor offices, (2) introduction of worker-planter cards to facilitate suppression of "vagabondage," (3) revision of the law to permit realization of collective contracts (e.g. with village chiefs for native workers under their authority), (4) creation of a savings plan to promote work force stability, and (5) legalization of company stores and their authorization to sell alcoholic beverages, availability of which would act as an incentive to work. (3: March 1937)

What was the Administration's reaction to these recommendations?

Regional labor offices were, in fact, created by decree in May 1937, principally to act as labor exchanges and to set minimum wages. All labor recruited through these offices was to be subject to contract, thus permitting greater administrative control of working conditions. Minimum wages were first fixed for various regions by decree in January 1938. In regions where demand was exceptionally high, actual wages paid were substantially higher than the legal minimum. (Employers urged that labor offices also set maximum wages and minimum tasks, to prevent pirating of workers; but this idea never received favor with the administration.)

Work cards were never instituted officially, but no objection was made to their private use, nor to the use of these cards by the authorities as evidence to determine vagabondage (3: November 1937)

Apparently the administration turned down the proposal that collective contracts be allowed. A number of the employer demands which had been made by the commission were met in a November 1937 decree which introduced a worker savings plan, legalized company stores, and instituted workmen's compensation, (thus removing this matter from the realm of common law, under which employers had felt disadvantaged by the absence of any statutory limitation on claims). (3:October 1937) The decree also extended to workers' families the right to free medical treatment. (26: 1937) Finally, the decree defined the attributes and prerogatives of labor inspectors attached to the newly created regional labor offices. (9:29)

These measures did not satisfy colonial employers, who claimed that their right to influence decisions affecting them was being abridged by four or five administrators in Yaounde. They threatened to take the matter of the manpower crisis directly to the Minister for Colonies rather than continue to seek satisfaction through the Commissioner.

When a new Commissioner arrived on the scene in 1939, he let it be known that his devotion to the principle of freedom of work would not prevent him from doing everything possible to insure that this principle not be interpreted to mean that idleness would be condoned. He instituted a weekly work card in June of that year. Clearly going beyond his authority in this domain, the Commissioner authorized both exemption of hired workers from the head tax and the requisitioning by the Administration of labor for harvest work on private plantations. He swore to planters that he was "willing to open up roads into the thickest jungles in order to route out the indolent." (3:March 1939) At the beginning of the war, in 1940, the Commissioner gave authority to regional administrative heads to forcibly recruit workers to supply planters with labor for all agricultural tasks.

Chamber of Commerce representatives to the Central Labor Office in Yaounde in 1940 managed to keep down the highest regional minimum wage from a proposed 4.5 francs/day to 3. (The 3 francs were to include the food ration, and could be reduced by 20% for workers on the job less than 20 days in the month.) (3:March 1940) Subsequent pressure brought to bear by employers in two departments succeeded in reducing the minimum wage there to 2.5 francs/day. In another department, authorization had been given to planters to pay only "chop-money," at 1.5 francs/day.

By January 1942, it was proudly announced in the Chamber of Commerce Bulletin that administrative efforts in recruiting labor for the private sector had finally brought the manpower crisis to an end. Still, it was felt the administration would do well to conduct a census, in order to determine potential manpower available, and to enable the introduction of identity cards. With these, pressure could be put on workers to be more stable in employment.

Employer complaints in 1943 turned to a problem of low productivity; they appealed to the Commissioner to intervene to prevent desertion by workers. The Commissioner responded that workers under contract who deserted were being caught and punished according to the law; but since workers recruited by the

labor offices were not asked for their consent, they could not be held to have broken a commitment if they left the job. One employer attempted to explain these desertions by citing low wages paid in relation to the high cost of living, adding that a worker could earn two or three times as much working on his own account with his family. In general, however, employers maintained that raising wages was no solution to the problem of work force instability, citing cases such as that of the railroad, where raising the wage to 6 francs/day had actually led to a fall in the number of days of work supplied. (Some workers were said to simply hire small boys to cut firewood for the train, paying them 3 francs/day and keeping the other 3.) (3:October 1943)

With the arrival of a new labor inspector in 1943, consultations began concerning the need for new labor regulations. Employers denied the need for any new provisions. They insisted that what was needed was better enforcement of already-existing provisions. The Commissioner issued an order in September raising the minimum daily wage and requiring that this wage be paid independently of the number of days worked--this, in contrast to the former practice of paying rates which were reduced according to the degree of absenteeism. Tensions developing between employers and the administration over labor policy grew. In a vote taken in a meeting of the Central Labor Office, a proposal to suspend the September order raising the minimum wage was rejected by 7 (5 civil servants and 2 native chiefs) to 6 (3 European employers and 3 "Blacks"). This provoked one employer to insist that greater voice be given to those "responsible for the economic life of the country," in contrast to public servants, who by implication did not have the economic welfare of the country at heart. (3:November 1943)

B. 1944 - 1975

1. Unions Created and Labor Relations Given a Comprehensive Legal Framework

The climate of labor relations began to change rapidly as the Second World War drew to a close. The first signal of change came in resolutions passed at the Brazzaville conference of colonial governors in 1944. Native workers were declared to have the right to complete freedom in their decisions about taking work. Employers reacted very strongly against this principle. They felt that the administration, which had formerly given its support to colonial employers, was now doing everything to ruin them. As one planter complained, the struggle

was not between native peasant and colonial entrepreneur, but between the Administration and those truly responsible for the economic life of the colony. He cited Governor Boisson's own words as proof that the administration had chosen against whites: "Il est maintenant impossible de laisser se développer la colonisation indigène parallèlement; il faut se décider pour l'une ou l'autre."¹ (3:June 1944) According to the Governor, it was now time to give way to "indigenous colonization" (i.e. indigenous smallholder cash-crop production), since natives much preferred working their own land to wage labor. (16:273) At the same time, to defend himself against accusations of certain of his critics, the Governor cited as proof of his concern for colonial enterprise, the administration's active efforts to bring natives to work in private enterprises, "by action or threat of action from labor offices." (3:June 1944)

Following on the Brazzaville recommendations, the climate of labor relations was to change under the impact of two decrees in August of the same year. The first decree extended the provisions concerning unions of the French Labor Code to all French African territories. The second called for creation of a corps of labor inspectors who were to be for the first time independent of the general territorial administration. (9:30)

The "indigenat" and conscripted labor were abolished by the First Constituent Assembly in 1946, thus officially bringing to an end discriminatory "native laws" and the practice of forced labor, which had taken on various forms throughout the colonial era. Particularly during the Second World War, the French had used forced labor on private plantations, making every effort to prevent workers from fleeing to British Cameroon, where obligations were lighter. (10:20,58)

Reactions to the ending of forced labor were mixed. The Representative Assembly in 1949 debated the question of labor freedom, which they feared would be interpreted as the "right to do nothing" and lead to a serious labor shortage. In that same year, claims were made by unionists and politicians that forced labor continued in Cameroon. These claims were investigated by the United Nations Mission to the territory. (24:71f)

Employers tried with some success to resist these new trends. They managed to prevent the application of a new labor code for overseas territories, the

¹It is no longer possible to let European and native colonization develop side by side; a decision must be taken for one or the other.

