



RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Workers' Proto-diplomacy: Early Contacts between Zambian and Yugoslav Trade Unions, 1959–1962\*

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## Abstract

Socialist Yugoslavia and Zambia became dynamic Cold War partners in the Non-Aligned Movement, with extensive cooperation in economic development, national defence, and international diplomacy. This article explores the roots of this “East–South” cooperation by looking at the pioneering contacts between North Rhodesian and Yugoslav trade unions in the late 1950s and early 1960s, showing how Yugoslav trade union officials opened up new perspectives for the Yugoslav organized labour movement as it reached out to the “global” at a time of rising decolonization and incipient non-alignment. Further, it offers a nuanced perspective on Cold War trade union internationalism and sheds new light on the politicization of the Zambian labour movement. The article shows that the national trade union federations and their officials on both sides were proactive sociopolitical actors, paving the way for future diplomatic contacts akin to “workers’ proto-diplomacy”.

## Introduction

On 9 February 1959, Svetozar Vukmanović-Tempo, the president of the Yugoslav Federation of Trade Unions (SSJ), sent a letter from Belgrade to the Northern Rhodesian town Kitwe, located in the economically essential Copperbelt region, which provided a large portion of the Central African Federation’s export earnings and served as an industrial working-class hub (Figure 1). In the letter, Vukmanović-Tempo extended an invitation for the SSJ’s counterpart, the Northern Rhodesia Trades Union Congress (NRTUC), to visit Yugoslavia and to attend the SSJ congress in April that year. The congress, the president noted, would be an

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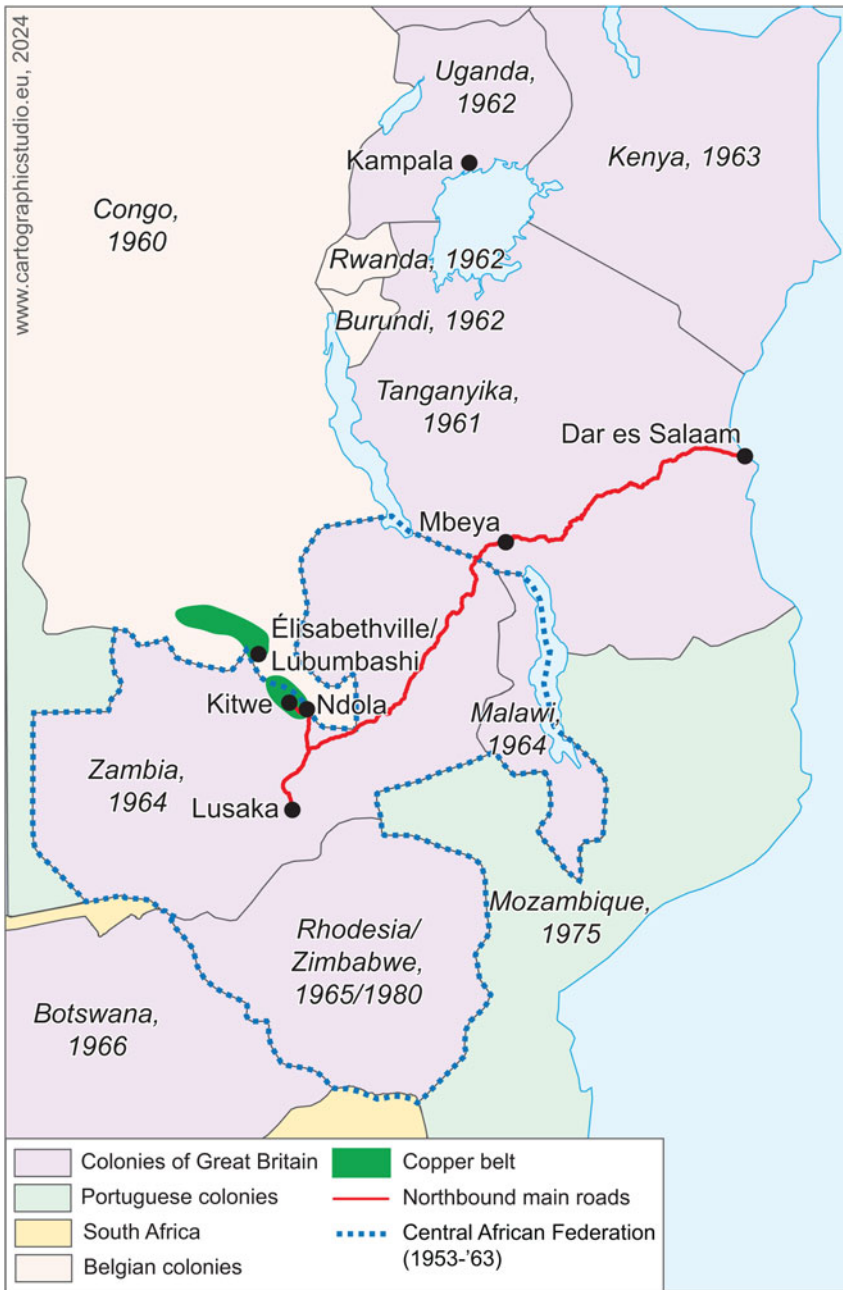


Figure 1. Zambia and other East and Southern African countries in the early 1960s.

excellent opportunity for a Northern Rhodesian delegation to become acquainted with the goals and trends of trade unions in Yugoslavia, since the congress would not only present a report on the past four years, but would also feature lively discussions about

future work. Little did SSJ officials know that their invitation would set in motion a chain of events that would lead to great turmoil within the NRTUC and, ultimately, to its split in the years leading up to Northern Rhodesia/Zambia's struggle for independence from Britain in October 1964.<sup>1</sup>

Post-independence Zambia sought to maintain cordial relations with both socialist and capitalist countries while insisting on African unity and the further advance of decolonization in Southern Africa.<sup>2</sup> While the Yugoslav revolutionary leader-turned-statesman Josip Broz Tito appreciated Zambian independence figurehead and first president Kenneth Kaunda's engagement in world politics (Figure 2), British diplomats noted "Kaunda's admiration for President Tito" and highlighted "Yugoslavia's reputed success in combining non-alignment, anti-imperialism and industrial democracy".<sup>3</sup> In this context, non-aligned Yugoslavia emerged as one of Zambia's most trusted foreign partners. By 1965, a technical assistance agreement was already in place, followed by a Yugoslav-Zambian joint venture construction company.<sup>4</sup> Southern Rhodesia's Unilateral Declaration of Independence that same year, and Lusaka's resulting deteriorating relations with London, turned Zambia towards Yugoslavia also in the field of military cooperation. The Third Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Lusaka in September 1970 with full Yugoslav diplomatic support, further enhanced the reputation of President Kaunda and his United National Independence Party (UNIP) as being among the main African proponents of national sovereignty and non-interference in the face of Cold War tensions.<sup>5</sup>

While official diplomatic contact between Lusaka and Belgrade was established immediately after Zambia's independence, this article reveals that friendly relations between the Yugoslav party-state and some of the most prominent protagonists of Zambian decolonization and nation-making can be traced back to the late 1950s.

<sup>1</sup>The white settler politicians and British conservatives decided to unite the territories of Northern Rhodesia, Southern Rhodesia, and Nyasaland into a Central African Federation in 1953. The white settler community was larger and more powerful in Southern Rhodesia and sought to merge the territories to benefit from the burgeoning mineral wealth of Northern Rhodesia's Copperbelt and to extend its political control over black Africans under the promise of partnership. African opposition to the federation was widespread from the outset and intensified in the face of shallow promises of economic empowerment and racial equality. The Northern Rhodesian elections of October 1962, discussed later, led to African majority government and the eventual implosion of the federation in 1963, followed by the independence of Northern Rhodesia from Britain as Zambia in 1964, while the white racist settlers of Southern Rhodesia unilaterally declared independence from Britain in 1965. See David C. Mulford, *Zambia: The Politics of Independence 1957-1964* (Oxford, 1967), pp. 1-55; and Andrew Cohen, "The Central African Federation", *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*, 31 August 2021. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.421>; last accessed 2 September 2024.

<sup>2</sup>Clarence Chongo, "A Good Measure of Sacrifice: Aspects of Zambia's Contribution to the Liberation Wars in Southern Africa, 1964-1975", *Zambia Social Science Journal*, 6 (2016), pp. 1-27.

<sup>3</sup>Annual Review for Zambia for 1970, British National Archives, Kew, FCO 45/876.

<sup>4</sup>Yugoslav Chargé d'affaires talk with the Minister of Transport and Works, Alexander Grey Zulu, Diplomatic Archives of Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (henceforth DA), Belgrade, 3 December 1964, PA-1965-131-42007.

<sup>5</sup>For an overview of Yugoslav diplomacy within the Non-Aligned Movement, see Milorad Lazić, *Unmaking Détente: Yugoslavia, the United States, and the Global Cold War, 1968-1980* (Lanham, MD, 2022); and Tvrtko Jakovina, *Treća strana Hladnog rata* [The Third Side of the Cold War] (Zaprešić, 2011).



**Figure 2.** Zambia's founding president, Kenneth Kaunda, and president of Yugoslavia Josip Broz Tito during a 1970 meeting

Source: *Zambia News and Information Services (ZANIS)*, with permission.

Political independence in a given country is never a completely new beginning but brings with it “important legacies from the earlier years”.<sup>6</sup> Yugoslavia's successful diplomatic and economic relations with non-aligned governments in Africa and Asia were often based on the political capital earned by assisting anti-colonial liberation movements. Once in power, the former activists and fighters did not forget this solidarity, and Zambia was no exception.<sup>7</sup> Analysing Zambia's road to independence, a May 1964 report by the Yugoslav State Secretariat for Foreign Affairs noted that the Yugoslav and Zambian trade unions played a particularly important role in the long-standing relations between the Yugoslav communist leadership and the leaders of Zambia's independence movement.<sup>8</sup> The report mentions that Yugoslav unions “provided material aid to the [Northern] Rhodesian labour

<sup>6</sup>Jan Pettman, *Zambia: Security and Conflict* (New York, 1974), p. 24.

