



**Industrial Relations Systems  
in Colonial West Africa:  
A Comparative Analysis of French West Africa  
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**Elliot J. Berg**

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Industrial Relations Systems in Colonial West Africa--

A Comparative Analysis of French West Africa and the Cold Coast

There has been considerable writing in recent years about African labor, the bulk of it focussed on trade unionism and in particular, the political aspects of trade unions.<sup>1</sup> Few studies have appeared, however, which are concerned with the broader industrial relations environment within which African trade unions have operated, and comparative analyses of African systems of industrial relations are very rare.<sup>2</sup>

The lack of comparative studies is surprising as well as unfortunate, since one of Africa's continuing sources of interest for social scientists is precisely its potential for study of the process of institutional

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. Meynaud and A. Salah-Bey, Le Syndicalisme Africain (Payot, Paris, 1963); Andreas November, L'évolution du mouvement syndical en Afrique occidentale (Mouton, Paris 1965); B.C. Roberts, Labour in the Tropical Territories of the Commonwealth (L.S.E., London, 1964); Ioan Davis, African Trade Unions (Penguin, Baltimore, 1966); Jack Wooddis, Africa: The Lion Awakes (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1961). Useful bibliographies are: W.H. Friedland, Unions, Labor and Industrial Relations in Africa: An Annotated Bibliography (Cornell, Ithaca, 1965); Arthur Ross (editor), Industrial Relations and Economic Development (London, Macmillan, 1966), pp. 325-406, and in particular, pp. 344-56; Ioan Davis, op. cit. pp. 233-44.

<sup>2</sup> The International Labor Organization study, African Labor Survey (Geneva, 1958) provides much useful background, but, as is usually the case with surveys of this sort, it is very general in scope and legalistic in tone. A recent book by B.C. Roberts and L. Greyfié de Bellecombe, Collective Bargaining in African Countries (London, Macmillan, 1967) is explicitly comparative in intent, and does contain observations and information of a comparative kind. While it is a noteworthy first step toward comparative analysis in this area, it too is quite general, largely descriptive and based heavily on documents available in Geneva.

transfer and social change on a comparative basis. The sources of this appeal are well known. Into African areas with similar cultural, social and economic systems were injected a variety of new institutions, including industrial relations institutions. The study of how these institutions were adapted to the new environment can tell a great deal about the process of social change, and about the nature of the colonial relationship as well. The evaluation of industrial relations institutions is also of interest to students of comparative industrial relations, especially since studies of non-Western systems of industrial relations are still very few.

In this paper I will describe and compare some of the main aspects of industrial relations in British and French colonial territories in West Africa, using French West Africa and the Gold Coast (now Ghana) as units of comparison.<sup>1</sup> The focus is on the period before independence, roughly the years between World War II and the late 1950's. I will try to explain the nature and sources of the differences in the two areas and will comment briefly on some longer-term implications of these differences.

Systematic comparative analysis of industrial relations systems is a complicated task, partly because little usable theory exists to serve as a general guide to analysis. The most ambitious attempt to generalize about industrial relations systems is undoubtedly John Dunlop's recent

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<sup>1</sup>Comparison of French West Africa and the Gold Coast is not of course the same as comparison of French and British African colonies in general. Not only were there large differences within French West Africa, and between French West Africa and other French colonies in Africa, but the Gold Coast's system of industrial relations differed in some respects from that which developed elsewhere in British West Africa, not to speak of East and Central Africa. Analysis of the French West African and Gold Coast cases nonetheless sheds considerable light on the general character of industrial relations in British and French colonial Africa.

effort.<sup>1</sup> For a variety of reasons, however, his analysis is not much help in explaining West African industrial relations patterns.<sup>2</sup> The most suggestive work on national industrial relations systems has been essentially "institutional" in approach, in the sense that it tries to explain the characteristics of particular industrial relations arrangements by analysis of the specific historical, political, economic and cultural factors which have shaped them. In his study of Danish industrial relations, for example, Walter Galenson stresses the timing of industrialization and the characteristics of the labor force as key determinants.<sup>3</sup> Students of the U.S. system have emphasized such factors as the heterogeneity of the labor force, the openness of the society, the favorable labor market conditions, and similar factors as inducing American trade unions to opt,

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<sup>1</sup> John T. Dunlop, Industrial Relations Systems, (Harper & Row, New York, 1958).

<sup>2</sup> Dunlop is most concerned with classification of factors affecting rulemaking at the work site; he gives less attention to determinants of national systems of industrial relations. His discussion of the evolution of industrial relations systems over the course of economic development puts forward a number of bold generalizations, some of which are relevant to the problems discussed in this paper. But the usefulness of Dunlop's analysis is reduced by his emphasis on the character of the ruling elite as a major determinant of the features of an industrial relations system, and especially by a classification of ruling elites which is not altogether meaningful. In particular, the fact that most of the industrial relations systems in the less developed world developed under colonial rule is not adequately taken into account in his analysis. In Dunlop's later collaborative volume (Industrialism and Industrial Man, was written with C. Kerr, F.H. Harbison, and C.A. Myers) colonial administrators are elevated into one of the elite categories into which the authors put all modernizing groups, and the character of which is made a key factor in explaining different systems of industrial relations. But this is also unsatisfactory. Both French and British West African industrial relations systems, for example, were shaped by colonial administrators, but their policies and behavior were very different, and were determined not by their similar status, but by the different political and ideological contexts within which they worked, as will be pointed out below.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Galenson, The Danish System of Labor Relations: A Study in Industrial Peace, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1952).

in their formative years, for collective bargaining and job-oriented unionism. In combination with the spread of national product and factor markets, this gave rise to a craft focus, national unions as the basic unit in the union structure, the concept of exclusive jurisdiction and other features distinctive in the American system of industrial relations.<sup>1</sup>

This same broadly institutional approach will be followed in this paper. I will try to identify within each of the two West African areas the economic, political, historical factors that seem to have been most important in influencing the pattern of development of the industrial relations systems under colonial rule. For reasons of space and lack of knowledge, not all aspects of industrial relations will receive attention. Much of what is covered is meant to be exploratory and tentative, since so much about the two areas in the colonial period remains obscure.

#### I. The Characteristics of the Two Industrial Relations Systems<sup>2</sup>

The major differences between the French West African and Gold Coast industrial relations systems can be summarized by considering in turn the

<sup>1</sup>Cf., Lloyd Ulman, The Rise of the National Trade Union: The Development and Significance of its Structure, Governing Institutions and Economic Policies, (Harvard University Press, 1955).

<sup>2</sup>For general background, see the works by Roberts, Roberts and Greyfié de Bellecombe, and the 1958 I.L.O. African Labor Survey, all cited earlier. See also, for more details on French West African and Gold Coast labor relations: E. Berg, "French West Africa", in W. Galenson, (ed.), Labor and Economic Development, (Wiley, N.Y., 1959), pp. 186-260; J.I. Roper, Labour Problems in West Africa, (Penguins, Harmondsworth, 1958); articles in Bulletin of the Inter-African Labour Institute (London), September and November, 1955, January, 1960, and #2 of 1963, and the article by Rimmer in Industrial and Labor Relations Review, January, 1961, pp. 206-226. A good survey of labor law in French Africa at the end of the colonial period is P.F. Gonidec and M.Kirsch, Droit du travail des territoires d'outre-mer, (Paris, 1958).

trade union movements, the organization of employers, the role of Government, the structure of collective bargaining and dispute patterns.

#### A. Trade Union Organization

The major differences in trade union organization between the two areas were: (1) a greater degree of political involvement and ideological concern in French West Africa; (2) less attention in French West Africa to the development of trade union institutions in the sense of organizational machinery and procedures, and less activity at the shop level; (3) a smaller degree of differentiation in French African trade union structure along economic or occupational lines, and a greater degree of centralization of authority at the territorial level.

##### 1. Politics and Ideology

It is not easy to define and measure the "politicalness" or degree of ideological commitment of a labor movement, and it is even harder to compare these qualities.<sup>1</sup> All labor organizations have interest in issues beyond those of bread and butter, and all mix some politics with some job-oriented and institutional (union-building) activity. The relative importance of the two components of union activity varies between countries and over time within countries. It is nonetheless fairly clear that the mix of activities contained relatively more politics and ideology in French West Africa than in the Gold Coast; in the allocation of trade union energy, time and money, the French African unions gave relatively more attention to larger social and political issues than did the Gold Coast unions, and relatively

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<sup>1</sup> See, for a discussion of some of the semantic and conceptual problems, E. Berg and J. Butler, "Trade Unions" in J.S. Coleman and C. Rosberg, (eds.), Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa, (Los Angeles and Berkeley, 1964).



less to job-oriented or union-oriented activities.

One rather intangible indication is to be found in the marked differences in the language of trade unionism and trade unionists in the two areas. Marxist thinking of one shade or another permeated the writing and speech of French African unionists, as is evident in the documentary legacy of the trade union movement--convention records, constitutions, newspapers, etc. The mainstream of thinking and writing in the Gold Coast labor movements contains much less in the way of political or social philosophy or concern, and very little of a traditional Marxist flavor in particular.