Code Moutet, which was decreed in October 1947. Their holding action was successful until November 1952, when a definitive Labor Code for Overseas Territories became law. (1:179) This Code, hailed as an advance even over French labor legislation for the home territory, broke with the colonial tradition by ruling out discrimination between French and native workers. Its provisions covered all aspects of working conditions and labor relations; unions, work contracts, health measures, worker representation, conflict resolution, means of enforcement, and authorization to institute social insurance and security schemes. (9:32f)

Even before the new Labor Code went into effect in December 1952, the climate of labor relations had begun to change rapidly as workers, now free to organize themselves, the principal line of self-defense had been not to address claims for better working conditions to either the employer or administrative and judicial authorities, but rather to escape by any means available the yoke of wage employment.) (1:77) The economic situation after the war particularly favored the creation of unions for a number of reasons. Severe wartime and post-war cut-backs in trade with industrial countries had acted as a stimulus to local industry to attempt to fill the gap left by reduced imports. Rising prices and fixed wages during the war had worsened living conditions. Finally, wage demands could now be linked to demands for advantages hitherto reserved for Europeans. Such an attack on racism, combined with an attack on exploitation of workers, was sure to win wide support. (28:17)

Already in 1944, the Union des Syndicats Confédérés du Cameroun (USCC) under patronage of the French Confédération Générale du Travail, CGT (itself attached to the World Federation of Trade Unions, WFTA), was formed in Douala. Its organizers concentrated on winning over employees of the Administration and of commercial enterprises. USCC organizers gained a large following with their message of class struggle. Refusal by the Administration and most European employers to meet their demands for wage increases led to a rash of strikes in September 1945, among employees of missions, commercial houses, and the Administration. On the twenty-first of that month, a wildcat strike broke out in Douala workshops of the government-owned railroad--reportedly organized outside the auspices of the USCC, since the latter feared that any strike would give the authorities an excuse for violent repression. (28:18) It seems that many Europeans, annoyed by recent union demands, in fact were hoping for a confrontation which would put an end to the unions.

The strike broke out first among laborers and non-unionized railroad workers of the Northern Line, which runs from Douala to Nkongsamba. It soon spread to the Central Line. It was at first orderly, until some unemployed men from a native quarter formed a band which moved through the streets toward the airport, where they were repelled by rifle fire. Then followed the repression which had been feared by union organizers. With help from the army, paramilitary groups were formed by Europeans and began roaming the streets for some 16 days, firing on anyone in sight. Some people were killed (sources differ on the numbers e.g. LeVine (17) and Suret-Canale (28)) and many more wounded. The European secretary of the railroad union, along with other European organizers and several threatened Cameroonian organizers, were kept in security and eventually expelled to Brazzaville, as were union organizers in Yaoundé. (A political repercussion of the violent means used by Europeans to repress the strikers was the defeat of the administration-supported candidate for the First French Constituent Assembly by Alexandre Douala Manga Bell, who was subsequently to play an important role in passage of the April 11, 1946 law abolishing forced labor in the colonies.) (10:39)

After the September 1945 strikes, unions--and especially their European leaders--chose to change tactics by trying to capture the leadership of UNICAFRA (Union Camerounaise Française). UNICAFRA, the USCC and other groups met to discuss a joint program. Trade unionists lost the initial debate over a general strike, but eventually took over the organization which grew out of the confrontation, RACAM (Rassemblement Camerounais). (17:p144)

Until 1948, the only major organizing effort to contest the field with the USCC was the Confédération Française de Travailleurs Chrétiens, CFTC (affiliated with the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions), whose local that year took the name Confédération Camerounaise des Syndicats Croyants, CCSC. The CFTC was strongly supported by the Secretary of State for Overseas France, Dr. Aujoulat. (6:5) Another union federation which began organizing in Cameroon was the Confédération Générale du Travail-Force Ouvrière, CGT-FO (created when the French CGT split into two camps, and affiliated with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions). Both the CGT-FO and the CCSC inherited from the CGT-sponsored USCC large numbers who left in protest against the CGT's Communist orientation. Thus, between 1947 and 1951, the USCC fell in importance from a representation of approximately 70% of the unionized labor force to 40%. (25)

Considerable animosity existed between the USCC and the other two union federations, as evidenced by mutual complaints received by the 1950 United Nations Mission to the territory. CGT-FO and CCSC organizers complained that they were

getting no support from the administration, which was said to be intimidated by the USCC. In return, USCC organizers complained that the French administration was trying to sabotage its efforts by violating its right to strike and persecuting militants; while they claimed that the Catholic clergy was fighting the USCC openly. The CCSC petition to the Mission eloquently presented a complaint which was to become a standard banner of union policy. In opposing replacement of Cameroonian workers with Italian and Japanese unemployed workers on the dam construction site at Edea (the latter said to be living in luxury compared to their Cameroonian fellows), they wrote, "It is difficult to see how social and economic progress can be promoted in a country without the participation of its citizens, who should be the free artisans who build that economy and the ones to benefit from social progress." (24:81) The UN Mission reported that the French authorities and Cameroon elite, while aware of the lack of maturity of the union movement in the territory, maintained the hope that unionism would lead to a consciousness raising of the laboring classes. (24:77)

During the 1950's, union rivalry reflected differing attitudes of union leaders and their federations toward the issue of national Independence and all the associated political options, as well as toward matters of strategy and instruments most suitable to the defense of workers' interests. To those tensions were added a certain number of personal rivalries; as a result, federations split into factions, reunited, joined regional confederations, or abstained from joining them, et cetera.

Over a period of ten years, officially reported union membership grew from estimated numbers of 14,000 in 1947 to some 36,000 in 1957; so that in this latter year unions claimed to represent over one fourth of the salaried labor force. In spite of the competition, the USCC, with an estimated membership of 10,000 in 1957, still accounted for more workers than the CGT-FO and CCSC, whose combined membership in the same year did not exceed 10,000. The USCC was known to be better financed from outside sources than either of the other federations, thus enabling them to pay full-time staff and organizers, as well as to send some members abroad for leadership training. By 1952, these union confederations shared the field of organized labor with a third, independent, Union des Syndicats Autonomes Camerounaises (USAC), which in 1957 claimed a membership of some 8,000

workers, then nearly disappeared by 1961.¹ Other independent groups included the Union Nationale des Cheminots du Cameroun (UNCC), independent since its inception in 1948. According to one source, this union and many other independent unions were really company unions formed by employers to forestall true union organization. (19)

The administration took a particularly dim view of the militancy of the USCC. However, when in 1959 its leaders (then the Confédération Générale Kamerounaise du Travail, CGKT) were arrested for having called a series of strikes demanding the right to strike and adaption of the labor code to the Cameroonian context, all unions felt insecure about their chances for survival. (29)

2. The Post-Independence Shift Away from Foreign Control of the Unions Toward a United and Autonomous National Labor Front.