<sup>7</sup>Nemanja Radonjić, “Слика Африке у Југославији” [Image of Africa in Yugoslavia] (Belgrade, 2023), pp. 253–273; D. Tot, “The Engagement of Yugoslav Technical Cooperation Experts in Post-Colonial Algeria (1962–1990): A Global Microhistory of East–South Relations” (Ph.D., University of Bologna, 2023), p. 110; and Jelena Đureinović, “Internationalizing the Revolution: Veterans and Transnational Cultures of Memory and Solidarity between Yugoslavia and Algeria”, *International Review of Social History*, 69 (2024), pp. 139–158.

<sup>8</sup>A note on terminology: when we refer to the territory of present-day Zambia before 1964, Northern Rhodesia will be used. When we refer to union officials from that colony, we will employ interchangeably either Zambians or Northern Rhodesians.

movement, consisting of money, transport vehicles, equipment and printing materials”.<sup>9</sup> Although it recognizes the importance of trade unions in fostering Yugoslav–Zambian bilateral relations, this depiction is somewhat misleading as it presents the exchanges as unidirectional and downplays the agency of Zambian trade unionists.

This article makes two important arguments. Firstly, based on an empirical examination of the early connections between Zambian and Yugoslav trade unions, we argue that one must expand the customary notions of what a trade union (centre) is and what its functions were during the 1950s and 1960s amid the Cold War. The historiography of postcolonial labour in Africa usually focuses on trade unions’ role in maintaining the delicate social contracts promoted by the nation-building elites or their ability to act as a bargaining tool for workers vis-à-vis domestic and foreign employers. In the case of labour under state socialism, trade unions are most often seen as “transmission belts” for the influence of the communist parties inside the enterprises, ad hoc welfare providers, conductors of social standards policies, and occasionally outlets for workers’ resistance.<sup>10</sup> Without denying these crucial functions, we highlight trade unions as organizations that provided their officials with social and physical mobility, travel, and educational opportunities in foreign countries. Especially in colonies and newly decolonized nation-states, unions’ international connections were important for procuring financial and material aid from workers’ organizations based in economically more developed countries.

Secondly, national trade union federations, and their officials on both sides, were proactive sociopolitical actors paving the way for future diplomatic contacts, thus shaping what we conceptualize as workers’ proto-diplomacy. The concept has been applied by historians of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to the role of its national trade union federation, the party-controlled FDGB. Alexandra Hermann emphasized the “protodiplomatic work” of the FDGB, while for Ilona Schleicher the East German trade union delegations figured as “important diplomatic missions” under the West German Hallstein Doctrine, which aimed to isolate the GDR internationally.<sup>11</sup> These union contacts not only allowed the GDR to circumvent the diplomatic blockade, but they also “served as a foundation for subsequent state relations”.<sup>12</sup> According to Burton, this underpinned the FDGB’s “proto-diplomatic

<sup>9</sup>President of the Government of Northern Rhodesia Kenneth Kaunda’s visit, 13–19 May 1964, Archives of Yugoslavia (henceforth AJ), Belgrade, KPR I-3-a, 128–1.

<sup>10</sup>For the Zambian trade unions, see Robert H. Bates, *Unions, Parties and Political Development: A Study of Mineworkers in Zambia* (New Haven, CT [etc.], 1971). For the Yugoslav trade unions, see Sharon Zukin, “The Representation of Working-Class Interests in Socialist Society: Yugoslav Labor Unions”, *Politics & Society*, 10:3 (1981), pp. 281–316.

<sup>11</sup>See, for example, Ilona Schleicher, “Elemente entwicklungspolitischer Zusammenarbeit in der Tätigkeit von FDGB und FDJ”, in Hans-Jörg Bücking (ed.), *Entwicklungspolitische Zusammenarbeit in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der DDR* (Berlin, 1998), pp. 111–138, 133; and Alexandra Hermann, “Internationale Arbeit des FDGB”, in Dieter Dowe, Karlheinz Kuba, and Manfred Wilke (eds), *FDGB-Lexikon. Funktion, Struktur, Kader und Entwicklung einer Massenorganisation der SED (1945–1990)* (Berlin, 2009). Available at: [http://library.fes.de/FDGB-Lexikon/texte/sachteil/i/Internationale\\_Arbeit.html](http://library.fes.de/FDGB-Lexikon/texte/sachteil/i/Internationale_Arbeit.html); last accessed 3 August 2024.

<sup>12</sup>Immanuel R. Harisch, “‘Mit Gewerkschaftlichem Gruß!’ Afrikanische GewerkschafterInnen an der FDGB-Gewerkschaftshochschule Fritz Heckert in der DDR”, *Stichproben: Vienna Journal of African Studies*, 18 (2018), pp. 77–109, 82. Our translation.

function” in its engagement with African trade unions.<sup>13</sup> As will be demonstrated here, the proto-diplomatic activities of workers via trade union contacts were also significant for both Socialist Yugoslavia and the incumbent postcolonial government of Zambia.<sup>14</sup> In the absence of Yugoslav colonial ties, trade unions served as a gateway for establishing connections with union officials in countries that remained under colonial rule, where establishing embassies was not feasible.<sup>15</sup> In the case of Northern Rhodesia, the increasingly close relationship and the occasional personal overlap between Zambian union officials and leading anti-colonial political figures enabled the formation of quasi-diplomatic contact via workers’ organizations even before official independence.

Conceptually, this research has been inspired by recent currents of global labour history,<sup>16</sup> as well as by the burgeoning literature on “worldmaking” during the Cold War, which accounts for the agency of peripheral actors in East–South and South–South encounters,<sup>17</sup> not least within the frame of the Non-Aligned Movement, where Yugoslavia played the role of prime mover and Zambia participated as one of the most active African members.<sup>18</sup> With respect to Yugoslavia, labour historiography has been reinvigorated by the recent surge of global labour history because transnational perspectives are well suited to examining phenomena such as forced labour during World War II, the system of workers’ self-management and its reception and adaptation abroad, and, last but not least, Yugoslav labour migration to Western Europe and beyond.<sup>19</sup> In the 1950s and

<sup>13</sup>Eric Burton, “Kindred by Choice: Trade Unions as Interface between East Africa and East Germany”, in Kristin Roth-Ey (ed), *Socialist Internationalism and the Gritty Politics of the Particular: Second-Third World Spaces in the Cold War* (London, 2023), pp. 197–216, 197.

<sup>14</sup>For an early recognition of trade unions’ role as influential actors in Yugoslav contact with developing countries, see Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Nonaligned World* (Princeton, NJ, 1970).

<sup>15</sup>For an extensive survey of early diplomatic ties between Yugoslavia and African members of the Non-Aligned Movement, see Nemanja Radonjić, “A Non-Aligned Continent: Africa in the Global Imaginary of Socialist Yugoslavia”, in Paul Stubbs (ed.), *Socialist Yugoslavia and the Non-Aligned Movement: Social, Cultural, Political, and Economic Imaginaries* (Montreal [etc.], 2023), pp. 302–331.

<sup>16</sup>For an outline, consult Marcel van der Linden, “Labour History: The Old, the New and the Global”, *African Studies*, 66 (2007), pp. 169–180. For a global labour history approach focusing on Africa, see Stefano Bellucci and Andreas Eckert, “The ‘Labour Question’ in Africanist Historiography”, in Stefano Bellucci and Andreas Eckert (eds), *General Labour History of Africa: Workers, Employers and Governments, 20th–21st Centuries* (Woodbridge, 2019), pp. 1–16.

<sup>17</sup>For the concept of “worldmaking”, see Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, NJ, 2019); and Łukasz Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ, 2020). For the agency of peripheral actors, see James Mark, Artemy M. Kalinovsky, and Steffi Marung (eds), *Alternative Globalizations: Eastern Europe and the Postcolonial World* (Bloomington, IN, 2020). See also the Special Issue by George Bodie (ed.), “Everyday Internationalism: Socialist–South Connections and Mass Culture during the Cold War”, *International Review of Social History*, S32 (2024).

<sup>18</sup>Paul Stubbs, “Introduction: Socialist Yugoslavia and the Non-Aligned Movement: Contradictions and Contestations”, in Paul Stubbs (ed), *Socialist Yugoslavia and the Non-Aligned Movement: Social, Cultural, Political, and Economic Imaginaries* (Montreal [etc.], 2023), pp. 3–33.

<sup>19</sup>For a key text in this regard, see Sabine Rutar, “Towards a Southeast European History of Labour: Examples from Yugoslavia”, in Sabine Rutar (ed), *Beyond the Balkans: Towards an Inclusive History of Southeastern Europe* (Zürich, 2014), pp. 323–354. This trend has revitalized labour histories of the wider regions, for example the contributions in the Special Issue by Rory Archer and Goran Music (eds), “New

1960s, trade unions in Yugoslavia were given an important role by the ruling communist party in supervising the system of workers' self-management, initiating elections to workers' councils, and spearheading economic reforms.<sup>20</sup> Despite trade unions playing "a key role in industrial relations", Vladimir Unkovski-Korica argues that they are "a remarkably under-researched component of the Yugoslav power relations".<sup>21</sup>

This is certainly not the case for Zambia's trade unions. While many of the detailed studies written between the 1950s and 1980s focused on black mineworkers and the African Mineworkers' Union (AMWU), more recent studies have shed light on the national trade union federation(s), individual labour leaders, and the story of white unionism and its international connections.<sup>22</sup> Yet, despite this rich and multifaceted scholarship on many aspects of Northern Rhodesia/Zambia's organized labour movements, empirical studies on Zambian unionists' connections with individual unions, national centres, and international trade union federations of the Cold War East are lacking.<sup>23</sup> The recent burgeoning literature on Cold War labour internationalisms has highlighted the rival global federations' struggles for the "hearts and minds" of unionists and workers in Africa, which increasingly came into conflict with Pan-African and non-aligned-inspired union networking. Curiously, the Zambian unions, among the best organized on the African continent, as well as the fiercely non-aligned Yugoslav trade union federation, are missing from these accounts.<sup>24</sup>

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Perspectives on East European Labor History: An Introduction", *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*, 17 (2020), pp. 19–29; Marsha Siefert, "Introduction: Labor in State-Socialist Europe since 1945: Toward an Inclusive History of Work", in Marsha Siefert (ed.), *Labor in State-Socialist Europe, 1945–1989: Contributions to a History of Work* (Budapest, 2020), pp. 1–27; and Selin Çağatay et al., *Through the Prism of Gender and Work: Women's Labour Struggles in Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond, 19th and 20th Centuries* (Leiden, 2024).