A firmer clue is the fact that the divisions within the labor movement in French West Africa were apparently due almost exclusively to political factors arising either from local political circumstances or from the rival union situation inherited from France, itself largely ideological in nature.<sup>1</sup> In the Gold Coast, political disagreements played a much less important role; only for a brief period in the early 1950's and again in the year before independence were they at all significant. Even then the ideological content was slight, and in any event the conflict existed almost entirely at the Trade Union Congress level. Trade union splits did occur in the Gold Coast but these had their origins for the most part in job-oriented conflicts:

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the colonial period the unions in French Africa were grouped into rival centrals attached to the three main French union centrals (the communist) Confédération Générale du Travail; the (socialist) Confédération Générale du Travail-Force Ouvrière; the (Christian socialist) Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens).

<sup>2</sup> In 1953, there were two central labor organizations, divided on the overt issue of international affiliation. Also at issue were differences in trade union willingness to associate with the Convention People's Party. (See E. Berg and J. Butler, op. cit., for a brief discussion.)

differences between blue and white collar groups, for example, or dissatisfaction of a particular craft inside a larger industrial union. Thus in the 1950's, first railway engineers and then maritime workers seceded from the railway union because they felt the railway clerks were running the union and that their particular interests were not being taken into account. There were also some breakaways that reflected ethnic particularism or regional conflicts.<sup>1</sup> There appear to have been no comparable sources of internal division within the French West African unions, though too little is known about the history of trade unionism in that area to be certain.

## 2. Union Structure

In the evolution of every trade union movement, two related sets of structural questions arise. The first involves the form of organization to be adopted. Should an electrician working for the XYZ Construction Company join with other electricians working in his and other enterprises in an electricians' union (a craft union); with all other employees of the XYZ Company to form an XYZ employees' union (a "house" or "company" union); with all other employees of the XYZ Company and employees of other enterprises in the construction industry to form a construction workers' union (industrial union); or, finally, with all other workers in his locality or industry, in a geographically-based union?

The second question, implicit in the first, relates to the distribution of functions and power among the various layers of union structure. How is authority within the labor movement to be divided among local unions, national unions, intermediate bodies, and the central confederation?

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<sup>1</sup> See below, p. 32

Between French West Africa and the Gold Coast some fundamental differences arose in these structural matters. According to the theoretical blueprint of union structure in the French-speaking areas, workers were organized in Syndicats Professionels, occupational unions most often industrial in scope; the electricians in XYZ Company in Dakar would be organized with all other XYZ workers in an XYZ Company Section Syndicale, a local unit of the Construction Workers' Union of Dakar. The structure then rose horizontally (geographically) as well as vertically (occupationally). The Construction Workers' Union of Dakar joined with all other Dakar unions in a kind of city central or district council--a Union Locale or Régionale, which was grouped with other Union Locales on the national level into a Territorial Federation--a Union Territoriale (after independence Union Nationale). The Construction Workers' Union of Dakar would also be grouped with construction workers in other parts of Senegal in a Construction Worker's Union of Senegal.

The key organizational unit, where true authority and sovereignty in the labor movement resided, was the geographical federation--the Union Territoriale. The "house" (or enterprise-level) unions never had much vitality. An all-French West Africa-wide organization came into being after 1951, but was mainly a coordinating body with little authority. Industrial unions, except among teachers and railwaymen, existed more on paper than in reality, though after 1956 they assumed a somewhat more important role in negotiations. Throughout most of the history of the labor movement in French-speaking Africa, the territorial (national) federations handled grievances for all workers, bargained on most important questions, and decided the major strikes as well as led them.

In the Gold Coast, a different structure emerged. The basic unit became the "house" or company-wide union. Industrial unions developed in mines and railways and in a few other sectors, as in French West Africa. But most unions were limited in scope to a single company. The Trades Unions Congress which existed at the top before independence was a relatively powerless body, with little money, few full-time staff workers and limited control over the constituent unions. Authority in the labor movement of the Gold Coast thus tended to be more decentralized than in French-speaking Africa, and the geographical bodies so important in the French West African union structure had no counterpart there.

### 3. Institution-Building and Shop-Level Activity

As might be expected from the relatively greater political commitment and the structure of the labor movement, the French West African unions were less concerned than Gold Coast unions with organizational matters, with improving the union's institutional position, with procedures and administrative machinery. And, related to this, the French African unions had less presence at the shop or office level, though in neither area did the labor organizations have much of a hold among the rank and file. There are a number of indicators of these differences.

(a) In French West African trade union affairs of the period there seems to have been very little preoccupation with matters relating to internal union machinery; neither trade union administration nor structural problems were much discussed at conventions, except occasionally and when they bore on broader political issues.<sup>1</sup> Among unions of comparable strength

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<sup>1</sup>At the UGTAN (general Union of African Workers) Convention in Conakry in January 1959, for example, there was considerable discussion of "corporatism"--that is, tendencies toward job-oriented union positions as opposed to "revolutionary" unionism. But this apparent discussion over union structure was simply the overt manifestation of basic political differences which could not prudently be discussed openly.

in the two areas, the internal administrative machinery was more developed in the Gold Coast--committee structure and branch organizations were more articulated, for example, in the Gold Coast Mineworkers' Union or railwaymen's organizations, than in the mining or railway unions in French West Africa. No one who sat through union conferences in the two areas during the colonial period could fail to be impressed by these differences: the French African union discussions were general, highly colored with Marxist rhetoric, almost without reference to the humdrum details of running a union organization. In the Gold Coast there was a laborious concern with procedural matters and organizational affairs; conventions were heavy with committee reports on job-oriented questions, sub-committee reports, arduously-compiled financial statements, and--for a union like the Mineworkers--long discussion of Branch-Headquarters relationships.<sup>1</sup>

(b) The most direct impact of unions on workers is normally in the area of grievance handling. The French African unions played a significantly smaller role with respect to grievances than did the Gold Coast unions. There was very little formal grievance machinery in either place but consultation and negotiation machinery at the shop or office level was more frequent in the Gold Coast. In the bigger private firms and government departments there was a fairly well developed system of joint consultations.<sup>2</sup> During these sessions, extensive discussions took place concerning minor wage matters and working conditions within the firm, and local union representatives had a chance to discuss worksite problems and grievances with

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<sup>1</sup>Cf., Report of the 14th Annual Convention, Gold Coast Mineworkers' Union, Tarkwa, 1958, (mimeographed).

<sup>2</sup>In 1953-54, for example, some 47 such committees were functioning in private enterprises and 125 in public services. (Gold Coast, Annual Report of the Labor Department, 1953-4).

employer representatives. Similar opportunities were rare in French Africa. Individual grievances there were almost invariably handled by the representatives of the trade union central, not the local representatives. At the local level, the labor law provided (as in France) for the election of workers' delegates (délegués de personnel), who were to act as spokesmen on grievances. Although the unions usually put forward slates at these elections, and so were represented in this sense at the local level, there was an ambiguity in the relationship between workers' delegates and trade unions which did not exist in the Gold Coast. It is not clear, in any event, that the worker delegate system functioned satisfactorily--though very little is known about how they worked in practice. The opinion of the French Labor Inspectorate officials in the early and mid-fifties were generally negative on their performance.<sup>1</sup> The fact that workers so frequently went directly

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<sup>1</sup>The system of workers' delegates was introduced into French West Africa in 1937, by the decree on collective agreements of March 20, 1937. According to the Labor Inspector in the Ivory Coast in 1948, the system functioned poorly:

"...often the delegate is an old man, most of the time illiterate, who (the workers) push forward to take on a thankless job in every way similar to that done by the village chief vis-a-vis the administration. The favor that these representatives enjoy with their comrades is nil; that...which they enjoy with employers is largely fictitious, a fiction which is carefully maintained by the employers however...." (Inspection Territoriale du Travail de la Côte d'Ivoire, Rapport Annuel, 1948, cited in Inspection Générale du Travail de l'AOF, Rapport Annuel, 1949, p. 59.)

In the Sudan, (now Mali) it did not seem much better. "The workers have not generally profited from these provisions (on workers' delegates) because they are either union members and do not therefore understand the need of having, alongside their unions, a permanent representative..., or because they are not union members and any type of organization is not of interest to them." (Inspection Générale du Travail de l'AOF, Rapport Annuel, 1949, p. 59).

to the Bourse du Travail and to the permanent representatives of the union central located there, suggests that it did not work very well.

Equally little is known about the actual functioning during these years of one other shop-level institution: the joint classification committees, provision for which was included in collective agreements. These committees, composed of worker and employer representatives, were intended to resolve grievances related to job grading. Whether their creation significantly lessened the flow of classification grievances to the labor courts is not known.