In the early sixties, the fortunes of the Confédération Générale de Travail Camerounaise (successor to the CGT affiliate, USCCO rose to a maximum representation of 53% of the hired labor force in 1961 (according to shop steward elections), then fell back in 1962 to 26%, after splitting into two camps. In contrast, the importance of union membership in independent unions grew steadily (from 13% of the labor force at the end of 1959 to 20% at the end of 1962).

This trend toward independence from external allegiances, favored by the Labor Ministry, was an expression of growing interest by some labor leaders in a unified Cameroonian labor movement. The first serious steps toward unity were taken in 1963, when the Fédération des Syndicats du Cameroun, FSC, was formed by the two branches of the former Confédération Générale de Travail Camerounaise and

¹The reported membership in all these federations must certainly be exaggerated. An independent estimate gives a total membership of 14,000 in 1954, compared to an official figure of almost double that number. Even the trends in the comparative growth rates of the three main currents (Communist USCC, Christian CCSC, and Free Trade CGT-FO), as recorded in official statistics, do not seem to accord with independent observations that, after a peak in 1952, the USCC declined in influence to the benefit of the CGT-FO, and that by 1954 Christian unions counted a bare 1,000. It is, in fact, difficult to determine the reliability of any source for these statistics--in part, because unions clearly exaggerated their membership, but also because with high labor turnover, unions appeared and disappeared within the space of a few months. (19:25)

the Union des Syndicats Libres du Cameroun, USLC (grandchild of the CGT-FO), after their disaffiliation from the World Federation of Trade Unions and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions respectively. The Union de Syndicats Croyants du Cameroun, USCC, successor to the CCSC (which had split and then reunited), seemed at first interested in the effort at unification of the labor front, but finally opted to maintain ties with their international and regional federations.

The new federation, FSC, looked strong at first, representing all unionized workers except those of the USCC (with sixty-five percent of the employed labor force, compared to 16% under the USCC). Fortunes of the FSC ebbed considerably when the railroad union withdrew to join up with the USCC and when schisms broke out among FSC leaders. A workers' congress called in October 1964 led to a reshuffling of the leadership and more orderly functioning of the federation in the years which followed.

President Ahidjo was still not satisfied with a situation which permitted diversity and conflict among the various groups claiming to represent workers' interests. In a speech to the Party (Union Nationale Camerounaise, UNC) Congress in Garoua in March 1969, he outlined the official position that in a country like Cameroon, "where class-conflict does not exist" and where the State seeks to insure social justice, the role of unions should be constructive, rather than contentious. Labor can only make demands in light of the possibilities available in an economy whose progress depends on mutual sacrifice by all strata of the population. He went on to define the role of unions to be that of insuring application of labor law in the workplace, while at the same time insuring worker discipline and high productivity. Unions should sensitize workers to the problems of development, mobilize the masses to contribute to building the nation, and collaborate with the government to improve the living conditions of workers. Finally, he called on unionists to cut their ties with foreign labor movements, and to replace irrelevant ideologies with the principles of the UNC. (6)

Echo of the sentiment that the Cameroonian labor movement was too easily influenced by foreign currents may be found in the 1970 internal reports of the Labor Inspector of Douala to the Labor Ministry, in which he spoke of the turbulent labor climate in the Douala dockers' union (representing some 3,800 workers). He attributed trouble on the docks to agitation by irresponsible union leaders and shop stewards, some of whom were said to mislead illiterate workers, inciting

them to strike; while others made deals with management; and both profited financially from the disruptive situation. In the same report, the inspector noted a lower level of disputes in that year compared to 1968-69, and seized the opportunity to suggest that this difference proved Cameroonian workers to be influenced by their union colleagues internationally, who had been particularly disruptive in 1968 and 1969.

Creation of the UNTC

Early in 1970, the three remaining labor federations--the FSC, USCC, and the West Cameroon Trade Union Congress--heeded the President's call by dropping their international affiliations, as a prelude to the creation of a single federation. In February 1972, the UNTC (Union Nationale de Travailleurs Camerounais) was finally created and given its first structures by a tripartite committee composed of representatives of unions, the Party, and the administration. (29:56)

The UNTC has been organized at both the national and departmental levels. At the national level, the provisional federation statutes call for a workers' Congress to meet every three years. The Congress is to determine union policy and to elect a National Council which in turn must name a confederal bureau for day to day management of the union. Members of departmental federations are the various unions in each department, organized by economic branch. The UNTC is clearly subordinate to the Party, whose Political Bureau must be represented on the UNTC's National Council, and without whose approval no decision can be taken. The Party also subsidizes Federation activities.

The UNTC has been faithful to the President's vision of its role, urging restraint by workers and mutual sacrifice. In August 1975, upon removal of its permanent Bureau,¹ for "sectarian and deviationist actions," the UNTC's National Council seized the occasion to urge workers to forswear work stoppages and wildcat strikes, which would only harm the economy, and fuel inflation. (21)

Voiced official complaints about the UNTC usually center on its failure as yet to develop strong links with grassroots membership, which is said to weaken its capacity to control labor troubles at the source. This is the opinion evidenced by labor inspector reports in 1973 and 1974, which stressed the need for

¹This is the confederal bureau which was set up in February of 1972, along with the National Workers Council, by the tripartite committee. To date no national workers congress has ever been held.

the UNTC to educate and control its shop stewards, many of whom were "stirring up troubles," believing themselves to be protected by law for almost anything. (4:Doula 1974) An example may be taken from a 1974 report of the Labor Inspector in Yaoundé, in which he wrote that shop stewards, elected at the end of 1973, had made wild promises to workers about job reclassification. When the promises proved unfounded, the stewards set out to discredit the inspector, saying that he had sold out to employers. On the other hand, workers in former West Cameroon complained that the new union federation no longer protected their jobs adequately-- as had the West Cameroon Trade Union Congress, which required prior consultation with the Divisional Union of Agricultural Workers before dismissal of a worker. (4:Buea 1973)

When the UNTC was first set up on the departmental level beginning in 1972 and 1973, resentment by leaders of the old union federations of attempts by some new leaders to usurp the place of everyone from the shop steward and employer to to the Party and the labor inspector, led to many conflicts. According to a report by the Douala Labor Inspector, conflict was particularly acute between previously-elected shop stewards (who were mistrusted by many workers as a result of the part they had played in reclassification of workers to implement the first national system of job classification, established in 1971--see below), and the new union representatives. The role of the latter was not clear, and their position remained precarious, since they were not yet protected by the law from employer reprisals.