<sup>20</sup>Vladimir Unkovski-Korica, *The Economic Struggle for Power in Tito's Yugoslavia: From World War II to Non-Alignment* (London, 2016), p. 14.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>22</sup>S. Zelnicker, "Changing Patterns of Trade Unionism: The Zambian Case, 1948–1964" (Ph.D., University of California, 1970); B.B. Liatto, "Organised Labour and the State in Zambia" (Ph.D., University of Leeds, 1989); F.E. Mulenga, "Crises of Expectations: Workers' Struggles in Zambia, 1964–2011" (Ph.D., University of Zambia, 2017); J.T. Samungole, "The History of Zambia Congress of Trade Unions, 1964–2011" (MA thesis, University of Zambia, 2020); Kenneth P. Vickery, "Odd Man Out: Labour, Politics and Dixon Konkola", in Jan-Bart Gewald, Marja Hinfelaar, and Giacomo Macola (eds), *Living the End of Empire: Politics and Society in Late Colonial Zambia* (Leiden, 2011), pp. 111–137; and Duncan Money, *White Mineworkers on Zambia's Copperbelt, 1926–1974: In a Class of Their Own* (Leiden, 2022).

<sup>23</sup>For similar research on other African labour movements' Eastern connections, see Immanuel R. Harisch, "Nkrumahism, East Germany, and the South–East Ties of Ghanaian Trade Unionist J.A. Osei during the Cold War 1960s", *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 54 (2021), pp. 309–332; and Immanuel R. Harisch and Eric Burton, "The Missing Link? Western Communists as Mediators between the East German FDGB, the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) and African Trade Unions in the Late 1950s and Early 1960s", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 103 (2023), pp. 292–311.

<sup>24</sup>Su Lin Lewis, "We Are Not Copyists': Socialist Networks and Non-Alignment from Below in A. Philip Randolph's Asian Journey", *Journal of Social History*, 53 (2019), pp. 402–428. Further consult the Special Issue by Carolien Stolte (ed.), "Trade Union Networks and the Politics of Expertise in an Age of

Methodologically, inspired by anthropological approaches in global and transnational history writing, we employ George Marcus's concept of following our historical actors in their transnational movement, communication, and exchange of knowledge and ideas.<sup>25</sup> When tracking transnational relations and the activities of a number of leading union officials, one important insight is "that the loose ends of threads of inquiry can be found in archives in different places, and the gaps in one record can be filled by the associated record elsewhere".<sup>26</sup> While this filling of gaps certainly opens up new questions and inconsistencies, it allows us to assemble a patchwork of evidence for a reliable historical reconstruction of actions and events. In this article, we connect archival trails from various locations: the Archive of Yugoslavia in Belgrade, Serbia; the Archives of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) in Amsterdam, the Netherlands; the National Archives in Zambia (NAZ); and the Archive of UNIP in Lusaka, Zambia. The intimate organizational links between Zambian organized labour and the political party UNIP are demonstrated by the fact that, from 1961 onwards, the national trade union federation's correspondence with its Yugoslav counterpart, as well as with the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) and trade unions from the Soviet Union, the GDR, and Czechoslovakia, are kept in UNIP's archive.<sup>27</sup> The insights from multi-archival research allowed for a nuanced, multi-perspective, and actor-centred approach. The corpus of primary sources is supplemented by both established and recent research literature as well as a number of autobiographical accounts by Zambian and Yugoslav personalities who were involved in these encounters.<sup>28</sup> We also conducted a series of interviews with high-ranking former UNIP officials, which helped us to contextualize the detailed archival accounts.

The article first provides some background on politics and trade unions in Yugoslavia and Northern Rhodesia, and on the international labour movement. It proceeds to show how an invitation extended by the Yugoslav national trade union federation to Northern Rhodesian unionists to attend their congress had severe consequences: while two dissident Zambian union officials benefited from an extensive study tour and an exchange of knowledge with Yugoslav union officials, their clandestine travels to a communist country prompted a split in Northern Rhodesia's organized labour movement. The article then argues that the growing

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Afro-Asian Solidarity", *Journal of Social History*, especially Mathilde von Bülow, "Beyond the Cold War: American Labor, Algeria's Independence Struggle, and the Rise of the Third World (1954–62)", *Journal of Social History*, 53 (2019), pp. 454–486.

<sup>25</sup>George E. Marcus, "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24 (1995), pp. 95–117; and Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton, NJ, 2016), p. 121.

<sup>26</sup>Matthias Middell, "Weltgeschichte DDR. Die DDR in globalgeschichtlicher Perspektive", in Ulrich Mähler (ed.), *Die DDR als Chance. Neue Perspektiven auf ein altes Thema* (Berlin, 2016), pp. 149–156, 151. Translation ours.

<sup>27</sup>Consult "Trade Unions, Correspondence [1961–1962]", British Library, Endangered Archives Programme (hereafter EAP), 121/2/10/1/4, <https://eap.bl.uk/archive-file/EAP121-2-10-1-4>.

<sup>28</sup>M.R. Mwendapole, *A History of the Trade Union Movement in Zambia up to 1968*, edited and with an Introduction by Robin Palmer and Ian Phimister (Lusaka, 1977); Kapasa Makasa, *Zambia's March to Political Freedom* (Nairobi, 1981); and Svetozar Vukomanović Tempo, *Revolucija koja teče*, 2 vols (Belgrade, 1971), II, pp. 292–313.



alliance of organized labour with the nationalist, anti-colonial movement, as well as closer contacts with unions from socialist countries such as Yugoslavia, generated a new breed of unionism in Northern Rhodesia. Tanganyika, and in particular its port capital Dar es Salaam, acted as an important “hub of decolonization” through which socialist trade unions channelled their aid to black Northern Rhodesian union officials and leaders of UNIP.<sup>29</sup> Through their active support and engagement, this article shows that the early links between Zambian and Yugoslav trade unions paved the way for a trustful relationship based on a number of shared premises such as anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, and non-alignment after Zambia’s political independence.

### An Invitation with Consequences

By the time the SSJ extended its invitation to the NRTUC in February 1959, SSJ officials were able to look back on a decade and a half of the existence of their federation. Following the Yugoslav Partisans’ heroic struggle against the fascist occupying forces during World War II, the Yugoslav communist party initially aimed to emulate the Soviet model of state organization. After the elections of late 1945, the unions took up the tasks delegated to them by the Politburo of the Yugoslav Communist Party (after 1952 the League of Communists of Yugoslavia), namely “raising [...] discipline and developing shock-work and [socialist] competition”.<sup>30</sup> Yugoslavia’s expulsion from the Cominform in 1948 led to a critique of the Stalinist organization of state and society. During the 1950s, a period of rapid economic development, three pillars came to define Yugoslavia’s path to socialism: federalism; workers’ self-management; and a non-aligned foreign policy. The programme and aims of the trade unions changed considerably as their educational and welfare role became more important: they were tasked with making workers “suitable” for implementing self-management and organizing workplace-based social services.<sup>31</sup>

While it is important to outline intra-Yugoslav labour dynamics, the SSJ invitation must also be understood within a broader framework of international labour relations during the Cold War. The SSJ left the WFTU – from which most non-communist unions in Western, capitalist countries split in 1949 to form the ICFTU – in April 1950.<sup>32</sup> In order to demonstrate its non-aligned stance, however, the SSJ did not join the ICFTU since its anti-communist character was considered by Yugoslavs as “a serious obstacle to it becoming a broad international workers’ body”.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Eric Burton has conceptualized Cairo, Accra, and Dar es Salaam as “hubs of decolonization”. See Eric Burton, “Hubs of Decolonization: African Liberation Movements and ‘Eastern’ Connections in Cairo, Accra, and Dar es Salaam”, in Lena Dallywater, Chris Saunders, and Helder Adegas Fonseca (eds), *Southern African Liberation Movements and the Global Cold War “East”* (Berlin, 2019), pp. 25–56.

<sup>30</sup>Unkovski-Korica, *The Economic Struggle for Power*, p. 51.

<sup>31</sup>Othmar Nikola Haberl and Wolfgang Höpken, “Jugoslawien (YU)”, in Siegfried Mielke (ed.), *Internationales Gewerkschaftshandbuch* (Opladen, 1982), pp. 653–636, 658.

<sup>32</sup>ICFTU Executive Board, “Agenda Item 12: Report on Yugoslavia” (June 1952), p. 28, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam (hereafter IISH) 3130.

<sup>33</sup>P’ M. Pavićević, “Yugoslav T. U.s and International Working Class Movement” (March 1951), IISH 3130, pp. 2–3.