The presence of labor courts, and the absence of comparable institutions in the Gold Coast, further contributed to the dilution of a trade union presence at the shop-level in French Africa. Not only was there in the French West African system less face-to-face discussion between unions and employers about local issues and grievances, but these issues were less frequently settled directly by the parties.<sup>1</sup>

(c) Accounting and financial problems absorbed far less leadership energy in French West Africa than in the Gold Coast. The Gold Coast unions operated on locally-raised dues revenues to a greater extent and were much more concerned with financial reporting, both within the labor movement, and between the unions and the Government. The French West African unions could exist without much dues income, thanks to provision by municipalities of office space in a Bourse du Travail, and the French administration practice of allowing civil servants to be "detached" with pay for union duties.

(d) Broader efforts at rank and file education were made in the Gold Coast. Soon after the formation of the first university, in the late 1940's

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<sup>1</sup> Mediation and conciliation by labor officers was general in both systems, however.

an Extra-Mural Department was set up, which sent out trade union tutors throughout the 1950's and held frequent in-service training courses for trade unionists . In 1953 the Trades Union Congress, with the help of the British TUC and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, set up a Workers' Education Association, which was supposed to do rank-and-file education, though what it actually did is obscure. In French Africa, the only union education efforts were those that took union leaders abroad, though the Christian unions in Senegal did set up some courses in the late 1950's. This seems to have been the only effort of its kind in all of French West Africa before independence.

#### B. The Organization of Employers

Differences in trade union organization were matched by differences in employer organization in the two areas. In French Africa almost all employers were members of an industry-based trade association; there were over 120 such associations in French West Africa in the early 1950's. Through their trade association most employers belonged to one of the two major groups which did most bargaining for employers: an organization of employers in manufacturing and construction (UNISYNDI, Union Syndical des Industriels), and an organization of employers in trade, commerce and services (SCIMPEX, Syndical des Commerçants Importateurs et Exportateurs). (Where there were expatriate planters, as in Guinea and the Ivory Coast, they had their own organizations.) Each of the two major employer associations maintained an office with paid staff in each of the territories, in Dakar, and in Paris. Finally, overseas employers formed a special section in the French Employers Association (CNPF, Comité National du Patronat Français).



In Ghana employer organization was much sketchier. The big mining companies, with one major exception, were members of the Chamber of Mines, which bargained for its members over wages and had a joint policy on conditions of service. There were a variety of trade associations and numerous chambers of commerce. But there was no joint bargaining other than in the mining industry. The Ghana Employers' Association, composed of most of the important British enterprises, was a poorly-financed, loosely-organized group, which played no significant role in collective bargaining. Some employers in commercial enterprises attempted late in the colonial period to organize along racial lines: the Indian Merchants Association, the Syrian Merchants Association, etc. But when in 1958 these associations were urged to bargain collectively with a newly-formed Union of Distributive Retail and Allied Workers, they were unable to do so effectively. British-based firms had relations with the British Overseas Employers' Federation, but the links were less formal and less continuous than were those that tied the French overseas employers to the French Employers' Association.

### C. The Role of Government

In both areas government wage decisions were the major determinants of the general level of wages and the wage structure. In the Gold Coast, Government influenced general movements in wages through its position as employer of over half the non-agricultural labor force. Private sector wage changes tended to follow those of Government, but there were substantial variations between firms and industries, and the whole process of private sector wage determination was decentralized. There was, for example, no statutory minimum wage until after independence. Decisions about non-wage

conditions of employment were also decentralized and varied fairly widely from firm to firm.<sup>1</sup> They were either negotiated between employers and unions (notably in the mining industry and the United Africa Company, where relatively strong unions existed) or were decided upon unilaterally by employers, where unions were weak or absent. The scope for determination of these conditions by the parties was relatively large, since the law was not extensive on these matters.

In French Africa, it was otherwise. There was first of all a statutory minimum wage (salaire minimum interprofessionnelle garanti, or SMIG), which affected privately as well as publicly employed workers, and which became the effective rate for unskilled labor throughout the territory. Furthermore, the change in the SMIG was the basis of discussion for changes in the wages of skilled workers. And finally, the scope of bargaining was highly restricted; all the basic conditions of employment were set down by law-- overtime rates, vacations, etc. The law also prescribed the form of collective contracts, including directives as to what had to be included in the agreement. The government role in the negotiation of collective agreements was more direct than in the Gold Coast, since agreements were negotiated in the presence of government officials, and these could be "extended" to cover entire industries, thereby acquiring the force of law.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf., Report of the Ghana Employers' Association on Terms and Conditions of Service, 1957. See also, Roberts and Grefié de Bellecombe, Ch. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Much has been made of this particular characteristic of the French African bargaining system by outside observers, who suggest that it made collective bargaining in the French areas more an administrative arrangement than true bargaining. (See: P.F. Gonidec and M. Kirsch, Droit du travail des territoires d'outre-mer, (Paris, 1958), p. 143; and Roberts and de Bellecombe, p. 63 ff.)

The colonial governments in French West Africa intervened more intensively and directly in the procedures of collective bargaining, but not in all respects. With respect to wages, bargaining procedures were more or less the same in all the territories of French West Africa. There existed in each territory a tri-partite (Government, Employers, Unions) Labor Advisory Committee (Commission Consultative du Travail), whose main, almost exclusive function was to discuss changes in the SMIG. The "bargaining" procedure consisted of the two parties presenting the Government representative with conflicting claims as to how much the cost of living had gone up since the last SMIG revision;<sup>1</sup> in states other than Senegal, demands also focussed on closing the gap between the SMIG in Senegal and other states. More meaningful wage bargaining took place when it came time to discuss the wages of graded workers--that is, those in skill categories above that of unskilled laborers. These discussions took place in tripartite territorial Joint Councils (commissions mixtes), also under the chairmanship of a government official. In these councils, collective agreements were worked out. In the French areas, therefore, the procedures of wage determination, and collective bargaining in general, were highly structured.

In the Gold Coast the instrument of wage changes in the public sector was the wage or salary commission, a body of experts, usually chaired by an expatriate called in from Britain. The major wage changes after World War II were based on the recommendations emanating from such commissions: the Harri-  
gan Commission in 1946, Korsah in 1947, Lidbury and Gbedemah in 1951 and

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<sup>1</sup>In periods of price stability, as in the mid-50's, bargaining revolved around arguments as to what was "suitable" to include in the "minimum subsistence budget" (budget du minimum vital), the composition and cost of which was the peg around which all discussions over wages took place.

1952, Waugh in 1957. Between commission reports, bargaining took place mainly with respect to cost of living adjustments; public sector unions demanded, and generally won, cost-of-living allowances. But what usually happened was that between commission reports, "anomalies" in the wage structure and dissatisfaction with cost of living allowances led to an accumulation of grievances; the consequent pressures were temporarily dealt with by the succeeding salaries commission.

Bargaining over wages and conditions of employment in the private sector almost invariably involved demands by unions that employers meet government rates or conditions. Changes in the general level and structure of wages of privately-employed workers did tend to follow government changes, though larger enterprises retained considerable flexibility. Each time a salaries commission was appointed to recommend changes in government wages, the private sector held its breath. When the commission issued its report there was a flurry of negotiation (and strikes) to decide how much of it would be applied to private firms. The important point is that Government's role in determining private sector wages and conditions, either through direct wage regulation or by legislation, was far less significant than in French Africa.

Colonial administrations in French Africa were not uniformly more "interventionist" in industrial relations matters than the British administration in the Gold Coast. In several respects the roles were reversed. Thus, in matters of political activity, French administrations generally took a more permissive line toward the trade unions. In 1949-50, when there were a number of serious "incidents" in the Ivory Coast and Upper Volta, the authorities in those territories did move to suppress overtly political acts by the

trade unions. But the normal response of the colonial administrators was to play the political game themselves, manipulating (where they could) trade unions as they tried to manipulate political parties and other groups. There was certainly much less lecturing by French government officials on the virtues of "non-political" trade unionism, as compared with that by British officials in the Gold Coast.

Related to this was the policy stance regarding the scope of activity allowed to civil servant organizations. In the Gold Coast, as throughout British Africa, civil servants had particular restrictions put on them, especially insofar as their activities touched political nerves. In French West Africa this was decidedly less of a concern, and trade union activities among civil servants were subject to fewer constraints.

Finally, the British were a good deal tougher about accounting practices than were the French. In the Gold Coast, trade unions were required by law to register with the Registrar of Trade Unions and to submit annual reports on membership and finances. Proper reporting and accounting was taken seriously by the Registrar of Trade Unions, who subjected the unions to a continuous flow of nagging letters and complaints about inadequate financial accounting.

The French West African unions were not exposed to the same controls. It is true that in the beginning years formal regulation by law was more extensive than in the Gold Coast. In the latter country, for example, the Trade Union Ordinance which appeared just before World War II required registration and financial accounting as a precondition for union recognition. In French Africa the 1937 legislation which authorized unions, had accounting regulations, educational qualifications for membership and leadership, and prohibition of political discussion by some of the new associations of wage

earners. In 1944, most of these restrictions were swept away. Between 1944 and 1952 there existed a peculiar legal situation in labor matters; it was not clear which laws applied to Africa and which did not. African trade unionists claimed that the French Constitution was applicable in certain matters of African labor law. They therefore refused to comply with unfavorable legal provisions supposedly in force in French West Africa.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the registration and accounting provisions of the 1937 law on trade unions were ignored after 1944, and the unions sent in no reports. In the Labor Code of 1952, the omnibus labor law which governed industrial relations until independence, no provision was made for registration and regulation of financial practices.