The Labor Ministry was, in fact, directly involved in replacing old unions with new ones, in conformity with official policy favoring worker unity. Labor inspectors in each region did a considerable amount of campaigning on behalf of the UNTC--calling meetings of employers, unionists, and Party representatives and urging that trade unionism was no longer a matter of worker concern alone, since unions were being called upon to act as an arm of the Party in pursuit of the national interest. (4:Ebolowa 1970) Labor inspectors continue to play an important role in worker education by calling meetings with union and Party representatives to cover such topics as: responsibilities of shop stewards, the contribution of unionism to national progress, the need for raising efficiency and professional conscience, and the means to maintain a climate of dialogue between workers and employer. (4:Bertoua 1974)

The financial capability of unions has been greatly enhanced since the system of check-off of union dues at the source was borrowed from former West Cameroon. Union dues are currently established for all workers at 1% of base salary.

(This seems to be a bone of contention with higher levels of personnel, who would prefer to form their own union rather than pay this rate.) (29:77) Workers must authorize deductions for union dues from their pay. The idea did not meet with immediate worker approval. Though most workers claimed to be union members, many did not initially sign the authorizations for check-off. (4:Bafoussam 1973) This resulted in a certain ambivalence on the part of the labor administration. Labor inspectors, while openly favoring education of workers on the need to financially support the union, attempted to counter the zeal of certain union leaders who thought that workers should be obliged to sign waivers for the check-off. After some unsuccessful experimentation with local control of funds, management was finally given to tri-partite committees created at the national level for each workers' union, and composed of representatives of the national Party, the particular union, and the government. These committees distribute funds in the following manner: 50% to the departmental union, 15% to the departmental federation of unions, 25% to the UNTC, and 10% toward social security projects. (In the case of unions existing only at the national level, 65% of dues go directly to the union.) (29:55f)

Though it is possible to criticize both the motives which led the Cameroonian government to pressure for a united labor front and the UNTC's functioning under the aegis of the Party, due recognition must be given to the fact that when nearly all important decisions concerning labor are taken at the national level, there is a definite advantage to labor presenting a unified voice. It may be assumed that labor's voice is more forcefully heard in the National Labor Council (a consultative body concerned with proposed legislation and regulation of labor) and in the national commission responsible for setting wage scales, CNPCCS, (Commission Nationale Paritaire des Conventions Collectives et des Salaires), because unions are organized into a single, highly centralized national federation. A particularly striking example can be given of the capacity of the UNTC to exert its influence in the defense of workers' interests, by its successful lobbying effort to shift the burden of proof of a legitimate cause for rupture of contract upon the employer, confirmed in the new Labor Code of 1974.¹

¹I am grateful to my colleague Roger Doublie for pointing this out to me.

II. LABOR LAW AND ADMINISTRATION

As the French legal tradition would have it, the ideal system of labor relations is one in which nearly all aspects of labor relations are regulated by law. Even collective agreements often take on the force of law. In such cases, it is the responsibility of the labor administration, through its role as inspector, to see that the specific provisions of an agreement are honored in practice, in addition to overseeing enforcement of laws covering general working conditions and the minimum wage. It is on this pattern of French law that labor relations in Cameroon have evolved.

Before 1944, labor regulations and labor administration in the territory were meager. It was only in 1949 that true work inspectorates, independent of the general administration, were created. The Overseas Labor Code, passed by the French Assembly in 1952, was the first comprehensive labor law applicable in Cameroon. It established a pattern which was to be closely followed by the first Labor Code completed after Independence, in 1967. By 1974, a new Code was passed, in order to complete harmonization of social and labor legislation in the two former federal states. The 1974 Code is largely a revision of that of 1967, but also borrows a certain number of provisions from the English tradition of West Cameroon; in particular, the institution of an official union registry and the check-off system for dues collection, and the empowering of labor inspectors to directly initiate legal proceedings against violators of laws and ordinances.

A. REGULATION OF TRADE UNION ACTIVITY

The Labor Code sets the context in which trade unions are allowed to operate. Its provision for an official union registrar permits the administration to control union structure and functioning. The Code also sets limits on the right of workers to strike (see below). The role of shop stewards, who by law must be elected from a list established by the leadership of the union concerned, is defined in the Code and protected by providing that strict conditions be met before a steward can lose his job.

Given limits on local union activity set by official policy, the principal role of union shop stewards in the workers' defense becomes that of (1) presenting individual and collective demands to the employer or (2) calling on the labor inspector to intervene in all instances where a claim is made against the employer for failure to execute provisions of social and labor law. The employer is required to hold meetings with shop stewards at least once a month to air grievances and to solicit suggestions for improvements in the organization of work. The law protects shop stewards from employer reprisals by requiring that authorization be given by the labor inspector before any shop steward can be dismissed or laid off. The law also requires that shop stewards be given priority in keeping their jobs or being transferred to another service when workers are being laid off. (This protection has proved to be absolutely essential. The Labor Inspector for Yaoundé complained in 1974 of a rash of requests by employers for dismissal of shop stewards.)

B. COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS

The Labor Code and ordinances concerning its application regulate the content of collective agreements. A distinction is drawn between, on the one hand, agreements made at the level of the firm or a group of firms; and, on the other hand, "national collective agreements," concluded within one or several sectors, designed to cover all workers in these branches, and given the force of law by decree, after consultation with unions and employers. In the negotiation of national collective agreements, workers are represented by their union, and employers by their association, where one exists. (Employers' associations are presently grouped into two federations, one for the primary sector and the other for the secondary and tertiary sectors together.)

All collective agreements are now required by law to specify such matters as trial periods, required termination notice, minimum wages by category and supplemental wage rates,¹ the establishment of a commission to determine workers'

¹These supplemental rates include premiums for length of service and overtime, travel allowances, and compensation for termination of contract.

job categories, and provision for travel and transport allowances. All collective agreements must be concluded for a period of indefinite duration. Preference has been given by authorities to "national" collective agreements; and the law gives great force to their provisions by making infractions of these agreements subject to criminal penalties. (Thus, for all infractions which can be given a money value, the labor inspector can impose a fine. This, however, does not preclude civil action by any party subject to the agreement.)