Determined not to have its international policy curtailed by the policy interests of either of the two major Cold War federations, the SSJ leadership worked towards the diversification of international contacts – not least in Africa.<sup>34</sup>

The SSJ's heightened attention to Western and Southern Africa at the close of the 1950s was part of a deliberate assertive foreign policy of the Yugoslav party-state. Isolated from the world communist movement and facing the limits of domestic markets for its fast-growing industry, Yugoslavia initiated successful political and economic partnerships with Egypt and Ethiopia in the mid-1950s. The Algerian war for independence inspired former Partisans to extend substantial diplomatic and military assistance to the National Liberation Front (FLN).<sup>35</sup> The emergence of independent Ghana (1957) and Guinea (1958) signalled that the focal point of the decolonization movement was moving to sub-Saharan Africa. The joint meeting of the commissions for international cooperation of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia and the Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia, held in late October 1959, described "Black Africa" as "an extraordinary region which can be reached by our political and economic activity due to their character".<sup>36</sup>

The Yugoslav communists had high hopes for the new generation of African anti-colonial activists, seeing them as "progressive patriots". However, the biggest obstacle to more meaningful engagement was the dearth of knowledge about the African continent, in particular about Eastern and Southern Africa. Yugoslav companies lacked the most basic information, there was very little literature available, and very few people dealt with or had access to colonies in the region. The joint meeting of the commissions for international cooperation concluded that it was "time to make a decisive jump ahead".<sup>37</sup> The meeting participants agreed to give each sociopolitical organization in Yugoslavia the task of drafting a plan to connect with political activists in Eastern and Southern Africa, to invite delegations to visit, and to gather information. The February 1959 invitation to the NRTUC stressed the Yugoslavs' "sincere wish to establish close connections and as friendly relations as possible with the African trade union organizations in a struggle where we have many aims in common".<sup>38</sup> In order to make the invitation more appealing,

<sup>34</sup>The African trade union delegations at the Fourth SSJ Congress in 1959 came from Algeria, Morocco, United Arab Republic, Liberia, Guinea, and Ghana. See SSJ, *Četvrti kongres Saveza Sindikata Jugoslavije* (Belgrade, 1959).

<sup>35</sup>For the connections with Algeria, see Miladin Milošević (ed.), *Jugoslavija. Alžir, Zbornik radova sa naučne konferencije održane u Alžiru 27. januara 2013* (Belgrade, 2013); and Jelena Petronijević, "The Role of Trade Unions in Circulating the Idea of Workers' Self-Management between Yugoslavia and Algeria during the Algerian War of Independence (1959–1962)", unpublished seminar paper, University of Vienna, 2023, p. 10. We thank the author for sharing her manuscript with us. For a cinematic reflection on Yugoslav involvement in Algerian independence, see Mila Turajlić's project *Non-Aligned Newsreels*. Available at <https://www.nonalignednewsreels.com>; last accessed 10 July 2024.

<sup>36</sup>Stenografske beleške sa sastanka Komisije za međunarodne veze CK SKJ i SO SSRNJ [Stenographic record of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia Central Committee and the Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia Federal Board Commission for International Affairs], 31 October 1959, AJ, SSRNJ 142, 37.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup>Vukmanović (President SSJ) to Northern Rhodesia Trades Union Congress [NRTUC], 9 February 1959 (Belgrade), AJ, SSJ 117 363–651.

SSJ president Vukmanović-Tempo emphasized that the federation was ready to subsidize or fully cover their travel expenses.<sup>39</sup>

When the NRTUC officials opened the envelope from Yugoslavia, one may assume they were well aware that their activism was under close scrutiny by the British Colonial Office, the British Trades Union Congress (TUC), and, increasingly, the ICFTU. Trade unions were founded in Northern Rhodesia during the 1940s, but these were labour organizations catering for white workers.<sup>40</sup> Due to mounting pressure within the international labour movement to fight against racial discrimination and the “colour bar”, the British Colonial Office dispatched a Scottish trade union adviser to Northern Rhodesia to support the already blossoming first efforts of black workers to set up trade unions in 1947. The NRTUC, a national centre comprising several black African-led unions, was established in 1951 and admitted as an affiliate of the ICFTU three years later.<sup>41</sup> The labour movement was repeatedly repressed domestically: when the mineworkers went on strike in 1956, the colonial government declared a state of emergency, arrested eighty-seven AMWU officials, and rusticated them to rural regions, where some remained for two years.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, reflecting the sharp sectoral imbalances of a colonial economy focused heavily on extractive industry, the internal relations between individual craft unions were unequal from the start. The AMWU was the only constituent union that had paid its annual contribution since 1954.<sup>43</sup> Zambian union leaders made it clear to a visiting ICFTU mission that most other unions faced financial difficulties due to the small number of dues-paying members.<sup>44</sup> Lacking funds, the NRTUC could not even appoint a salaried full-time official and depended on the AMWU for office space in the latter’s headquarters in Kitwe, to which the Yugoslav invitation was addressed.<sup>45</sup>

The biographical notes on Albert Kalyati, the general secretary of the Union of Commercial and Industrial Workers, and Jonathan Mubanga, the general secretary of the Northern Rhodesia African Municipal Workers’ Trade Union, give us an idea of the precarious lives of NRTUC officials from less affluent unions and their frustration with their dependence on the AMWU bureaucracy and the ICFTU. Despite holding the highest positions in their respective unions, Kalyati and Mubanga could not survive on their union salary as membership fees were rarely paid on time. Well educated and in their early thirties, these men were dependent

<sup>39</sup>Vukmanović to NRTUC, 9 February 1959 (Belgrade), AJ, SSJ 117 363–651.

<sup>40</sup>The president of the white mineworkers’ union was the representative for Africa on the WFTU executive from 1945 until 1951 and attended several WFTU meetings. The white mineworkers’ union also remained affiliated to the WFTU for two further years after the ICFTU split. See Money, *White Mineworkers on Zambia’s Copperbelt*, p. 118.

<sup>41</sup>At the time of its affiliation to the ICFTU, the NRTUC reported a membership of 75,000. See ICFTU, “The Northern Rhodesia Trade Union Congress”, undated [c. 1957], IISH 4742.

<sup>42</sup>Money, *White Mineworkers on Zambia’s Copperbelt*, p. 176.

<sup>43</sup>Co-Operative & Marketing Officer (Trade Unions) to The Registrar of Trade Unions, 7 October 1957, National Archives of Zambia, Lusaka (henceforth NAZ), MLSS 1–26–136.

<sup>44</sup>Wilson Chakulya, “Supplement to the Memorandum presented to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions Mission to Northern Rhodesia, Tanganyika and Kenya”, 29 March 1958 (Broken Hill), IISH 4742, p. 1.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*

on various side jobs to support themselves and their families. Apart from unionism, they were actively engaged in anti-colonial politics and thus under constant threat of state repression. Both had a chance to undergo short-term trade union education abroad – Kalyati in England and Mubanga in Israel – but this did not result in any sustained educational or financial benefit in their careers.<sup>46</sup>

Within the NRTUC, the influential miners' union leadership under Lawrence Katilungu was insisting on a continuous alliance with the anti-communist ICFTU and its affiliates. In autumn 1959, the ICFTU executive, in cooperation with the Nordic Building and Woodworkers' Federation, agreed to fund an extensive organizing programme for Northern Rhodesian unions and dispatched a representative, the Swede Sven Mattson (Figure 3).<sup>47</sup> However, Kalyati and Mubanga were of the opinion that the ICFTU had neglected Northern Rhodesia when deciding to open its African Labour College in Kampala, Uganda, in autumn 1958. Moreover, being close to the anti-colonial movement, both were upset that the ICFTU was insisting on the separation of union work from politics – a position the British Colonial Office maintained as well.<sup>48</sup>

Between 7 and 8 March 1959, a few weeks after the envelope had left Yugoslavia, the NRTUC held a meeting in Kitwe, attended by a number of its affiliates. The Yugoslav letter was among the issues discussed, and it seems the invitation was handled as a routine affair at first.<sup>49</sup> As Matthew Mwendapole, the NRTUC's newly elected assistant general secretary, recalled almost two decades later in his autobiography, Northern Rhodesia was attracting increasing attention from the international labour movement in those months due to the rising tensions between the British Colonial Office and the nationalist organizations. The letter was just one of many invitations for the NRTUC to attend conferences abroad. However, the invitation soon generated "serious trouble", in the words of Mwendapole, as the Yugoslav unions were considered "communist-influenced".<sup>50</sup>

Initially, Mwendapole informed Vukmanović-Tempo that the SSJ's invitation was "warmly welcomed and provisionally accepted".<sup>51</sup> But in the following days, Zambian union officials became increasingly uneasy. A handwritten report dated 15 March 1959 and stored in the National Archives of Zambia shows that NRTUC officials had asked the ICFTU "whether this Yugoslav movement [SSJ] is not communistic [sic!]"<sup>52</sup> On 19 March, Mwendapole asked the ICFTU General Secretariat for guidance on how to handle the invitation, claiming to be unsure whether the SSJ was an affiliate of the ICFTU.<sup>53</sup> In a climate of intense Cold War rivalry within the international labour movement, ICFTU assistant general secretary Hans Gottfurcht

<sup>46</sup>These biographical sketches can be found in the SSJ Fond: AJ, SSJ 117 363–651.

<sup>47</sup>See C.H. Millard [ICFTU Director of Organization] to Knut Johansson, 17 December 1959 (Brussels), IISH 4639.

<sup>48</sup>Mulford, *Zambia*, p. 26.

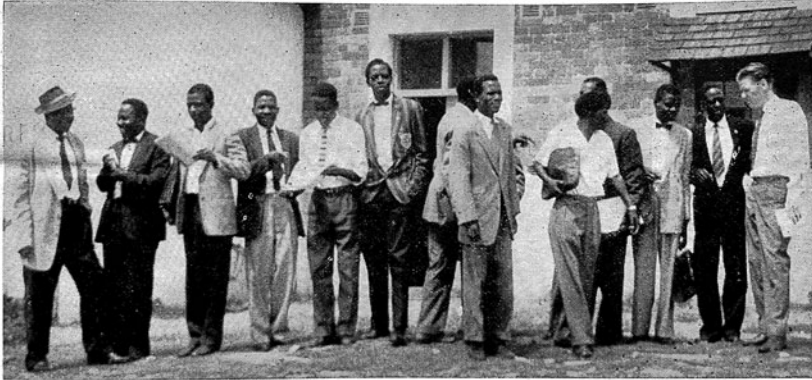
<sup>49</sup>E.K. Mayengano [?], "N. R. Trade Union Congress, Kitwe Head Office" [handwritten report], 15 March 1959 (Ndola), NAZ, MLSS 1–26–136.

<sup>50</sup>Mwendapole, *A History of the Trade Union Movement*, p. 49.