D. The Nature and Structure of Collective Bargaining

As has already been suggested in the discussion of wage determination above, the structure of bargaining--like the union and employer organizations themselves--was more centralized in French West Africa than in the Gold Coast. In the Gold Coast, typical negotiations took place between the management of a given plant or company and the employees of that company. In some of the bigger firms bargaining was on an establishment rather than on enterprise-wide basis; the United Africa Company Employees' Union, for example, did not negotiate for all the employees of the UAC in the Gold Coast, since important subsidiary companies had their own unions. In a few cases, bargaining took place along "craft" lines, though this was rare; the main example was in the railways, where the skilled locomotive engineers

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<sup>1</sup>Until 1952, for example, a complicated procedure of compulsory conciliation was theoretically in force, and any strike occurring before this procedure had been exhausted was "illegal". In fact, this old law was ignored by African trade unions, most strikes occurred "unlawfully", and the law was not really applied.

had their own union and negotiated separately. In some cases, too, there were approaches to industry-wide bargaining. The most important example was in the mining industry, where the Mines Employees' Union and the Chamber of Mines bargained for most mines and companies. The African Manganese Company, however, which employed approximately twenty per cent of the mineworkers in the country, was not a member of the Chamber of Mines and bargained directly with the union.

Bargaining arrangements as they existed in FWA are less easy to summarize quickly, especially for those accustomed to the Anglo-Saxon trade union tradition. What especially complicates matters is that major changes occurred after 1956, due to the application of new labor legislation. The only name that would seem to fit the FWA bargaining structure before 1956 is "regional bargaining". In each of the territories, union and management representatives selected by the government met with government representatives in the territorial Joint Councils (commissions mixtes), where, as noted above, they worked out long collective agreements covering large blocks of workers. In some territories there was one basic agreement covering all African workers; this was the case in Senegal and Dahomey. In other territories there were two agreements for African workers--one for all manual workers, the other covering all office workers. Expatriate European workers were covered by separate agreements.

These general collective agreements covered wages for all graded labor, and almost all conditions of work--hours of work, overtime payments, leave arrangements, etc. Some of the particulars of the contract were left open for negotiations by local employers' groups and unions--generally meeting on an industry-wide basis. Because so much of the substance of the agreement was covered by law or was specified in the territory-wide agreement, the

scope of discussions on what can be called "local conditions" seems to have been relatively small. The general agreements could be, and were, given legal status by government extension, as noted earlier.<sup>1</sup>

That these arrangements involved more centralized decision-making in the French African areas is clear. The key wage decisions were made on the territorial level, when changes in the statutory minimum (SMIG) were introduced. Changes in the SMIG swung the whole structure. In fact, wage decisions made in any of the territories (the Ivory Coast, for example), were influenced by employer and government representatives in Dakar (where the government of the Federation of French West Africa was located) and in Paris. Employer policies on wages and other labor matters were often set on a broader basis than the territory, because of a concern with territorial "whipsawing", whereby an increase granted on the territorial level could become the target wage of unions in other territories; employer organizations in each territory often had to clear with Paris before making final offers in wage discussions in the Labor Advisory Commission or the Joint Councils.

With respect to conditions of employment, Paris played an even more decisive role. For it was in Paris that the big legislative decisions were made, such as in the substantive provisions of the Labor Code of 1952, which applied to all the overseas territories of France. With respect to major

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In 1956 two main changes were made. First, bargaining units more closely modeled on the French pattern were introduced. These called for collective agreement by "branch of activity" or industry group, rather than by whole classes of workers as until 1956. Thus in 1956, the first two federal (FWA-wide) collective agreements were signed--one for the construction industry and the other for commercial firms. Agreements covering other industries followed until 1958.

The second change introduced in 1956, was that agreements based on race were abolished; the federal agreements set down conditions of work and wages for all workers in the industry whatever their race.



conditions of work, such as legal working hours, overtime rates and leave provisions, it does not appear that major employers ever departed significantly from the legal specified conditions.

All of this suggests a second major difference in the nature of the industrial relations systems in the two areas, as evidenced in the collective bargaining process: The Gold Coast system was much more "indigenous", or "inward-looking", involving essentially domestic considerations, while the French West African arrangements were outward-oriented, embedded in the colonial relationship. In the French areas, all the major issues, almost all of the substance of collective bargaining as well as the strategies employed by the parties, derived from the colonial situation. As contrasted with the Gold Coast system, where issues and strategies were at once indigenous and universal (employer-employee conflicts of a familiar kind), the French West African bargaining system was a unique offspring of the French African colonial relationship.

In French West Africa, one general issue dominated collective bargaining: equality of treatment of wage earners, and in particular equal pay for equal work. Trade union demands were invariably focussed on the existence of "unjustified" wage differentials--between African and French civil servants working in the African administrations; between workers in private industry and workers in the public sector; between workers in one territory and workers in others within the Federation of French West Africa. The essence of trade union strategy was a kind of generalized "whipsawing", frequently using expatriate conditions as the lever or target.

The process is illustrated most dramatically in the Civil Service. Public sector wage levels in France itself varied during this period with

changes in the French consumer price index. An adjustment of civil servant salaries in France was normally followed by a comparable adjustment of the salaries of Frenchmen at work in the colonial territories in West Africa. But these adjustments in Africa led to a widening of differentials between Frenchmen and African civil servants doing comparable jobs, a situation which generated insistent demands by African unions for equalizing increases. Up to 1957, near the end of the colonial period, this procedure dominated discussions of civil servant salary policies and invariably led to increases in African civil salaries.

The colonial government tried to settle the problem of equal pay for equal work in the civil service in the Lamine Guèye Law of 1950, which set down the principle of equal pay regardless of origin or race. But supplementary allowances and other fringe benefits differed between Frenchmen and Africans, and the debate on wage policy throughout the 1950's was centered on these differences in treatment.<sup>1</sup>

Private sector employees had two "comparison groups". African civil servants, who enjoyed better conditions, and European (French) workers in private employment. Not only were demands for private sector wage increases generated by increases granted in the public sector, but equally favorable fringe benefits were sought and frequently won; thus family allowances were introduced into the private sector after their existence in the

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<sup>1</sup> For example, French civil servants in the highest cadre (Cadre Général) received a 40% hardship allowance on their base rate, while Africans--few of whom were in this cadre, received 20% or 10%. The Frenchmen in Africa benefitted from the French Code de Famille, and received roughly twice as much in family allowances as an African civil servant under the local regulations. (The differences are discussed in detail in a union newspaper, L'Afrique--Force Ouvrière, #24, November 15, 1953).

public sector had led to much agitation; and the higher rates of family allowance payments in the public sector led to demands that there be equal family allowances in private and public sector. Salary scales of white workers, similarly, were an extremely useful lever, since the wage structure was differentiated between expatriates and Africans, and many of the differences could not be easily defended.<sup>1</sup>

In discussions over statutory minima a similar kind of whipsawing occurred. Here the target was the narrowing of what can be called "the Dakar differential". The SMIG in Senegal was always the highest in the Federation, and in territories other than Senegal it served as the reference point in bargaining over minimum wages.

These examples suffice to illustrate the point: that the issues and strategies of collective bargaining in French colonial Africa depended to a unique extent on the special conditions of French colonial rule. The main grievances sprang from the connection with France and the presence of French administrators and wage earners in Africa. This was far less so in the Gold Coast, or in British colonies generally. The issue of overseas allowances for expatriates in the civil service did exist in the Gold Coast and was a source of grievance, as were differences in leave provisions and other fringes.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in retail and wholesale trade, at least until 1956, European salary scales were based on seniority--i.e., according to number of tours of duty--while African scales were graduated according to training and responsibility on the job. The lowest wage (including major fringe benefits but excluding family allowances) paid to a Frenchman exceed the highest African base rate in the collective agreements by over 30%. The rates were minima; actual rates could be higher. But it was nonetheless a fact that the rawest Frenchman with only a few exceptions received a higher salary than the most skilled and seasoned African covered by the agreements. (See Annuaire Statistique de L'Afrique Occidentale Française, édition 1951, tome ii, pp. 412, 413, 429, for collective agreement provisions and fringe benefits as they existed in the early 1950's.)

But the issue was faced squarely in the early 1950's, insofar as the public sector was concerned, and it did not arise again as a major source of organized protest in the public sector, nor was it an overwhelming issue in the private sector. Into the public sector salary structure there was put an "inducement" or overseas allowance, which was recognized to be necessary to recruit expatriate civil servants and hence was limited to expatriates.