The first collective agreement negotiated in former East Cameroon was in 1953, for auxiliary railroad personnel. Two years later, the first national collective agreement was signed, covering public works and construction workers. By the time that social and labor laws were being harmonized for the two federal states (over the period 1967-1969) collective agreements already included most branches of economic activity--covering 80% of workers in the private sector. Since then the number of collective agreements has remained constant at 18; ten are of the national type, some of which have been extended by decree to cover the entire sector concerned. (14:96)

In general, voluntary collective agreements by economic branch no longer play a very important role in the defense of workers' interests, since the most important matters of concern to workers are either covered in the Labor Code or set for all workers by the newly created Commission Nationale Paritaire des Conventions Collectives et des Salaires (see below). The fact that the CNPCCS now determines the entire hierarchy of minimum wage rates as well as certain wage supplements for all job classifications and all economic sectors removes the major raison d'être of voluntary collective agreements. However, since indemnities for dismissal or reassignment are not as yet determined by law, collective agreements which include these provide some additional advantages to workers covered by them. Collective agreements may also supplement the law's provisions by including arrangements more favorable to the worker in matters of obligations by both parties for giving notice to end a contract, higher overtime rates of pay, longer vacations, greater leniency for absence due to family difficulties or sickness, and greater protection for shop stewards. (14)

C. BRANCHES OF THE ECONOMY REGULATED BY DECREE

A number of branches for which there are no collective agreements are regulated by presidential decree and special statute. The state intervenes in these cases, either because there are no representative employer or worker

organizations capable of negotiating an agreement, or because attempts at negotiation have failed. The former is the case for domestic service employees. Their working conditions and pay scale are set by decree because the absence of any employers' organization renders negotiations impossible. In the case of private school teachers, the authorities stepped in to set job classification and a wage scale because repeated attempts to promote negotiations between employers and teachers had failed to yield an agreement. Wage rates for private school teachers were, thus, first set in February 1974, and then raised in August of the same year by 15% in the lowest wage category and 6% in the highest.

Employees of the State without civil service status (numbering an estimated 57,000 in 1974), and hence covered by the Labor Code, represent a special case. Since large numbers of these workers are employed in para-public industrial or commercial enterprises, they were initially given coverage by extension of the public works agreement. By 1972, in order to conform with the new CNPCCS national job classifications and wage scales, para-public enterprises were assigned for coverage to their respective economic sectors. Employees of the administration were, however, covered by a decree establishing for them wage rates by professional category and general working conditions. Since 1972, their wages, like those of private sector employees, have been raised twice, once in September 1973 and again in July 1974. In both cases the most important increases were for the lowest job categories: a total increase of 15% over the base salary for the lowest category of State employee and of 6% for the highest category.

Civil servants, numbering more than 26,000¹ in 1971, are of course covered by a special statute of rules and regulations for the public service. Their wages are not negotiated; they are set by decree. Wage supplements paid to civil servants in the form of allowances for family, lodging, and responsibility over subordinates represent a very large share of their total earnings. Even at relatively low levels of the administration, these extras can raise wages by more than 100%, and hence constitute a powerful attraction to the civil service. (13:34)

¹Thus, employees of the State--57,000 in the public sector and 26,000 civil servants--represent no less than one third of all wage labor for 1971.

D. WAGE DETERMINATION

In the matter of wage determination, a whole restructuring of the mechanism has taken place since 1971. Up until then, official intervention in the determination of wages was restricted to setting minimum rates by zone. The practice was begun between the two world wars and made a part of the law with the 1952 Overseas Labor Code. Initially, rates were set by zone to reflect differences in the cost of living, particularly between major urban centers and the rest of the territory; and in the hope that investors would be attracted to outlying areas by low wage rates. However, trends in the cost of living became generalized; and whereas investors did not respond to the difference in wages, workers did, moving toward higher wage zones and thus aggravating the problem of urban agglomerations. Minimum wage policy therefore changed; an attempt was made to reduce wage disparities by gradually reducing the number of zones, from nine in 1956 to three by 1968. There were actually two rates for each zone, the SMAG (salaire minimum agricole garanti) for the primary sector and the SMIG (salaire minimum interprofessionnel garanti) for all other sectors. The difference between the two was at first slight, then was increased until 1963, when for the lowest wage zone the ratio of SMAG to SMIG reached a low point of 78%. In 1968 the ratio in the lowest wage zone was raised to 80% and has been maintained since then at this level.¹ (15:107ff) There are pressures within the UNTC and labor administration favoring a further reduction of wage zones in order not to discriminate against workers in low wage zones such as the North, where the cost of living is rising rapidly--a burden on workers already employed and a factor making recruitment of qualified labor difficult. (4:Garoua 1972, Bafoussam 1974)

¹The fact that significant wage disparities still exist can be readily appreciated when it is pointed out that most primary sector workers (subject to SMAG) are located in the lowest wage zone while most other workers (subject to SMIG) are located in the highest wage zone; and thus, the minimum wages of the former are actually only 53% of the minimum wages of the latter (in 1975) rather than 80%.

In March 1976, the National Labor Council was preparing the way for the elimination of the system of SMIG and SMAG. With the 1971 adoption of the hierarchical minimum wage by professional category, sector and zone, SMIG and SMAG applied only to those unskilled workers having been employed less than six months in an enterprise, since after six months these workers were to be paid at the scale of the lowest rung on the hierarchical ladder. When decisions taken by the National Labor Council become law--as they most surely will--those workers formerly paid at the SMIG and SMAG rates will enter directly the lowest rung of the wage hierarchy for their sector and zone. This will raise the wages of the least skilled and most recently hired without significantly affecting the wage disparities between regions for unskilled workers.

It is possible to piece together various price and cost-of-living indexes recorded for the Cameroon since 1938 and to compare these with the evolution of minimum wage rates. The results show high rates of inflation for certain periods before Independence, with much lower rates since 1962. Between 1938 and 1945, prices and minimum wages rose at the annual rate of 15% and 13% respectively. Both prices and wages soared between 1945 and 1948, the prices rising by a factor of 3 and the wages by a factor of 6.5. Between 1949 and 1956, the rates of price and wage inflation slowed down considerably to 7.5% and 18% per year respectively. Wages rose at half that rate from 1956 to 1962. The rate of price inflation between 1962 and 1973 fell to 4.25% per year; wages lagged behind, rising at only 2% per year. In 1973 and 1974, raises in minimum wages nearly restored the purchasing power which had been lost gradually over the last ten years, but did not keep up with the more rapid rises in the cost of living since 1972 (at 11%/year). Actually, the general level of wages must have risen at nearly 8% annually between 1969 and 1974 (faster than the rise in the general consumer price index, but approximately equal to the rise in the consumer price index for an average Cameroonian family in Yaoundé-- the more relevant index for comparison with wage trends), as a result of adoption of the national job classification scheme in 1971 and of increases in the rates for each category in 1973 and 1974.¹