<sup>51</sup>Matthew Mwendapole to Vukmanović, 10 March 1959 (Kitwe), AJ, SSJ 117 363–651.

<sup>52</sup>E.K. Mayengano (?), "N.R. Trade Union Congress", 15 March 1959 (Ndola), NAZ, MLSS 1–26–136.

<sup>53</sup>Matthew R. Mwendapole to J.H. Holdenbroek [sic!], 19 March 1959 (Kitwe), IISH 4742.



Pictured here outside the Head Office at Kitwe are some members of the United Trades Union Congress Executive. Second from the left is Brother Mwendapole, and on the far right Mr. Sven Mattsson.

**Figure 3.** Some members of the United Trades Union Congress Executive in front of the Head Office in Kitwe. Second from the left is Matthew Mwendapole; Sven Mattson is on the far right.

Source: *Workers' Voice*, 1:1 (September 1961), ICFTU/ITUC Archives, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, 4743a.

reminded Mwendapole in his reply on 24 March that the SSJ was not an affiliate of the ICFTU and that relations between the ICFTU and the SSJ were frosty. The ICFTU executive board placed great emphasis on “free trade unionism”, highlighting liberal-democratic rights and the freedom of labour movements to operate independently. Thus, Gottfurcht explained to Mwendapole that the SSJ was not a “genuine” trade union organization as its “actions are controlled by the Party in power in Yugoslavia”.<sup>54</sup> The Yugoslav invitation to their Belgrade congress was even discussed in a sub-committee of the ICFTU, which had decided that its affiliates should not send delegates.

This placed the NRTUC officials, who had already provisionally accepted the invitation to Yugoslavia, in an uncomfortable position. Since a copy of Gottfurcht’s letter can be found in the SSJ’s archives, Mwendapole apparently resolved this dilemma by being entirely transparent: he forwarded Gottfurcht’s reply of 24 March in which the NRTUC was advised to decline the invitation. However, organizational loyalty to the ICFTU did not last long. While ICFTU executives and NRTUC officials, such as long-serving AMWU president Katilungu, did not approve of delegates attending the SSJ’s congress, the SSJ had already sent the plane tickets. “While the rumpus was still fresh”, Mwendapole recalled, Kalyati and Mubanga “secretly travelled on those two tickets to Yugoslavia via Lubumbashi through Cairo”.<sup>55</sup> Kalyati and Mubanga thus undermined the NRTUC leadership and its loyalty to the ICFTU with their headstrong action. Kalyati’s personal reply to the Yugoslavs, which can be found

<sup>54</sup>Hans Gottfurcht (ICFTU assistant general secretary) to M.K. Mwendapole, 24 March 1959 (Brussels), IISH 4742.

<sup>55</sup>Mwendapole, *A History of the Trade Union Movement*, p. 49.

in the SSJ archives, demonstrates the marginalized Zambian unionists' eagerness to travel abroad: "Dear comrades, we are really anxious of visiting your country and if all horses were wishes [sic!],<sup>56</sup> we could have flown to your country by the very minute that we received yours [invitation]."<sup>57</sup> This illustrates two key points. Firstly, Zambian union officials of the second tier, such as Kalyati and Mubanga, were keen to travel. International mobility and study tours and/or education were significant opportunities for aspiring African unionists at the time.<sup>58</sup> Secondly, the arduous route and successful circumvention of colonial restrictions on international travel demonstrates their determined agency in getting to their hosts in South Eastern Europe.

### Zambian Dissidents in Communist Yugoslavia

The records show that Kalyati and Mubanga reached Yugoslavia almost seven months after the SSJ congress, on 18 November 1959, and left shortly before the New Year. Scholars have recently enriched our understanding of Africans' routes from colonial territories to state socialist countries in Eastern Europe. Faced with restrictions on movement, hostile visa regimes, limited funds, and contingent planning, many of these journeys undertaken by young aspiring Africans took several months or even several years.<sup>59</sup> While one might be able to travel to the colonial metropolis – London – in a few days, this was almost impossible for countries branded as "communist" by the British colonial government since it commonly refused to issue passports and/or visas.<sup>60</sup> The Yugoslav union officials proved flexible, however, and turned the late arrival into an opportunity for a longer stay which included a study tour through various parts of the country. Apart from the federation's capital Belgrade, the Croatian capital Zagreb, and its port city of Rijeka, the guests also visited local unions, enterprises, government bodies, and cultural institutions in Zrenjanin (Vojvodina) and Skopje (Macedonia) (Figure 4).<sup>61</sup>

<sup>56</sup>This apparently refers to the Scottish proverb and nursery rhyme, "If wishes were horses, beggars would ride", first recorded in the seventeenth century. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/If\\_wishes\\_were\\_horses,\\_beggars\\_would Ride](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/If_wishes_were_horses,_beggars_would Ride); last accessed 7 December 2023.

<sup>57</sup>A.N. Kalyati to SSJ, 10 October 1959 (Kitwe), AJ, SSJ 117 363–651.

<sup>58</sup>I.R. Harisch, "Great Hopes, False Promises: African Trade Unions in the World of Organized Labor: Institutions, Networks, and Mobilities during the Cold War 1950s and 1960s" (Ph.D., University of Vienna, 2023).

<sup>59</sup>Eric Burton, "Decolonization, the Cold War, and Africans' Routes to Higher Education Overseas, 1957–65", *Journal of Global History*, 15 (2020), pp. 169–191; Sara Pugach, *African Students in East Germany, 1949–1975* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2022); and Ismay Milford, *African Activists in a Decolonising World: The Making of an Anticolonial Culture, 1952–1966* (Cambridge [etc.], 2023).

<sup>60</sup>Kalyati and Mubanga applied for exit visas, claiming they were attending the ICFTU's Sixth World Congress in Brussels in December 1959 via Athens and Belgrade. They expected legal repercussions upon their return to Rhodesia.

<sup>61</sup>For African dissident students' visits to Yugoslavia, see Christian Alvarado, "In the Spirit of Harambee! Kenyan Student Unions in the German Democratic Republic and Yugoslavia, 1964–68", in Eric Burton *et al.* (eds), *Navigating Socialist Encounters: Moorings and (Dis)Entanglements between Africa and East Germany during the Cold War* (Berlin, 2021), pp. 87–114; and Nemanja Radonjić, "Anti-Colonial Constellations: The Belgrade All-African Students Conference of 1962", in Chris Saunders, Helder Adegas Fonseca, and Lena Dallywater (eds), *Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and Africa: New Perspectives on the Era of Decolonization, 1950s to 1990s* (Berlin, 2023), pp. 263–288.



**Figure 4.** Socialist Yugoslavia in the early 1960s

As the two sides had very limited knowledge of one another, the focus of the visit was knowledge exchange and learning. SSJ officials held extensive talks with the Zambians, taking careful notes about NRTUC internal structures, the Northern Rhodesian labour movement, the country's political situation, and the society in general. The guests held lectures at the trade union headquarters and the Institute for Workers History, gave radio interviews, and agreed to contribute two articles to SSJ publications. Kalyati and Mubanga were particularly interested in educational possibilities, especially vocational training for their union members. The Zambian delegation was interested in how shop-floor education for workers was carried out in Yugoslavia, and whether courses, seminars, or even schools were organized for the workforce – demonstrating the desire among Zambian union officials for workers' and trade union education at a time when labour colleges for Africans were being created by international federations and national centres in Africa and abroad.<sup>62</sup> Mubanga noted that the colonial state was not educating Africans, while the British unions and the ICFTU were not opening educational centres in Northern Rhodesia under the pretext that it was not an independent country.<sup>63</sup>

For radicalized unionists in Northern Rhodesia, anti-colonialism was a key issue and a bone of contention in relations with foreign unions. Kalyati and Mubanga expressed the desire to maintain contact with as many federations as possible but wanted to remain independent as some of them allegedly used their privileged position to place Zambians under their influence. As the days went by, the reserved formulations and careful criticism of the NRTUC's main foreign partners became more explicit. In the second week of their stay, during a meeting with the SSJ's president Vukmanović-Tempo, the guests stated, "we are aware that ICFTU works in the interest of imperialism and decided to ignore many of their instructions". What bothered them the most about the ICFTU and many of its major affiliates was their disapproval of Zambian workers entering politics. The Zambians did not see why they should not take part in the "just struggle of our people and remain abstinent only because the Europeans tell us".<sup>64</sup> They believed organized labour and the anti-colonial movements should coordinate their activities and then decide how to move forward on the issue after independence had been achieved.<sup>65</sup>

This insistence on workers joining forces with nationalist political organizations was unpopular among the NRTUC leadership, which labelled Kalyati, Mubanga, and their co-thinkers "reds" and "communists". Indeed, some of the historical accounts published in the second half of the 1960s identified politicized trade

<sup>62</sup>Gabriele Siracusano, "Trade Union Education in Former French Africa (1959–1965): Ideological Transmission and the Role of French and Italian Communists", *Third World Quarterly*, 42 (2021), pp. 483–502; and Harisch, "Afrikanische GewerkschafterInnen an der FDGB-Gewerkschaftshochschule".

<sup>63</sup>"Informacija sa sastanka i razgovora između Duška Sobote i Jonathan Mubanga u Centralnom odboru Sindikata komunalnih i zanatskih radnika" [Information from the meeting of Duško Sobota and Jonathan Mubanga in the Central Council of Communal and Artisanal Workers Union], 20 November 1959 (Belgrade), AJ, SSJ 117 363–651.

<sup>64</sup>"Zabeleška o razgovorima koje je vodio drug Tempo sa delegacijom sindikata Rodezije" [A note from the meeting between comrade Tempo and the Rhodesian union delegation], 24 November 1959 (Belgrade), AJ, SSJ 117 363–651.