#### D. Strike Patterns

In certain basic respects, work stoppages in both the French areas and the Gold Coast displayed common characteristics. Most work stoppages in both areas, first of all, were short demonstrations, "quickies", lasting one day or less; many of these were spontaneous in character--that is, not organized by local union leaders. Thus, of the 30 work stoppages in French West Africa in 1951, the majority were of this kind. The Inspector-General of Labor wrote of them:

...their spontaneity was indicated, most often, by the fact that neither the managers of the enterprises nor the workers' delegates, nor the responsible trade union leaders were informed about them beforehand....the strikes have usually been violent manifestations of dissatisfactions....<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Inspection Générale du Travail de l'A.O.F., Rapport Annuel, 1951, p.168. That these continued to be the most common form of strike throughout the 1950's is indicated by later figures for the Ivory Coast, where in 1957, 32 strikes affected 5,800 workers for a total of 8,000 man-days lost, which indicates an average duration of strikes of little over one day. (Inspection Territoriale du Travail et des Lois Sociales de la Côte d'Ivoire, Rapport Annuel, Année 1957, (Tableaux #19, mimeographed).

In 1958 in Senegal, there were 29 stoppages, affecting 11,900 workers and resulting in 78,100 man-days lost. Seven of these strikes were less than one day in duration, seven for one day, twelve for less than six days and three for more than six days. (Etat du Sénégal, Inspection du Travail et des Lois Sociales, Rapport Annuel, 1958, fascicule #1 (mimeographed), p. 125). In the Gold Coast, of the 57 disputes in 1957-1958, a typical year in this respect, thirty-four were one day or less in duration, eleven were two to three days, seven were from four to seven days, and only five were over a week long. (Ghana, Annual Report on the Labour Division of the Ministry of Labour, Cooperatives and Social Welfare, 1957-1958. Table X(a). )

In both areas, too, most stoppages were limited to the workers of one enterprise, and were--insofar as one can tell from the strike descriptions contained in official reports--essentially "defensive" in nature; they were the result of some action by management felt by the workers concerned to be unnecessary or unjustified. These stoppages were really a method of airing a grievance, or of initiating bargaining.<sup>1</sup>

Where differences in strike patterns appear most clearly is in the character of big strikes. In the Gold Coast before 1958, there were three large-scale strike movements. Two of them (in 1947 and in 1955-1956) were long strikes in the mining industry, the third was the semi-general political strike of 1950. In French Africa, the major strikes were sometimes on an industry basis, such as the FWA railway strike of 1947-1948, which lasted five months in some areas, but they generally tended to involve larger blocks of workers, such as all government workers (Senegal, 1957 and Ivory Coast in 1959), or all workers in the private sector (Senegal, 1957) and frequently engaged the African wage earning community in general protest demonstrations (1952 and 1953 stoppages throughout FWA). Major FWA union efforts were thus not only broader in "coverage" than those in Ghana, but were strikes against the government itself; a typical union effort was a one or two day protest demonstration by most workers in a territory against a government wage decision. The substantive issue in many of the general or semi-general strike movements was often "equality" of treatment; this was true for the railroad strike in 1947, and the private sector strike in Senegal in 1957. There also occurred in FWA a kind of stoppage without

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Analysis of strike histories given in Labor Department reports in the Gold Coast between 1947 and 1959, indicates that some 300 out of a total of almost 500 work stoppages during these years were "defensive" in this sense.

counterpart in the Gold Coast: stoppages aimed at influencing labor law-makers and those who applied the law at the local level. This type of stoppage was common from 1952 to 1954, when the new Labor Code for the Overseas Territories was being debated in France, and when it was later applied in Africa.

## II. Explanatory Factors

We have thus far described certain key characteristics of the industrial relations systems of French West Africa and the Gold Coast, pointing out similarities and especially differences in the two systems. The descriptions are brief, often impressionistic, oversimplified. Important aspects of the industrial relations arrangements have been ignored. Differences have probably been overstressed. It is nonetheless clear that the two patterns are different. Trade union organizations in French Africa were more involved in politics, more gripped by ideology, spent less time and energy on union-building and on local issues. Employer organizations were more plentiful, more structured, more centralized in French Africa. Government played a bigger role in determination of wages and conditions but exercised less "guidance" over trade unions and their activities than in the Gold Coast. The bargaining system was more centralized in French Africa, and the issues which formed the substance of bargaining were more dependent on a colonial presence than was the case in the Gold Coast. There was much spontaneous striking in both areas, reflecting the slight development of grievance procedures and union control at the shop level; but organized disputes were more frequently general in French Africa, were more concerned with the issues of equal pay and conditions, and were more focussed against the government.

Any attempt to explain these different patterns is complicated by the fact that in colonial situations whole institutional systems--in industrial

relations as in other spheres--were introduced as part of colonial rule.

It is possible in these circumstances to regard colonial industrial relations systems as simply little mirror images of metropolitan systems, distorted here and there perhaps, but still essentially "French" or "British".

Now it is obvious that the colonial inheritance has a great deal to do with explaining why the industrial relations arrangements of French West Africa and the Gold Coast developed as they did up to independence, and why they evolved differently in the two areas. This is especially so in the French areas, where the relevant institutions were more directly imported and in greater detail. In British Africa the principle of "voluntarism" in collective bargaining was reflected in labor law and in a greater diversity in such matters as wage determination; there was therefore a greater scope for indigenous adaptation.

But neither "the French system" nor "the British system" were absorbed wholesale. A process of selection and adaptation took place, and African conditions and needs determined which parts of the colonizers' industrial relations institutions would be rejected or modified. Moreover, even to the extent that most of the differences in patterns can be "explained" by reference to the different colonial inheritances, it is still important to spell out the process involved; certain elements of the transferred institutions were especially critical in shaping the evolution of the system as a whole, and these should be identified.

That there were "local options", so to speak, is illustrated by certain aspects of trade union development. With respect to French Africa, there was much in the local trade union situation that was familiar from French trade unionism: the ideological and political bent, the shaky presence of

the unions at the shop level, the general indifference to financial matters and the casualness of administrative structure. It could have been otherwise in French Africa, however. The Christian and FO centrals, for example, did tend to give higher priority to job-oriented issues and spoke the language of "non-politicalness"; they offered significantly different orientations than the CGT unions and their offshoots. Their audience, however, was always limited; CGT unions, and unionists in the CGT tradition, remained dominant throughout the colonial period.

In the Gold Coast, similarly, it is hardly an inherent characteristic of "the British system" that the labor movement is "non-political"; yet in the Gold Coast, relative "non-politicalness" was a fact for most of the unions throughout most of the colonial period.

The evolution of trade union structure suggests even more clearly that options existed and adaptations were made. The Gold Coast's unions developed as small autonomous company unions, and where there was more than one firm in an industry, no centralized industrial union developed, except in mining. But it cannot be said that this occurred because unions in Britain are this way. Not all of them are, and in fact, recent British trade union history has seen the sharp reduction of number of unions, and continual amalgamation into bigger units. The Gold Coast unions might just as easily have developed along General Union lines and still remained within "the British tradition". Elsewhere in the British Empire, in fact (Sierra Leone and East Africa, for example) national unions were the dominant form.

It is the same with union structure in FWA. In France, the national confederations are the center of power. In FWA the FWA-level organizations were always weak; real power was in the hands of the geographical federations



in each territory. Local unions and industrial federations were, for the most part, paper organizations, sacrificed to the territorial federation. In building this kind of union structure, African unionists in FWA often ignored legal requirements as to trade union organization. For in French Africa (as in France) the labor law said that only people who worked on the same or related crafts or industries could join together in unions. But the African trade union leadership in each city in FWA generally disregarded this part of the law. Often they enrolled members directly into the ranks of the geographical organization--the territorial federation--even if they belonged to no local union. This was for a long time the despair of French labor officers. But it was common practice.<sup>1</sup>

It is necessary, then, to search for local factors and forces which guided the process of institutional selection and adaptation and shaped the development of the local industrial relations systems.

#### A. Trade Union Organization

Three related aspects of trade union organization will be considered: the nature and extent of the political commitment; trade union structure; and the intensity of institution-building or organization-oriented activities.

In the Gold Coast, a variety of factors "explain the distinctive characteristics of the labor movement. An important element was the wage setting mechanism, and in particular the fact that individual firms retained considerable autonomy in fixing their wages and terms of employment. Despite

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<sup>1</sup> In 1950, the labor inspector of Guinea reported that the CGT in Guinea consisted of a few regularly-constituted unions plus a mass of individuals who were members only of the geographical federation. (*Inspection Territoriale du Travail de la Guinée Française, Rapport Annuel, 1950*, p. 56). The Inspector General in 1951 of Labor commented on the generality of this phenomenon and its undesirability. (*Inspection Générale du Travail de l'A.O.F., Rapport Annuel, 1951*, p. 148.)

the pattern-setting role of government, the locus of wage-making authority in most of the private sector remained at the enterprise level. This encouraged union concentration at the enterprise level and the emergence of a company-based or "house" unions as the key organizational unit.

This tendency was reinforced by other aspects of the environment. In an export economy, where there is in effect no internally competitive product market, even in the nascent manufacturing sector, there are no significant product market pressures inducing a larger scale of organization, either among unions or employers. Nor was there any ideological impetus or a general spirit of proselytizing which might have encouraged drives to organize the unorganized and thus stimulate units of organization wider than the firm. Though this was partly due to the scarcity of union leadership and funds, it is also evident that there was little sense of mission among most Gold Coast trade union leaders.