In 1971, a new dimension to wage determination was added with the establishment of an official hierarchy of minimum wages for each economic sector and zone. This proved necessary as a consequence of harmonization of labor law required by reunification of former British and French Cameroons into a Federal State. Since protection and benefits to labor accorded by law were much greater for the former French mandate territory than for the former British mandate territory, harmonization took the form of adopting the higher standards. When the new Labor Code of 1967 for the Federal State was made applicable by a series of decrees and ordinances in 1968-69, this resulted in a significant increase in minimum wages for unskilled workers in West Cameroon, thus requiring a complete revision of the whole wage structure. At the same time in East Cameroon, rising prices (reflecting the 1968 disturbances in France) and stagnant wages since 1964, caused unions in the East to press for a general increase

¹ These price and wage statistics have been gathered from numerous sources, including: 25; 15; 8; 11; 7; and 23. These sources do not all use the same measures. There are inevitable overlappings, contradictions, and gaps (e.g. price statistics are missing for the period 1956-1962). Thus, the rates cited should be considered highly approximate.

in wages. If workers in the West had negotiated increases separately at the level of the enterprise, as they were accustomed to doing, while workers in the East negotiated increases through revisions of eighteen sectoral collective agreements, this would have resulted in increased disparities in wages between the two federal states as well as greater disparities between economic branches in the East. In order to avoid widening gaps of this nature, the occasion was seized to create a legal body whose immediate function would be to establish official job classifications for each economic branch and then to set a hierarchy of minimum wages for each economic sector and zone. (14:99ff)

Thus, the Commission Nationale Paritaire des Conventions Collectives et des Salaires--an original Cameroonian institution--was created in 1969, composed of equal number of representatives named annually by workers' and employers' organizations. Their first official decision was for a general increase in wages by 4% in 1969 and 3% in 1970. Job classifications and the corresponding hierarchy of wages were established and became applicable for all sectors before the end of 1971. With the intention of reducing labor turnover, the CNPCCS superimposed on the twelve job categories a graduated system for advancement from one rung of the pay ladder to another. The original idea was that advancement to a higher rung should be at the discretion of the employer. However, the worker delegation to the CNPCCS proposed and finally got a provision that after five years at any rung in a job category, the worker must automatically be advanced to the next rung. (15:123)

Reclassifying workers was an enormous task and did not proceed without difficulties. A Ministerial order imposed a procedure whereby the proposed reclassification of workers in an enterprise first had to be submitted for approval to shop stewards, and in case of conflict was to be submitted for final decision to a tri-partite commission, presided over by the labor inspector. Challenges of decisions made by these commissions flooded the Labor Ministry in the first months following the adoption of this procedure. (14:114) The President was forced to denounce publicly employers who laid off workers rather than pay higher wages to workers whose job classifications had been altered upward. (4:Douala 1972)

In addition to wages, Cameroonian workers also benefit from a social security system financed by contributions from employers and employees, which since 1959 has paid allowances to families on the basis of the number of children.

In 1969, the National Social Insurance Fund began making provision for retirement, disability, and survivors benefits. Employer contributions to these various schemes represent about 20% of base salary. (20:112,196)

E. THE ROLE OF THE LABOR INSPECTOR

We have now discussed the major sources of norms regarding labor relations. It is the labor inspector¹ who is responsible for seeing that all legal norms concerning labor contracts, salary, and working conditions are respected. He is empowered to inspect on his own initiative and without prior notice any enterprise at any time. There he can determine whether requirements of the law are being observed. He may examine various registries of employment and wage payments which the employer is obliged to put at the inspector's disposal. He may call to the attention of the employer any infractions he has detected through examination of the registries and by comparison with official declarations made annually by the employer on his work force. He may also give an order to correct any features which do not meet safety and health standards. The labor inspector is further empowered to take the employer to court for infractions which are not rectified within a given time period. It appears that in spite of urging by the central administration, labor inspectors have usually left the task of legal pursuit to public prosecutors. It is hoped that with additional freedom of action given them under the new 1974 Labor Code, labor inspectors will be more vigorous in prosecuting offenders. (15:259)

Between 1964 and 1971, over 50% of all infractions reported by inspectors concerned failure by the employer to properly keep employment and wage registries or to submit annual work-force declarations. The other major category of infractions involved wages (approximately 20%), followed by length of the work day (8%), shop stewards (5%), hygiene and safety (6%) and work contracts (4%). Less than half led to the issuance of a compliance order. Impromptu

¹The number of labor inspectorates has increased from four in 1949 to 16 in 1975--with one in each of the provinces and nine at the departmental level. In principle there is one labor inspector, assisted by labor officers of lower rank, in each inspectorate. The size of the inspectorate depends on the importance of wage employment in the region or department and on the availability of trained personnel--supplied both by the National School of Administration and Magistracy and by the Regional African Center for Labor Administration.

visits to work places by labor inspectors should be a major arm in enforcement of the labor law. In fact, their effectiveness is severely limited by insufficient personnel and equipment (e.g. lack of vehicles to make inspection tours). Between 1964 and 1971, there was no noticeable increase in the number of days inspectors were on tour or in the number of infractions they discovered and reported (the latter averaged about 1,400 according to Ministry statistics). (27)

The modern labor inspector does not differ from his colonial predecessor in his concern to develop worker attitudes which will result in permanent attachment to the labor force. Both have always criticized the coming and going of workers at will in a tight labor situation as "irresponsible." (4: Bafoussam 1973) However, the modern labor inspector's paternalism in this respect can no longer take the form of actually forcing workers to stay on the job through police action. Rather, he seeks to persuade workers that as a result of instability they lose important benefits such as family allowances, and wage supplements which increase with length of service. On the other hand, direct concern for workers on the part of at least some labor inspectors can be seen in the frustration reported by one inspector over a labor climate calm but characterized by "peace without social justice"--which he attributed to employer ignorance of social and labor legislation or quiet refusal to apply the law. The situation is aggravated in some departments because the courts are slow to take up matters of infractions; and employers, realizing this, feel free to ignore the law. (4: Nyong-et-Keele 1974)

The labor inspector is the key figure in settlement of individual disputes arising out of failure by one or the other party to observe the legal norms, since it is to him that all such disputes must first be taken for an attempt at conciliation. An individual worker making a claim may be assisted by a union representative in the presentation of his case before the inspector and finally in court if the dispute is not settled. Between 1964 and 1971, an average 40% of all individual disputes were resolved through conciliation by labor inspectors (the rate of success having increased in the latter half of the period). Only a third of the complaints submitted annually to labor inspectors go to court¹ after an unsuccessful conciliation attempt; the remainder consist either of cases in process or cases dropped due to failure of

¹These courts sitting on labor and social matters are composed of a presiding judge, assisted by two assessors--one an employer and the other a worker--and a court clerk.

the complaining party to appear. (27) The considerable success of labor inspectors in their role as conciliators is clouded only by the fact that they have been thus forced to neglect certain of their other functions such as inspection tours. (15:246) In 1967, the most recent year for which statistics are reported on the nature of complaints, wages and overtime each accounted for approximately 20% of the total, while the remainder included such matters as insufficient notice given in terminating a contract, as well as failure to correctly evaluate and pay salary supplements.