<sup>65</sup>"Zabeleška o razgovorima koje je vodio drug Tempo [...]", 24 November 1959 (Belgrade), AJ, SSJ 117 363–651.



unionists such as Kalyati and Mubanga as the “militant left wing”.<sup>66</sup> The Yugoslavs had a different impression. One report written during the study tour notes that the Zambians “do not know much about socialism or any other theory for that matter”. Interestingly, similar conclusions were made by the ICFTU at the time in the midst of accusations by the NRTUC leadership against Kalyati and Mubanga. Mattson, the Swedish ICFTU representative in Northern Rhodesia, disagreed with Katilungu, the AMWU president, claiming that he could not find any communists among the dissident unionists and that “they do not know what Communism is”.<sup>67</sup> The Yugoslav officials observed that the guests did not have a clear picture of the European geopolitical divides and were “not able to comprehend the Yugoslav system deeply”.<sup>68</sup> These assessments reflect their unrealistic expectations of African union officials being acquainted with contemporary European politics and socialist intellectual heritage, and their lack of knowledge about the narrowness of the colonial education system and the ban on Marxist literature inside Northern Rhodesia.

Nevertheless, the Zambians’ unfamiliarity with Marxism did not make the hosts think less of them. Dušan Sekić, the secretary of the Central Council of the SSJ, saw them as “sincere, serious and interested to learn about our approach to solutions of certain issues”. The SSJ official went so far as to suggest that the Zambian delegation, “more than any other so far, tried to understand the core of the issues and comprehend the most important aspects of our system”.<sup>69</sup> The Yugoslavs were not immune to the paternalistic attitudes that European communist parties East and West tended to adopt towards their comrades in colonial countries.<sup>70</sup> The Zambians were supposed to learn from them, as the more modern society, and rarely the other way around. Yet, due to the break with Moscow and support for “national roads to socialism”, they had a less schematic view of the modes of peripheral transformation and believed the Africans would be able to find creative solutions by drawing from the Yugoslav experience.

For their part, the Zambian delegation remained pragmatic when it came to ideological issues. “For us it does not matter. As long the methods enable us to gain independence, it is irrelevant if they will call it communist or something else”, the SSJ report quoted them saying. However, Kalyati and Mubanga did note that socialism seemed more suitable for them, keeping in mind the traditional ways of life and work in Africa.<sup>71</sup> That is why they declared themselves eager to learn more from their

<sup>66</sup>Mulford, *Zambia*, p. 172.

<sup>67</sup>See Sven Mattson, “Report for the period from 16.9 to 23.11.1960”, undated [November/December 1960] (Kitwe), IISH 4639, p. 2.

<sup>68</sup>“Beleške o razgovorima koje je vodio Albert s vođa delegacije sindikata Severne Rodezije” [Notes on the talks held by Albert Kalyati the leader of the Northern Rhodesian trade union delegation], 24 November 1959 (Belgrade) AJ, SSJ 117 363–651.

<sup>69</sup>“Beleške o razgovorima koje je vodio Albert Kaljati [...]”, 24 November 1959 (Belgrade) AJ, SSJ 117 363–651.

<sup>70</sup>For a critic of the Stalinist approach of European communist parties toward their comrades of colour in colonial countries, see Aimé Césaire, “Letter to Maurice Thorez”, *Social Text*, 28 (2010), pp. 145–152.

<sup>71</sup>The amalgam of socialism and local traditions was to become one of the leading principles of political rule in independent Zambia under the rule of UNIP and President Kenneth Kaunda known as “socialist humanism”. For a foundational text, see K.D. Kaunda, *Humanism in Zambia: And a Guide to Its Implementation* (Lusaka, 1968).

hosts. In line with the principle of “non-interference”, the Yugoslav communists tried not to impose ideological views or methods of struggle onto their partners in the developing world. They believed this made them different from the larger Cold War powers. At the same time, however, they were eager to present their own political traditions and way of doing things so that their partners could “learn from our struggle for national and social liberation to see how they could find their own way”.<sup>72</sup>

The central unifying experience and reference point for socialist Yugoslavia’s state-building was the popular anti-fascist movement during World War II. A visit to a national liberation exhibition at the national museum in Skopje was thus an inevitable part of the study tour. Yet, it seems the Zambians could relate more to the exhibits from the interwar period of clandestine political work than to the ones from World War II. During the talk with Vukmanović-Tempo, Kalyati and Mubanga were interested in the activism of Yugoslav unionists under the monarchist dictatorship and posed questions related to covert recruitment, underground press, identifying police informers, and so forth.<sup>73</sup> This indicates that Zambian unionists were eager to draw concrete lessons from the historic struggles of Yugoslav workers and unionists, particularly from the 1930s, which they found corresponded more closely to their struggle against the British colonial authorities.

If Yugoslav officials had to abide by diplomatic etiquette and refrain from advising the Zambians on how they should conduct their struggle, this was certainly not the case for other African delegations inside the country. During their stay, the Zambians met with a group of Algerian national liberation fighters undergoing medical rehabilitation in Yugoslavia. The Algerians were at the height of their war of independence against France and adopted the patronizing tone of more experienced comrades. They boasted about their year-long guerrilla campaign and declared that they would not lay down their arms until the entire African continent was liberated from colonial rule, asking the Zambians directly when they would begin their armed struggle. The Zambians answered that they were fighting with strikes and demonstrations as the relations of power in their country were still not favourable for armed resistance. Still, they were curious about how the Algerians were acquiring weapons and about the FLN’s propaganda aimed at enemy soldiers.<sup>74</sup>

This was not the first time that the Zambians had hinted at being interested in more militant methods of struggle. Sekić recalled in a written report that during the museum visit Kalyati had spotted an exhibit of a home-made pistol. Sekić commented in passing that he had produced makeshift weapons in the interwar years of underground activism. Sekić was surprised when Kalyati returned to this topic later that day, when they were alone, and asked for details of the practice.<sup>75</sup> In late 1959, there were no clear indications of Zambian political parties considering armed struggle as a viable option. When asked about the methods used against the

<sup>72</sup>“Beleške o razgovorima koje je vodio Albert Kaljati [...]”, 24 November 1959 (Belgrade) AJ, SSJ 117 363–651.

<sup>73</sup>“Zabeška o razgovorima koje je vodio drug Tempo [...]”, 24 November 1959 (Belgrade), AJ, SSJ 117 363–651.

<sup>74</sup>“Beleške o razgovorima koje je vodio Albert Kaljati [...]”, 24 November 1959 (Belgrade) AJ, SSJ 117 363–651.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*

colonial authorities, they referred to their adherence to “positive action” – a type of non-violent resistance and civil disobedience which demanded constant and lively actions without open struggle, such as organizing illegal strikes to trigger massive incarceration.<sup>76</sup> However, encouraged by the supportive attitude of his hosts as well as the Algerians’ insistence on the necessity of armed struggle, Kalyati allegedly asked if it would be possible to obtain weapons from Yugoslavia. Sekić replied that he was a trade unionist, but that he would put him “in touch with comrades in the army responsible for these matters”.<sup>77</sup>

Once they realized the Yugoslavs were open to broadening the scope of discussion beyond purely trade union issues, Kalyati and Mubanga raised the possibility of future political and economic cooperation as part of their workers’ proto-diplomacy. Already in the first week of their stay, during a visit to the Servo Mihalj food processing conglomerate in Zrenjanin, the Zambian unionists enquired about the enterprise’s exports, noting that “once we win our freedom, we will also be able to trade”.<sup>78</sup> As the study tour progressed, such overtures turned more explicit as the guests’ posture became more self-confident. When talking to Socialist Alliance of Working People’s functionary Veljko Vlahović, Kalyati and Mubanga initiated political, even proto-diplomatic relations, discussing trade that could kick-start Zambia’s development and requesting an audience with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>79</sup> A meeting was arranged with a representative from the ministry and ideas were exchanged on the most urgent post-independence economic needs, with the Zambians emphasizing light manufacturing and the need for a national transportation company. Their hosts clearly tried to show the Zambians that they perceived them as serious political actors and representatives of the future independent state. Indeed, as contemporary scholars argued by the mid-1960s, trade unions had become “the great school for some African politicians and statesmen, so that trade unionists, along with African intellectuals, now constitute a substantial contingent of leaders in politics, state administration, and diplomacy”.<sup>80</sup>

As they neared the end of their study tour, Kalyati and Mubanga decided to formalize the talks and draft a memorandum which specified the aid they envisioned receiving from the Yugoslav party-state. The document suggested a “reorganization” of the NRTUC with the aim of establishing a broader, nationwide membership and an orientation according to which the congress would not hesitate to support political organizing, thus “strengthening our struggle for independence”. The cost of this new union apparatus, consisting of some thirty organizers, offices, and so forth, was estimated to be around ten thousand pounds sterling per year. The memorandum did not stop at making plans for the reformed trade union but went on to draft a list of

<sup>76</sup>“Informacija” [Information], 21 November 1959 (Belgrade) AJ, SSJ 117 363–651.

<sup>77</sup>“Beleške o razgovorima koje je vodio Albert Kaljati [...]”, 24 November 1959 (Belgrade) AJ, SSJ 117 363–651.

<sup>78</sup>“Zabeleška o razgovorima koje je vodio drug Tempo [...]”, 24 November 1959 (Belgrade), AJ, SSJ 117 363–651.

<sup>79</sup>“Beleške o razgovorima koje je vodio Albert Kaljati [...]”, 24 November 1959 (Belgrade) AJ, SSJ 117 363–651.

<sup>80</sup>Immanuel Geiss, *Gewerkschaften in Afrika* (Hannover, 1965), p. 16. Translation ours.

positions (technicians, doctors, trade union officials, etc.) and the training needed to make the future independent government made up of Africans possible.<sup>81</sup>

Of course, both sides understood the document did not imply that Yugoslavia was expected to fulfil all these needs immediately. It was rather an orientation and mapping of the ultimate goals to be reached with the help of Yugoslav communists and other allies over a longer period. The Yugoslavs showed their willingness to start the process and advance Zambian national liberation by offering twenty short-term stipends for vocational training or trade union education, thirty long-term scholarships for university studies, and administrative equipment and a typewriter. This broadens our understanding of organized labour movements insofar as trade unions, and national trade union centres in particular, were engaged far beyond the immediate workplace: in education and training, politics, and national liberation, as well as providing office supplies, vehicles, and equipment.