Administrative, organizational and regional factors further increased the propensity to small scale organizations on the trade union side. Where geographically scattered unions existed, central union headquarters were frequently incapable of servicing the minimum needs of component units.<sup>1</sup> Slipshod accounting and mishandling of union funds led local union organizations to hesitate in sending money to higher echelon for fear it would be mis-spent or misappropriated. Fast and loose use of union funds was in fact a major plague. The secretary of the Regional Union of Agricultural Department workers (Trans-Volta-Togoland Region), to take but one example, refused to give up the union's accounts to a commission of inquiry of the

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<sup>1</sup> In their 1956 report to the Registrar of Trade Unions, the Patterson Zachonis Employees Union, for example, noted that branches for some time refused to send dues to headquarters in Accra because:..."We had no cooperation from Accra since the last Annual Conference held in Accra in 1953; matters referred to Accra had received no attention and our letters had not been replied to; the HQ is not functioning and its administration has deteriorated."

National Union of Agricultural Department Workers in 1956, and refused also to give up the union funds in his possession. The amount was small (£12), but the commission report noted that rank and file members refused to pay dues as a result of this experience.<sup>1</sup>

Administrative shortcomings and misuse of union funds aggravated centrifugal tendencies. They added to existing feelings of regional separateness or ethnic differences, thereby making amalgamation of unions harder and even stimulating the dissolution along regional lines of such inter-regional organizations as existed. The most troublesome region was Ashanti, where general sentiment for separatism was greatest. In the mid-50's a number of Ashanti-based trade union branches broke away from larger organizations.<sup>2</sup>

Finally there appears to have grown up a considerable amount of loyalty to company or to craft. It was not easy to hold amalgamated unions together. In the railway and harbor workers union, first railway enginemmen, then maritime workers seceded because they felt the railway clerks were running the union and that their interests were not taken into account. Between clerical workers and manuals there were numerous signs of distrust.<sup>3</sup> Leaders of strong

<sup>1</sup> Joint Report of Inquiries into the Functions of the Trans-Volta Togoland Regional Union of Agricultural Department Workers Unions, Appendix to Minutes of the 7th Annual Delegates Conference of the Agricultural Department Workers Union, August 4-5, 1956 (mimeographed). Other unions had similar problems. (Cf., Report of Committee of Enquiry, the Obuasi Urban Council Employees Union, (mimeographed, n.d., 1956 ).

<sup>2</sup> Thus, the Kumasi Branch of the Agricultural Department Workers' Union broke away from the national ADW union in 1957, and the Ashanti Branch of the Cadbury and Fry Employees' Union stopped sending its dues to headquarters after 1954.

<sup>3</sup> Thus the constitution of the Elder Dempster Worker's Union provided for the separate representation of clerical and manual workers; the Accra and Takoradi branches, for example, each sent three clerical workers and one artisan to annual delegates' conferences. A number of unions broke up or fell into inactivity at least in part because artisans felt that the white collar leadership was not concerned with defending their interests.

company unions argued that only workers in one company had the "sense of oneness" necessary to cement a union together; they cited the failure of the early (1947) Mercantile Workers' Union, which quickly fell apart.

Another set of explanatory facts is "political" in a broad sense, relating to the creed or ideology of the colonial administrators, the policies of the administration (which was partly the consequence of administrators' ideology) and political forces within the Gold Coast. The Gold Coast colonial administration, first of all, took a consistently hard line in support of "voluntarism", and this led to a legal framework which indirectly encouraged enterprise-wide unionism in a number of ways. Social legislation was relatively sketchy, restricted largely to protective laws, and such conditions of employment as were specified in the law were distinctly minimum (as against "effective") conditions. Collective bargaining, conciliation and negotiation were strongly encouraged, and direct government intervention in determination of private sector wages and conditions was not common.<sup>1</sup>

The law on trade unions probably encouraged the development of "house" unionism in one special way: it permitted small groups of workers (five) to form themselves into a trade union. This meant that employers could, if they wanted to, easily disturb or break a union which was giving them trouble, by stimulating separatist groups to form their own union. Dissident groups within each union were also allowed to separate from the union whenever they suspected that their interests were not being advanced by the

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It should be remembered however, that half or more of the non-agricultural wage earners in the economy were in public sector employment, throughout this period, and government salary commissions did act as pattern setters.

leadership of the union.<sup>1</sup>

British administrators and labor officers, finally, took a purist position on the desirability of non-political trade unionism, which they combined with a devotion to "sound unionism"--i.e., well organized, well-administered, self-supporting unions. It is easy to see why administrative officers should have taken this position; it was in accord with their general desire to avoid political disturbances along the carefully-laid path they saw leading to full independence for the Gold Coast. But there is more to it than this; political expediency does not explain, for example, why representatives of the British labor movement, who were serving as labor officers in the colonial government or as advisors to the African unions, should have shared this dedication to non-politicalness and "sound" union development. One factor may have been their recognition that their role as technical assistance people could only be effective to the extent that the Gold Coast unions were anxious to become "real" unions, not political agencies. It also seems probable that they had an understanding of the needs of basic institution-building, upon which their vision of "proper" trade union development rested.

In addition to these "positive" factors there was an important negative one: that the British administration in the Gold Coast would not hesitate to repress forcefully any serious wandering from the non-political path. This was how they reacted to the one political adventure of the Gold Coast unions,

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<sup>1</sup> Ghanaian trade unionists, dissatisfied with their union structure in the 1950's, placed major emphasis on this legal framework in explaining the predominance of "house unionism". It undoubtedly played a role, but probably not a major one. While there may have been some incitement to scission by employers, firm examples are hard to find and the fact that the law allowed small numbers of workers to join in separate unions does not really explain why they should have wanted to do so.

the general strike of 1950, and the trade unionists knew they would react the same way if a similar situation arose.

All of the above refer to attitudes and policies of British colonial administrators. African political dynamics were also important in shaping the Gold Coast system. The relationship between the Convention People's Party, which was the dominant nationalist party after 1949, and the trade unions was quite complicated.<sup>1</sup> Two aspects are relevant here: (1) the biggest and best-organized unions (U.A.C. Workers Union, Public Works Department Union, Mines Employees Union, most of the Railway Unions) were not involved or interested in political affairs. (2) The CPP, in the early 1950s', tried to gain control of the unions and the labor movement as a whole, by putting its people in control of the Trade Union Congress, and shifting authority to the TUC. Throughout the 1950's therefore, most important unions were unwilling to give greater power to the TUC, because to do so would involve control by the CPP. This was a major factor rendering the TUC impotent until the situation was changed by law after independence (in the Industrial Relations Act of 1958). It also helps explain why union leaders so insistently argued that unions should be non-political, a view which not only was a matter of conviction but congenial to their self-interest as they saw it.

In explaining the distinctive feature of French West African trade union development, two factors are of major significance. The first is the peculiar political context, the fact that the colonial relationship was illdefined, the French committed morally and politically to an ideology of equal treatment for Africans and Frenchmen, and the French metropolitan governments of the period

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<sup>1</sup> Cf., Berg and Butler, op. cit.

weak and unstable. The general implications of this situation will be considered below; with respect to trade union development, it encouraged such political propensities as existed in the unions, gave much potential political bargaining power to the unions and made the equality issue an extremely effective bargaining device. Even more basic is the fact that the political context provided the raw material for conflict, so to speak. Because free movement of people was one of the principles of the French Union, many Frenchmen came to work in West Africa, including so-called petits-blancs, men of the little skill or training, who competed with Africans for skilled jobs and provided grist for the equality issue.<sup>1</sup>

The second major factor was the method by which wages were determined. Geographical bargaining meant that geographically-based union organization was stimulated. That the basic unit of union sovereignty was the territorial federation rather than the FWA-wide organizations is explained partly by political factors--the territory rather than the federation was the predominant political unit--and partly by the fact that wage determination was made on a territorial basis. Also, since government determined so much of the wage structure and conditions of employment, what was most useful was an agency capable of creating a political impression, one that could call all the workers out for one or two day demonstrations.

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The proportion of French wage earners in the wage labor force in FWA was far greater than in the Gold Coast. In the mid-50's for example, there were 22,000 European wage earners in FWA out of a total recorded wage labor force of some 350,000. Close to half of these European wage earners held middle or lower level jobs--jobs normally requiring secondary school education or below. (See E. Berg, "The Economic Basis of Political Choice in French West Africa", American Political Science Review, June 1960, pp. 397-8). In the Gold Coast in 1954 there was a total of 4,717 non-African wage and salary earners in a total recorded wage labor force of 244,417. (Gold Coast, Digest of Statistics, Vol.5, #s 1 & 2, August 1956, p. 5.)

The territorially-based general-type unionism which developed in response to these conditions was not torn by the centrifugal forces so much in evidence in the Gold Coast's unionism. Although clerical-manual differences existed, and were in some territories given official recognition in separate unions and collective agreements, they do not appear to have caused the same intra-union conflict; the non-manual leadership of the unions seems to have given rise to far fewer protests. Nor did administrative problems, misuse of funds, or regionalist and ethnic separatism cause comparable strains.