F. COLLECTIVE DISPUTES

In the matter of collective disputes, Cameroonian law requires that all channels available for peaceful settlement--principally the conciliating offices of the labor inspector, and arbitration--be exhausted before a strike or lock-out may be called. In actual practice, collective disputes never reach the stage of arbitration. In the opinion of one expert, this can be explained by the reluctance of employers to expose themselves to close scrutiny by arbitration councils, which are given wide investigative powers, including the right to demand that the employer produce information on the financial, administrative, and economic situation of the firm. (15:313)

In recent years, statistics have not been released on the numbers and duration of work stoppages. Those reported between 1964 and 1971 involved from 4 to 30 firms a year, and an average of 4,200 workers (peak levels reaching 7,500 in 1966 and 10,200 in 1969, compared to recorded salaried work force in the latter year of 117,000). They were of very short duration. The maximum total reported man-days lost in a single year never exceeded 800, with the exception of 1969, when a loss of 4,500 man-days was reported. They most often involved disputes over wage rates and delays in payment, job categories and work norms. All were reported to have been settled through the conciliatory offices of the labor inspector (although in at least one case, strike leaders were reported to have been arrested). (27)

In the first half of 1975, collective disputes reported by the Labor Inspector in Yaoundé (covering the South Central Province) centered on concern over attempts by employers to cut back the work force, as well as on the

deterioration in the purchasing power of wages. The Inspector reported that the climate of labor relations was changing as economic conditions improve and as employers' respect for union freedom grows. Employers are said to be more conciliatory about taking back workers who have been laid off. And some institutions, such as banks and insurance companies, have responded to complaints of declining purchasing power by increasing various wage supplements or by adding a fictional 13th month's pay at the end of the year.

In the presence of a dispute already erupted, the labor inspector or his representative, while attempting to reconcile the parties, will usually also make it clear that work stoppages are in direct contravention of official policy and harmful to the economic welfare of the country. (4:Bertoua 1973) The force of his words may be brought home by the participation of Party and UNTC representatives in conciliation attempts. In cases where an administrator or even a government minister is called upon to intervene, his role becomes more that of an arbiter than of a conciliator, in that both parties are usually predisposed to accept his decision as final. Many have remarked on the fact that this procedure fits well into the African tradition of "palavers," in which respected leaders of the community are called upon to settle disputes peacefully.

An example of intervention by a labor inspector to restore peace may be taken from a case in one region where agricultural workers protested with slowdowns and work stoppages because they were not receiving their full pay, but only advances on wages. Calm was restored when workers were assured by the inspector that they were not being robbed. On one farm this assurance took the form of a promise by the employer that back wages would be paid in full with interest during the coffee harvest. (4:Bafoussam 1973)

An even more striking example may be given from the Littoral Province (site of Douala, the economic capital) for which 1974 was a particularly troublesome year, with strikes in several major industries (railroad, beverage, chocolate, aluminum). The troubled social climate was attributed to inflation which was being provoked as a result of the energy crisis. The Commission Nationale Paritaire reacted by raising wages substantially for all professional categories in July 1974 (less than a year after they were last raised). When workers continued to manifest discontent even after the increase in wages was announced, the Political Bureau of the national Party sent its

secretary in charge of union relations, along with the president of the UNTC Confederal Bureau, to Douala. They, together with the Labor Inspector, spoke to workers and met with union representatives until calm was restored.

The labor climate between 1964 and 1971 in terms of collective disputes does not appear to have differed significantly from that at the close of the colonial era, at least as evidenced by similar statistics on record for 1950-1957. During the earlier period, an average of 3,500 workers annually were reported to have been involved in labor disputes (peak levels being 8,700 in 1950 and 6,400 in 1955--compared to a reported salaried work force in the latter year of 120,000). Disputes rarely lasted more than three days and were usually quickly settled by conciliation. (27) A comparison of statistics available for these two periods before and after Independence does not show a rising level of labor agitation such as to endanger the economic stability of the country. Thus, it is difficult to justify on economic grounds alone official pressure which was put on unionists to break ties with the outside and to unite under the aegis of the Party. An explanation for this policy must rather be sought in the political sphere. This conclusion is supported by reports of the Labor Inspector for Douala, about the unhealthy social climate in the months following the last national Party Congress in February 1975, in which he wrote, "It must be pointed out that enterprises in the city of Douala have become hotbeds of political maneuverings." (4:Douala 1975)

G. LABOR PLACEMENT SERVICES

A National Employment Service, formerly called the National Manpower Service, was first created by order of the French High Commissioner in 1953. It was so ineffective in placing unemployed workers in jobs that in 1959, on the eve of Independence, the Prime Minister closed the employment service, transferring its functions to the regional labor inspectorates. In that year over 20,000 unemployed were registered with the service. By 1965, the numbers of registered unemployed had fallen below 3,000, not, it seems, because the service had begun to function effectively, but rather because the authorities forced large numbers of men without work to return to their villages in an effort to put down political uprisings from 1959 to 1961. (2:14) An ILO study on the National Employment Service in 1962 found the services to be totally ineffective, and recommended that the Labor Code requirements made of employers to report all hirings and dismissals should be dropped, since these required

a lot of work and yielded very little benefit in actual organization of the labor market. (22)

The failure to place workers is, of course, not basically due to an incompetent employment service, but rather to slow employment growth in the modern economy. (A more legitimate criticism of the Employment Service, and one equally applicable to Cameroonian personnel directors, is the charge of favoritism.) (4:Douala 1972) In the late sixties and early seventies, the numbers of registered unemployed rose to a disquieting 37,000 in 1973 of whom only 6,400 were successfully placed in jobs. (27) Thus, officially counted unemployed represent no less than 15% of the total employed labor force. This would seem to be an underestimate, since in 1959 there were an estimated 20,000 unemployed in Douala alone, representing 17% of the city's population and about 15% of all wage earners in Cameroon. Between 1958 and 1973 wage employment grew at an average rate of 3% per year,¹ whereas towns over 5,000 were growing between 5 and 10% per year. (20:53)

¹Even the most optimistic estimates for the third Five-Year Plan were for an increase of some 33,000 jobs between 1970 and 1975--the equivalent of an increase of 3.75% per year. (5:57)

CONCLUSION

We have seen that prior to the end of World War II, there was virtually no legal framework for labor relations. The economic dominance of employers was enhanced by an all-too-frequent willingness on the part of colonial authorities to bend to demands of employers faced with labor shortages. The administration frequently recruited, and sometimes requisitioned, labor for private use. It used its taxing and licensing powers to force natives into wage employment; and its police powers to keep labor turnover low. In short, the colonists easily and often mistook the smooth working and expansion of colonial enterprises to be the sine qua non of improving economic and social welfare in "French" Cameroon. Unable to defend himself under the law or in concert with his fellow laborers, the native worker's only defense was flight. When the administration was being particularly vigorous in its police action, even this channel of protest was effectively closed.