Moreover, when Zambian unionists expressed interest in continuing their journey through other socialist countries, the Yugoslavs encouraged the idea and offered to connect them with Czechoslovak, Polish, and Soviet communists. This readiness to provide contacts to countries within the Soviet zone of influence is interesting keeping in mind the non-aligned position of the Yugoslav SSJ via the WFTU (and ICFTU), the rivalry of socialist countries in Africa, but also the subsequent image of Yugoslavia and the Non-Aligned Movement as a vehicle for keeping the newly decolonized countries away from Soviet influence.<sup>82</sup> During the period of *détente*, the Yugoslavs thus saw themselves aligned with other communist countries, supporting the cause of decolonization that fertilized a new breed of unionism in Northern Rhodesia.

### A New Breed of Unionism in Northern Rhodesia

On 16 February 1960, the SSJ received the first official letter from their Zambian guests following their departure from Yugoslavia shortly before the New Year. The letter contained a confession and news about an important development within the NRTUC. During their stay Kalyati and Mubanga had made no secret of their conflict with the NRTUC president and miners' union leader Katilungu, but they had downplayed his influence, claiming that they acted as official representatives of the congress. Kalyati was now admitting the trip had been undertaken *without* the permission of the NRTUC's leading bodies. He denounced Katilungu as an "imperialist agent" and disclosed that the unionists opposed to his leadership were to form a new organization provisionally named the African Federation of Labour.<sup>83</sup>

Kalyati and Mubanga's maverick trip to Yugoslavia accelerated the fracturing of the NRTUC. Earlier conflicts had arisen from material inequalities and struggles for influence within the Northern Rhodesian labour movement, given the dominant

<sup>81</sup>"Memorandum delegacije Kongresa Sindikata Severne Rodezije" [A memorandum of the Northern Rhodesian Trade Union Congress delegation], 16 December 1959 (Belgrade) AJ, SSJ 117 363–651.

<sup>82</sup>"Zabeleška o razgovorima koje je vodio drug Tempo [...]", 24 November 1959 (Belgrade), AJ, SSJ 117 363–651.

<sup>83</sup>Kalyati to SSJ, 16 February 1960 (Kitwe), AJ, SSJ 117 363–651.

role of the wealthy miners' union and its control of the NRTUC. Another important point of contention was the international affiliation of the trade unions and the associated views on the (non-)involvement of organized labour in (anti-colonial) politics. Katilungu, who was strongly oriented towards anti-communist unionism, was also absent from Northern Rhodesia during the month of December 1959, as he was attending the ICFTU's Sixth World Congress in Brussels. Upon his return, the NRTUC president accused the vice general secretary, Matthew Mwendapole, of complicity in the "Yugoslav affair" and threatened to remove him from the NRTUC leadership. Mwendapole recalled that "the issue flared up into the open causing a division among the leaders of the various unions, one group sympathetic to my plight the other supporting my sacking".<sup>84</sup> At the February 1960 NRTUC general executive meeting, radical unionists tried to strike first by initiating a campaign to oust Katilungu, but the move backfired. The powerful head of the union acted swiftly. Four industrial unions – the Central African Road Services Union, the Union of Commercial and Industrial Workers, the Food, Drinks and Factory Workers' Union, and the National Building, Timber and Woodworkers' Union – were expelled on the grounds that they were in arrears with their annual affiliation fees to the NRTUC.<sup>85</sup>

The group of officials from the industrial unions expelled from the NRTUC formed a competing national centre, the Reformed Trades Union Congress (RTUC).<sup>86</sup> The founding of this rival congress in February 1960 meant a sea change in terms of the link between labour struggles and politicization. RTUC officials openly aligned with Northern Rhodesia's fast emerging African nationalist party, UNIP, and its political goal of decolonization. While in Yugoslavia personal overlaps and rotations between the ruling party and trade unions guaranteed close coordination between the two organizations, it was only with the formation of the RTUC that similar entanglements between the unions and the main nationalist party UNIP surfaced. This is not to claim that high-ranking black African union officials had not been members of the African National Congress (ANC), the dominant African nationalist party during most of the 1950s.<sup>87</sup> However, the formation of the RTUC signalled the start of more open, institutionalized, and programmatic alliances between organized labour and the anti-colonial movement.

The new orientation of the national centre made closer contacts with national trade union centres from state socialist, but in particular non-aligned countries, seem more desirable. The Yugoslavs backed the newly formed RTUC, sending it administrative materials (printed letterheads) and political literature and maintaining close communication with its leadership.<sup>88</sup> Fierce criticism came from AMWU leader

<sup>84</sup>Mwendapole, *A History of the Trade Union Movement*, p. 49.

<sup>85</sup>J.K. Chivunga [Chairman Working Committee] to the general secretaries of ICFTU, British TUC, AFL-CIO, 18 February 1960 (Kitwe), NAZ, MLSS 1–26–136; and Mulford, *Zambia*, p. 172.

<sup>86</sup>Mulenga, "Crises of Expectations", p. 7.

<sup>87</sup>Experienced trade unionists and political figures with a union base, such as Dixon Konkola and Paul Kalichini, also played a prominent role in the founding of a more radical pro-independence UNIP. See Vickery, "Odd Man Out", p. 128.

<sup>88</sup>W.M. Chakulya to SSJ, 26 May 1960 (Ndola), AJ, SSJ 117 363–651.

Katilungu, who, still firmly in the ICFTU camp, justified the expulsions from the NRTUC with Cold War reasoning. According to records in the ICFTU archives, Katilungu considered the ambitious group of younger, more militant, and politically active black union officials as “paid Communists agents” and “opponents of the ICFTU” – a reference, as the ICFTU adviser in Northern Rhodesia added, to the fact that the Yugoslav federation supported the recently established rival centre.<sup>89</sup>

In reality, the group of RTUC officials and their relationship to Yugoslavia and socialist ideology was much more heterogeneous and complex. While Kalyati, Mubanga, and Jonathan Chivunga, president of the Union of Commercial and Industrial Workers, cultivated relations with the SSJ, as well as with the Prague-based WFTU and its affiliates, Mwendapole, for example, kept the unions from socialist countries at a distance. He was among those RTUC officials who maintained that unions should operate as independently as possible from political parties.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, the mere fact that the new national centre was named the “reformed” TUC, instead of the planned “African Federation of Labour”, indicated there was a compromise in the outlook between the radical and more moderate unionists ousted by Katilungu. Despite (or due to) firmer connections with unions from state socialist countries internationally, and to the ICFTU’s withholding of money, the RTUC struggled financially in the first months of its existence and many officials hoped a reunification would “usher in a period of labour stability and unity and contribute to a greater sense of purpose and urgency in the task of improving the conditions of workers throughout the country”.<sup>91</sup> The founding of the United Trades Union Congress (UTUC) on 3 January 1961, which marked a reunification of the two factions in Northern Rhodesia’s labour movement, confirmed the existence of these conciliatory tendencies.<sup>92</sup>

The UTUC was formed during a time when radical unionists sought to identify more closely with the Pan-African agenda, along the lines of the All-African Trade Union Federation (AATUF), which was led by socialist-oriented unions and governments from Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Morocco, and Egypt.<sup>93</sup> Applauding this non-aligned stance, the Yugoslavs wholeheartedly supported the establishment of the AATUF in May 1961 “as a promising step toward breaking down the polarization of the international labor movement”.<sup>94</sup> Yet, despite the Pan-African, anti-colonial rhetoric, the UTUC initially remained affiliated to the ICFTU as it depended heavily on its financial support. ICFTU representative Mattson hoped that ICFTU influence would encourage more discipline and control over Northern Rhodesia’s tumultuous labour movement. In January 1962, fierce struggles over

<sup>89</sup>Sven Mattson, “Report for the period from 16.9 to 23.11.1960”, undated [November/December 1960] (Kitwe), IISH 4639, p. 1.

<sup>90</sup>Mulenga, “Crises of Expectations”, p. 9.

<sup>91</sup>Mwendapole, *A History of the Trade Union Movement*, p. 51.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 50–51.

<sup>93</sup>Opoku Agyeman, *The Failure of Grassroots Pan-Africanism: The Case of the All-African Trade Union Federation* (Lanham, MD [etc.], 2003).

<sup>94</sup>Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Nonaligned World*, p. 193, quoted in Petronijević, “The Role of Trade Unions”, p. 9.

control of the UTUC were fought between Mwendapole's group, supported by the ICFTU, on the one hand, and what ICFTU officials referred to as the "circle of friends", with Chivunga, Kalyati, and Mubanga, on the other hand.<sup>95</sup> These more radical and populist unionists argued that the UTUC must work towards "democratically centralized trade unionism" and accused Mwendapole of being a "proud stooge" of the ICFTU and "treacherous" towards the national liberation movement.<sup>96</sup>

The strongest political trend within the Northern Rhodesian labour movement between the formation of the UTUC in 1961 and the country's independence in 1964 was the closer interlocking of union and nationalist political activism, visible in the fact that, more and more, leading union officials became card-carrying members of UNIP. This rising influence of radical politics inside the labour movement was shaped by the independence of neighbouring Tanganyika in late 1961 and the emergence of Dar es Salaam as an important "hub of decolonization".<sup>97</sup> Tanganyika's capital became a magnet for anti-colonial activists and socialist movements from Africa and beyond. The "progressive" orientation of Tanganyika's new political leadership enabled the highly mobile, radicalized UTUC officials such as Kalyati, Mubanga, and Chivunga to secure scholarships, attend union conferences, and embark on study tours. For landlocked Zambia, access to the port city of Dar es Salaam made it much easier to receive material aid from state socialist countries such as Yugoslavia in comparison with the period after the initial union split in 1960. Yugoslavia was quick to forge political and economic connections with the first independent government of Tanganyika and used Dar es Salaam as a base to develop closer connections with its contacts in Southern Africa.