The reasons for this are obscure; perhaps further research will someday indicate that the same problems did in fact exist. But several possible explanations can be suggested. One is the different role of ideology in the two areas. As noted earlier, ideological elements were always more substantial in FWA's unionism than in the Gold Coast's; socialism and Marxism of a more serious and persistent kind was common gospel and this preachment of the unity of the working class, especially in the colonial situation, may have served to dilute separatist sentiment among wage earners. Secondly, since union administration was not so absorbing an issue to French African unions as it was in the Gold Coast, it was less likely to give rise to internal controversy. Moreover, the greater role of government in wage determination and in fixing conditions of work and the greater centralization of bargaining gave less scope for division on the basis of local particularisms. And, finally the equality issue, around which so much of the bargaining revolved, was undoubtedly a unifying force, since it involved general grievances arising from the colonial situation.

#### B. Employer Organization

Analysis of differences in employer organization can be dealt with more



briefly. As a general rule, employers in most countries prefer to do their own bargaining unless there are important economic or political forces pushing them together. Thus, where many employers in one industry are facing a strong industrial union, they may see that it is better for them to bargain together; otherwise, the union can play off one against the other. Or where, as in FWA, over-all rates of wages and conditions of work are bargained for all workers in a given region, employers in that region must present common proposals, and so are encouraged to join together.

In the Gold Coast there was no such stimulus to employers to bargain together (except in the mining industry). There were, in fact, a number of reasons for them to continue bargaining separately. Private firms still retained considerable freedom to adjust their own wages and conditions of employment and this freedom they preferred to keep rather than give it over to a central bargaining agent in the form of an employers' association. As with the unions, there were few competitive pressures in product or factor markets which encouraged wider organization of employers. The disparate size of firms was also a factor. Leading firms like the United Africa Company felt it preferable to work out their own conditions on the grounds that they had little to gain from joining with other employers, while smaller employers feared domination by the UAC.

A final factor was political. The main expatriate firms were reluctant to engage in joint action with each other and with other employers partly because the history of such joint action was bitter to many Africans and evoked fears of imperialist conspiracy. The Association of West African Merchants, and the import quota arrangement from which it benefitted in the immediate post-war period, was one of the main elements in the Gold Coast disturbances of '1948. So, in order to avoid stirring old memories or new

fears among Africans, many of whom tended to regard the expatriate firms as part of the colonial apparatus, the larger employers--virtually all expatriates--shied away from employer organization.<sup>1</sup>

In FWA, employers organized more widely and more readily. French employers are more accustomed to joint negotiation than are British employers; there were fewer political overtones in their organizing than in the Gold Coast and, most important, the wage-setting mechanism in FWA was such as to encourage them to organize. When they were consulted on the minimum wage, and when they negotiated the wages of skilled workers, all employers bargained together because all were directly affected by the outcome. There was also less reason for major firms to be reluctant to bargain in common, since they had less scope than did employers in the Gold Coast to determine their own conditions of employment.

#### C. The Bargaining Pattern and the Role of Government

It was pointed out earlier that in French West Africa a system of centralized bargaining developed, organized on a geographical (territorial) basis, with the issues dominating bargaining arising largely from the French presence. In the Gold Coast collective bargaining was more decentralized, more localized at the level of the firm, and more "indigenous" or general, the issues and strategies being relatively independent of the particularities of the colonial situation. It was also shown that while government in French West Africa was a more pervasive influence than in the Gold Coast, more directly involved in the negotiation process, there was at the same

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<sup>1</sup> Symbolic of popular feeling and illustrative of the impact of the experience with the Association of West African Merchants is the fact that at the Accra race track, as late as 1958, the crowds would chant, "AWAM, AWAM," when they suspected that a race was fixed.

time less "guidance" of trade union development, less concern with the nurturing of "sound" trade unions as an end in itself. It was noted, finally, that larger labor disputes in French Africa were almost invariably general or semigeneral and directed against the administration itself, while this occurred only once in the Gold Coast between the end of World War II and the late 1950's.

In explaining these differences, it is quite clear that the different colonial traditions are relevant. The importation of the French custom of statutory minimum wage determination by region, with the statutory minimum being not only an effective rate actually paid to large numbers of workers, but also the key rate in the wage structure, was especially important in shaping the French West African system. It was the same with the highly articulated wage structure, which involved grouping all skilled workers into six or seven broad categories, all in practice linked to the SMIG. Other crucial elements of the system, such as permissiveness towards civil servant participation in trade union affairs, also are in some measure projections of the French system. Once these vital elements were introduced, they exercised strong influence in shaping the rest of the system.

In the Gold Coast there was less of this kind of direct influence, because the British system is much less structured, and because no particular set of wage determining institutions or approaches was "necessary", in the sense that the adoption of French wage fixing institutions was "necessary".

There were nonetheless, alternatives in French West Africa. If, for example, wages had been determined on an all French West Africa basis, instead of by territory, the structure of the labor movement and other major features of the industrial relation system might have been different; more authority would probably have gone to all French West Africa union bodies, for example,

and also industrial unionism would have been stimulated. This was in fact, beginning to happen after 1956, when industry-wide collective agreements were negotiated. Why didn't the structure of bargaining take this form from the beginning?

The territory became and remained the major unit of wage determination because all parties concerned preferred it, and underlying these preferences was the fact that the territories differed substantially in terms of income levels. Thus for government, a French West Africa-wide minimum wage would have been too rigid and would have risked forcing up wage levels in the very poor territories of the interior. Employers wanted territorial wage determination for the same reason, and because they recognized that the risk of political concessions was greater the larger the scope of conflict. The unions in the richer territories were not keen on federation-wide bargaining because it would have restrained wages in their territories. There was also a political factor of some importance: the French confederations, to which the African unions were tied informally, favored territorially-based unionism and bargaining because they feared the separatist tendencies manifested from the early 1950's in French West Africa-wide organizations.<sup>1</sup>

Differences in the political context, in the nature of the colonial situation in the two areas, are basic to understanding the variations in the two industrial relations systems. In the Gold Coast, the nature and

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The French centrals explained their position in economic terms--that management was too strong and well-organized on the federal level, and that negotiations on the territorial level were likely to be more favorable, since they presented opportunities for geographical "shipsawing"; the relatively strong Senegalese unions, for example, could win an advance which the other territories could then point to and demand. See, for a clear exposition of this argument, Bulletin de Liaison des Travailleurs des Pays Coloniaux (Paris, Mai, 1953), #33, pp. 4-5.

outcome of the colonial relationship was never in doubt, nor after 1950 was there much uncertainty even about timing. It was clear to all concerned that the Gold Coast would be independent, and soon; by 1951, the country already enjoyed a fairly large degree of self-government.

French Africa, in contrast, lived under far greater uncertainty about the character of its relationship to the metropole, about the ultimate outcome of the relationship, and about the timing of change. The French African territories had some political autonomy after 1945. But they were not self-governing to any significant extent--certainly not comparable to the Gold Coast after 1951--and constitutionally they were part of an indissoluble French Union. They did not in principle have the right to independence. It was not until 1956 that the word "independence" even came out into the open in general political discussion.

At the same time, the French colonial system was under fire throughout the period under consideration here--first in Indo-China, then in North Africa. And French governments at home were weak and unstable.

These specific differences in the political environment explain a great deal about why the differences in the two industrial relations systems came about. In all its dealings with African subjects, British administrators in the Gold Coast could take the posture of high-minded trustees-holders of a disinterested stewardship. They could therefore act with that ineffable self-confidence which was so striking a feature of the British colonial style. They could crush political strikes when they occurred. They could insist on developing "sound" unionism and properly functioning institutions, in industrial relations as in other areas. In confrontations with Africans over wage policy or other economic issues, they could righteously defend the long-term public interest and demand "responsible" behavior on the part of

trade unionists or other Africans.

French colonial administrators in West Africa enjoyed little of this kind of luxury. They were not in a position to insist on the niceties of institution-building, for example, even to the extent that they thought it worthwhile. Nor were they able to make convincing appeals to economic responsibility. The uncertainties of the political connection that bound Africa and France, and the need to avoid social disturbances that might raise questions about the nature of that connection, forced them into a much more defensive position. Most important for them was the keeping of the peace, particularly after disturbances began to spread in North Africa in the early 1950's. The French administrators were caught in special contradictions created by the doctrine and policy of equality between Frenchmen and Africans; on both moral and political grounds, they were thus vulnerable to African trade union attack. Under these circumstances it was extremely difficult for French administrators to maintain a principled position and to avoid concessions, especially when any threats of social disturbance arose.

These differences in colonial political environments can perhaps best be summarized this way: the British colonial administrators, when faced with demands or pressures by African trade unionists or other groups could say: "This is your country, and you will soon be running it. What you ask for is not in the general interest. Therefore we won't do it." Such a posture was rarely possible for the French, largely because it was not quite clear just whose country it was.