After World War II, the situation of workers began to change on two fronts. With the legalization of unions, workers were able for the first time to exert pressure on employers for improvement of wages and working conditions. Furthermore, in spite of resistance by employers, a comprehensive legal framework for labor relations was put into place. Unionism, which had passed through an initial period of repression, was now free to develop at a rapid pace. The active role of Cameroonian union leaders in pressing for Independence certainly added to the popularity of the labor movement. The presence of European union organizers representing various French labor federations--each with its own strategy and philosophy--reproduced these rivalries in Cameroon.

Since Independence, increasing reliance has been placed on the law as the principal means for regulating labor relations. The independent role of unions has been severely reduced with the institution of a unified labor front under the aegis of the Party. Simultaneously, the traditional role of unions in negotiating collective agreements has been replaced by tri-partite (government, workers, and employers) negotiations at the highest level, determining professional categories, wage rates, and wage supplements. This centralization has left grassroots unionism somewhat estranged. Dissatisfaction at the local level cannot take the form of officially-called strikes--both because strikes are for all practical purposes illegal, and because the UNTC has no voice independent of that of the Party. This does not, however, prevent wildcat strikes from erupting.

Since within the French tradition, reproduced in the Cameroonian Labor Code, the worker's defense rests on the law, the adequacy of that defense will depend upon how vigorous public authorities and unions are in informing workers of their rights and providing efficient means at all levels--shop stewards, labor inspectors, and the courts--to enforce the law. The obvious obstacles to efficiency and justice are ignorance on the part of workers and employers alike, untrained shop stewards, inadequate resources at the disposal of inspectors and the courts, and the ever-present temptation to corrupt at every level.

APPENDIX

Note on Colonial Labor Force: Forced and Voluntary

The term "forced labor," as used in reference to the French colonial period does not imply complete absence of remuneration--since under the French a very modest rate of pay was ostensibly paid laborers--but rather forced recruitment. Most, but not all, recruitment for large public works between the two World Wars was involuntary. (According to French authorities, 16 percent of the labor force on these public projects in 1926 was in fact voluntary.)

There was actually another form of forced labor in use called "prestation," by which every able-bodied man was expected to give ten days of work annually for "community improvement" work such as road upkeep. This was considered to be a "tax," since it was possible to avoid work by paying a fixed daily rate. This rate (1F/day in 1921) was manipulated upward when rising incomes permitted too many men to pay off the tax in money rather than in work. Another tax, based on the number of adult males was also manipulated to increase the numbers of workers "offering themselves" for employment in the private sector. (The collection of this tax, however, posed some problems for men wishing to leave their home--where the tax was collected by the local chief--to find employment in another locality (see page 7.)

Statistics on the number of man-days of prestation work each year over the period 1931-1937 imply that as many as 348,000 men, out of a total adult male population of about 625,000, were obliged to work by this system at least 10 days. It is interesting to note that if the man-years represented by prestation labor are added to man-years of labor on large public works projects (mostly involuntary), forced labor accounted for from 21 to 32 percent of the employed labor force in the years 1931-1937. (See Table below.) Their numbers increased over the period from a low of about 6,000 man-years to a high of about 14,500 man-years-- Since over these same years employment in the private sector more than doubled, from approximately 23,000 in 1931 to about 49,000 in 1937, it is easy to see why private employers complained bitterly about competition from the colonial administration over a limited labor force.

The numbers of man-years represented by private employment and forced labor between 1931 and 1937 increased from a low of about 27,000 to a high of about 68,000. If the figure of 64,828 in 1935 is compared to the estimated

size of the adult male population (616,143), it can be seen that 10.5 percent of the adult male population was employed in some form of wage or tax labor. This is an astoundingly large percentage for the period, especially (1) when compared to the year 1970, for which the comparable figure cannot be much higher than 18 percent (wage earners in that year being approximately 8 percent of the potentially active adult population); and (2) when consideration is given to the fact that percentages of the adult male population employed must have been much higher in those regions most thoroughly penetrated by the French (and presumably much higher in the north and southeast). In these same regions, of course, large numbers of planters produced for the money economy. There were an estimated 500,000 individuals (mostly women and children) producing for export on peasant plots in the year 1936 (estimated on the basis of 200 kilograms/year/individual, for an export that year of 98,000 metric tons).

When consideration is given to the factors of low wages and fear of work associated with the abuses of forced labor; and when the actual numbers of workers are counted and estimated for employment, export production, and subsistence needs; it becomes obvious that the French colonial labeling of Cameroonians as "lazy" was grossly libelous.

TABLE: DISTRIBUTION OF THE COLONIAL LABOR FORCE 1931-1937
(Man-Years)

SECTOR	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937
1. Commerce	4,190	4,876	4,406	4,492	9,863	11,483	12,129
2. Agriculture	12,986	8,945	10,680	16,913	21,207	22,954	22,297
3. Industry & Forestry	4,759	4,025	5,814	11,468	12,191	17,546	14,265
4. Total Private	21,935	17,846	20,900	32,873	43,261	51,983	48,691
5. Private Porterage	n.a.	32	155	522	1,050	805	585
6. Administrative Porterage	n.a.	811	663	747	705	580	520
7. Large Public Works	4,920	2,192	2,030	3,648	3,449	3,278	3,850
8. Prestation (tax labor)	5,986	6,321	4,201	11,002	10,899	11,287	10,727
9. Total Forced Labor ^a	10,906	8,513	6,231	14,650	14,348	14,565	14,577
10. (% of Total Employed Labor Force)	(31%) ^b	(32%)	(19%)	(27%)	(22%)	(21%)	(23%)
11. Douala Public Works	--	--	5,000	5,000	5,464	--	--
12. Total Employed Labor Force	34,800 ^b	27,202	32,949	53,792	64,828 ^c	67,933	64,373

Source: Rapports Annuels par le gouvernement francais au Conseil de la Société des Nations, 1931-1937.

^asum rows 7 and 8

^bapproximation

^c10.5% of estimated total adult male population (616,143)

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