### III. Conclusion: Environmental Change and Institutional Adaptation

In one sense, the industrial relations institutions that emerged in French Africa between World War II and the accession of French West Africa

to independence around 1960 were especially "functional" or well-suited to West African conditions. Trade union organizations and collective bargaining relationships were in line with organizational needs and capacities on the one hand, and in harmony with the structure of decision-making power on the other. Few restrictions were put on civil servants or other public employees in their trade union activities. Legal requirements regarding registration and financial reporting were ignored before 1952 and absent from the law after 1952. The attitude of government and employers toward work stoppages was in general tolerant. The government largely relieved trade unions of financial worries by the "detachment" arrangement allowing civil servants to collect their pay and serve as full-time union officials, and by the provision of office space at the Bourse. There was relatively little insistence by government officials or employers on the virtues of union self-sufficiency and solid organizations at the local level. All of this meant that the trade unions had their hands free, so to speak, for the substantive issues.

Union structure was similarly "functional". The vaguely delineated organizational arrangements, with the emphasis on geographically-based organizations, was an efficient adaptation to French African realities. Given the small number of workers in any firm, industry, or even locality, it allowed maximum use of union leadership and managerial skills and reduced the cost of union administration. At the same time it allowed the unions to make the maximum impact where and when it really counted: in discussions with Government over changes in the level of the SMIG, and-- on occasion--for mobilization of general protest demonstrations to impress either lawmakers in Paris or administrators in Dakar and the territorial capitals with the "disturbance potential" involved in a given issue.

Given the centralization of decision-making on labor matters, the broad scope and coverage of legislation, the tendency for the SMIG to be the effective rate for unskilled workers and to determine rates of change of all wages, the existence of labor courts, a solicitous inspectorate of labor and the délégués system--there seemed little to be done at the shop level and hence not much point in building shop level institutions of any strength.

From the point of view of the immediate interests of African wage earners and even the African community as a whole, the system worked well. The trade unions in French West Africa enjoyed a position of prominence in political and economic affairs during these years; they were clearly in the mainstream of events in most of the territories, despite union poverty, small membership, the absence of firm organizational roots among the rank and file, and other disabilities. In some of the territories (Guinea and Niger, especially) they provided top political leadership. They were in all territories significant agents of decolonization, their persistent demands for full equality of treatment being particularly effective in laying bare the inherent contradictions of the post-war colonial system.

On the economic side, the trade unions and the peculiarities of the bargaining system led to a higher level of real wages, especially in the public sector and the poorer territories, than would otherwise have prevailed, and to conditions of work and wages which were considerably better than those in neighboring countries. Major conditions of work for wage earners in French Africa (vacations, hours, etc.) were more favorable than those in more developed and richer African countries. Real wage levels in general increased throughout the period under consideration, despite many



years of sharply rising price levels.<sup>1</sup> The cost of these income gains, moreover, was to a considerable extent financed by metropolitan Frenchmen, so that the gains to African wage earners did not involve African rural-urban conflict of interests to the extent that it might have otherwise.<sup>2</sup>

In the Gold Coast it was different. In many respects the policies and institutions that evolved during this same period seemed out of joint, unsuitable to local needs and possibilities. The unions, for example, never had more than a marginal impact in political or economic terms. They were for the most part half-formed institutions, weak, divided, small, poor, preoccupied-- pathetically it sometimes seemed--with the forms of trade unionism rather than the substance, developing organizational machinery, laboring over account books, sitting in consultative and negotiating bodies which dealt only with minor issues of the workplace. They never came to grips with the fact that big advances might have been possible through legislative or administrative channels, which is to say through political action.

Judged by their serviceability to African wage earners and their adaptation to local possibilities and local power structures, the industrial relations institutions of the Gold Coast were thus less "functional" or "suitable" than those in French West Africa. But this is not the whole story. From a longer term point of view, and when account is taken of the adaptability of the two systems to conditions of independence, a different judge-

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<sup>1</sup> Cf., E. Berg, "Real Income Trends in West Africa, 1939-1960", in M. Herskovits and M. Harwitz, Economic Transition in Africa, (Evanston, 1964).

<sup>2</sup> Direct recurrent budget subsidies, payment of wages of some African civil servants, financing of investment expenditures, and support of prices of French West African exports at higher than world prices were the forms by which African wage increases were financed by the Metropole.

ment is called for. For the French West African system could not survive in recognizable form once colonial rule ended. It was too "specialized", too dependent on the peculiar features of the colonial environment at a particular phase of colonial rule: a Government unwilling to risk political disturbance and hence anxious to buy off potential trouble; an economic system such that normal restraints on wage increases were to an important extent removed by provision of French subsidies; a bargaining system in which the main issues were generated by the colonial presence (inequalities between Frenchmen and Africans in wage employment), and in which conflict centered on the demand for equality; a set of ground rules that allowed strikes against the state and imposed few penalties for strikes in general; a political framework and an ideology sanctioning free association, free collective bargaining and political and economic equality. With independence, all of these elements of the environment were transformed, and the whole institutional underpinning of the system crumbled. Independence, for example, removed almost entirely the political and moral force behind demands for equality of treatment between expatriates and locals, and therefore stripped from the unions their main weapon and removed from the bargaining system what had been its main concern. Independence also brought the new states face-to-face with the budget effects of wages policy, which, combined with an awareness of their political fragility, led them to take a far less genial view of strikes than had the colonial administration--particularly strikes of civil servants and semi-general protest demonstrations of the kind common earlier. They didn't hesitate therefore to forbid such strikes, requisition strikers when they occurred, and even fire strikers--an act almost without precedence in the earlier period. They could--and did--decapitate union leadership by changing the practice of civil servant detachment for

union duty. And they didn't hesitate to jail unionists, freeze wages, and-- in the new labor legislation that followed independence--severely control union activity. The trade unions, with in effect nothing to do, were thrown into almost total disarray. In most of French-speaking West Africa, independence brought into being state-dominated trade unions serving mainly ceremonial functions, and the withering of genuine bargaining.

The colonial system was "dysfunctional" in another sense. It led to levels of wages and salaries which were "too high", in the sense that they severely constrained possibilities for local financing of public sector development expenditures. One consequence of this was that the problems of independence were exacerbated by the need to deflate real wage levels in French Africa. Since the late 1950's money wages have risen very little in most of the states of former French West Africa. At the same time, price levels have risen by at least 4 per cent annually in most of these states. So real wages have been sharply cut, and in some places (Dahomey and Upper Volta, for example) civil service salaries have been reduced in money terms as well. This brutal confrontation with economic reality, which was postponed during the colonial period because the appeal by the French for "responsibility" was always countered by the African appeal to "Justice" and "Equality", has been a basic source of political and social instability throughout the French-speaking areas, and particularly in the poorer territories of Dahomey and Upper Volta.

In Ghana also, independence brought dramatic changes. Full government and party control over the unions was imposed by the Industrial Relations Act of 1958, and "independent" trade unions disappeared. Strikes and other union activities were closely regulated, and the unions were fully absorbed into the machinery of the governing party. In much of the public sector the

negotiation and consultation machinery fell into disuse. But what is most striking is the extent to which the system which developed under Colonial rule persisted, throughout the N'krumah regime and up to the present. Before the 1966 coup which ousted N'krumah, the trade unions continued to spend much of their energy on institution building, on perfecting their organizational machinery, on job-oriented issues. In the private sector, negotiations and discussions went on much as before. And despite the change at the top, with the newly-dominant TUC playing a major role as political and ideological agent of the party, most of the trade union officials at the lower levels continued to work at negotiations with employers, grievance handling, and similar matters. In part this was due to institutional inertia and to the fact that there was not much else that could be done. But it suggests that precisely because the Gold Coast system gave priority to local matters, and because of the efforts to construct genuine trade union machinery and engage in genuine bargaining with employers, the inherited institutions were able to survive more recognizably. Unlike the French West African arrangements, the Gold Coast system did not depend on particular characteristics of the colonial regime, except in certain respects (the degree of "autonomy", or independence from government); it was more "general," based more solidly on universal and persistent problems arising out of the relationship between employers and the employed.

There is another point relevant to any evaluation of the "suitability" of the industrial relations institutions transferred to West Africa under colonial rule.

The modernization process involves institution-building in a fundamental sense, It involves the emergence of organizations and procedures that can channel ideas and information between leaders and the led, articulate interest

group demands, widen the area of participation in decisions and presumably thereby make for better definition and resolution of problems. It involves also the development of organizational competence and effectiveness.

There is not much doubt that the industrial relations institutions and policies of the Gold Coast involved more "institutional development" in this sense than did those in French West Africa. It involved relatively more people in dealing with problems of a more basic and enduring kind, and taught them more about the complex task of administering organizations and resolving problems. It created an institutional base, a set of established procedures and habits of mind which (though it was neither large nor firmly rooted) could grow and develop. In this sense the colonial industrial relations experience had a broader modernizing impact in the Gold Coast than in French Africa, and this is probably the most important criterion of all in evaluating any set of institutions in modernizing countries.

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