The presence of Yugoslav diplomatic representation and UNIP offices in independent Tanganyika spurred workers' proto-diplomacy and opened the doors for provision of the aid pledged to Kalyati and Mubanga in Belgrade two years earlier. Such UNIP offices, which had also been established in London, Accra, Cairo, and the southeastern Tanganyikan town of Mbeya, were

the fruits of the anticolonial culture that activists had formed around their work over the previous decade: UNIP activists could travel to and between offices largely unhampered, often with funds raised by foreign sympathisers, pan-African or Afro-Asian organisations, or Cold War youth and student internationals.<sup>98</sup>

As our research reveals, these UNIP activists, who frequently travelled between the UNIP offices in Tanganyika, the Copperbelt towns, and Lusaka, as well as to Cairo, Belgrade, and Prague, included not only party activists, but also key union leaders such as Chivunga, Kalyati, and Mubanga. After the UNIP delegation visited the first

<sup>95</sup>S. Nedzynski (Assistant General Secretary, ICFTU) to Michael Ross (Director of International Affairs, AFL-CIO), Brussels, 3 April 1962, The George Meany Memorial Archives, AFL-CIO International Affairs Department, Country Files, 1945-71 RG18-001 Box 13 - Zambia 1959-70.

<sup>96</sup>J. Mubanga to Deloan [sic], 2 February 1962 (DSM), EAP121/2/10/1/4.

<sup>97</sup>Burton, "Hubs of Decolonization", p. 26.

<sup>98</sup>Milford, *African Activists in a Decolonising World*, pp. 208-209.

Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Belgrade in September 1961, the exchanges became more frequent. On Christmas Eve 1961, only two weeks after Tanganyika's independence, UTUC president Chivunga requested that the SSJ send plane tickets for three prospective students and trainees who were already waiting in UNIP's Dar es Salaam office.<sup>99</sup> UTUC official Mubanga, who was a regular visitor to UNIP's offices in Dar es Salaam, travelled to the WFTU's headquarters in Prague, visited the GDR, and revisited Yugoslavia in January 1962.<sup>100</sup> In September 1962, the SSJ informed the UTUC that Yugoslavia had granted six further scholarships for technical training and two scholarships for university studies, accommodating the educational requests of Zambian unionists.<sup>101</sup>

This shows that trade union representatives inserted themselves as important intermediaries in these proto-diplomatic relations connecting Northern Rhodesia with state socialist countries such as Yugoslavia. Moreover, their roles often overlapped: trade union officials were rewarded with scholarships and thus switched to the status of student or trainee and travelled abroad. Others took on important functions in the party, either in addition to their trade union position or switching entirely to (anti-colonial) party politics. The closer partnership between the Northern Rhodesian labour movement and UNIP domestically therefore went hand in hand with the increased openness of local trade unions towards national trade union centres from socialist and non-aligned countries internationally.

The growing alliance between UNIP and organized labour in the years preceding political independence was by no means a smooth process without contradictions. Some union officials, such as Mwendapole, remained inclined towards the traditional understanding of unionism separated from politics as advocated by the British and the ICFTU. There were clear signs of UNIP leaders attempting to subordinate organized labour in the late colonial period, a tendency that gained full force after Zambia's independence.<sup>102</sup> Historians have shown how the AMWU was determined to retain its autonomy and independent scope of action vis-à-vis both UNIP and the UTUC, resulting in frequent conflict between them both before and after political independence.<sup>103</sup> However, the general trend was towards incorporating black working-class interests, for example higher wages, provision of housing, and Africanization, into the broader programme of national liberation under UNIP's political guidance.<sup>104</sup> One of the prime examples of organized labour's engagement in the anti-colonial struggle was a ten-man committee staffed by African trade union leaders elected by the UTUC in March 1962 to collaborate

<sup>99</sup>R.S. Makasa (UNIP Representative DSM) to Presidents of CTUY, 24 December 1961, EAP121/2/10/1/4.

<sup>100</sup>J. Mubanga to I. Zakaria [Secretary of the WFTU in Prague], Dar es Salaam, 30 January 1962, EAP121/2/10/1/4.

<sup>101</sup>Deleon (Secretary Central Council CTUY) to J. Mubanga, Belgrade, 22 September 1962, EAP121/2/10/1/4.

<sup>102</sup>In July 1967, the Zambian government ordered all industrial trade unions to disaffiliate from all international organizations, arguing that this was in line with the country's policy of non-alignment. See Mulenga, "Crises of Expectations", p. 68. The Yugoslav SSJ had followed such a policy of non-alignment since its withdrawal from the WFTU in 1950.

<sup>103</sup>For more details, see Mulenga, "Crises of Expectations", p. 8.

<sup>104</sup>UNIP's aspirations to incorporate the youth into the party structure during 1962 and 1964 have been described in Mulford, *Zambia*, pp. 234–238.



with UNIP in the upcoming Northern Rhodesian general election in October 1962.<sup>105</sup>

The union correspondence via Dar es Salaam further demonstrates that federations from abroad, such as the Yugoslav SSJ, were considered important allies in this crucial election. Labour leader Mubanga boasted of great progress in enlisting black voters for the upcoming elections and urged the SSJ's Central Council to assist them by providing campaigning equipment. Yugoslavia had just started production of its first passenger car earlier that year under the licence of Italian Fiat and the SSJ mentioned the possibility of donating one of them for the campaign. Mubanga replied:

[M]uch of the achievements we will make [in the October 1962 election] will entirely depend on the high organisational and propaganda drive that the Party [UNIP] and the UTUC have to carry out during this period and before the electioneering date. Therefore, the problem of the Fiat Car fitted with a loudspeaker which you offered to UTUC is very important to us and will be of great help. So, the sooner you can forward it to us in Dar es Salaam [...] the more convenient it will be for us to enlist the support of the voters.<sup>106</sup>

Unfortunately for the UTUC officials (and UNIP), the car the Yugoslavs shipped to Tanganyika got stuck in the Portuguese-ruled port of Beira in Mozambique and was only recovered several months after the election. The circulation of goods and people between Northern Rhodesia and socialist Yugoslavia was still precarious due to logistical challenges and political obstruction. In the summer and autumn of 1962, Ašer Deleon, secretary of the SSJ Central Council, informed Mubanga of his desire to visit Northern Rhodesia as part of his tour through a number of African countries, but the British authorities refused to issue him a visa.<sup>107</sup>

Despite these obstacles, the solidarity assistance provided by Yugoslavia and other socialist and non-aligned countries to Zambia's decolonization activists through the UTUC and UNIP was an important factor in the organizational consolidation of UNIP. The party entered institutional politics decisively via the lower roll (dominated by black voters) constituencies of the October 1962 election.<sup>108</sup> While the settler-dominated United Federal Party (UFP) dominated the upper roll (largely white voters) with thirteen out of fourteen seats, UNIP won twelve out of fifteen lower roll seats, with the ANC securing the remaining three.<sup>109</sup> Overall, the UFP had fifteen members in the Legislative Council, followed by UNIP's fourteen, and the ANC's five. After much negotiating and engagement from other African leaders

<sup>105</sup>"UTUC Committee to Work with UNIP", *Northern News*, 30 March 1962.

<sup>106</sup>Jonathan Mubanga to Deloan [Deleon] [Secretary SSJ], [Carbon Copy to UTUC President Chivunga], Dar es Salaam, 12 July 1962, UNIP Archives EAP121/2/10/1/4.

<sup>107</sup>Deleon (Secretary Central Council CTUY) to J. Mubanga, 22 September 1962 (Belgrade), EAP121/2/10/1/4.

<sup>108</sup>Other important means for mobilizing votes were the "UNIP schools" where potential voters were taught how to fill in the English-language forms for the election, with basic literacy being one of the four general qualifications for voters (the others being twenty-one years of age; two years' continuous residence in the Central Africa Federation; and citizenship of the Federation or the UK and its colonies). See Mulford, *Zambia*, p. 247.

<sup>109</sup>Mulford, *Zambia*, p. 285.

such as Congo's Moïse Tshombe and Tanganyika's Julius Nyerere, UNIP entered into a coalition government with the ANC on 15 December 1962.<sup>110</sup>

## Conclusion

This case study of Zambian and Yugoslav trade unions in the Cold War 1950s and 1960s has illustrated the need to broaden our understanding of the role and functions of national trade union centres beyond that of mere mediators of industrial relations. Instead, they functioned as organizations that provided their officials with social and physical mobility, travel, and educational opportunities in foreign countries, while international connections were important for procuring financial and material aid from abroad. The 1959 study tour by Zambian union officials to Yugoslavia fostered a mutual exchange of important information and practices: while black unionists from Northern Rhodesia gathered experience and knowledge about labour and society in Eastern Europe and drew inspiration from Yugoslavia's system of self-management as well as its interwar and anti-fascist struggles, Yugoslav union officials were provided with valuable first-hand accounts of labour struggles in Northern Rhodesia by their Zambian colleagues.

The concept of workers' proto-diplomacy aimed to overcome the idea of unidirectional flows in East–South exchanges. As we have shown, national trade union federations, and their officials on both sides, were proactive sociopolitical actors paving the way for future diplomatic contacts. Yugoslav trade union officials developed a desire to forge closer ties with their counterparts in Africa, opening new perspectives on the Yugoslav organized labour movement as it reached out to the global at a time of rising decolonization and incipient non-alignment. Even though the Zambians Kalyati and Mubanga acted on their own initiative, without official acknowledgement by their labour organizations or the Zambian nationalist movement, the two dissident union officials operated as *de facto* proto-diplomats. They presented themselves as future politicians when travelling abroad, initiating new contacts and engaging with issues that extended beyond labour, including the future economic policy, diplomatic relations, and security aspects of an imminent independent nation.

The actor-centred focus on South–East trade union contacts employed in our research also sheds new light on the politicization of the Zambian labour movement. Zambian unions' open alignment with nationalist political parties, expanding international relations, and the ambition to adopt proto-diplomatic duties were interrelated. Our case study offered a nuanced perspective on Cold War trade union internationalism at a moment when its circuits were starting to shift away from the orbit of the British TUC and the Western-dominated ICFTU, towards party offices, conference venues, and study tours of state socialist countries in Europe such as Yugoslavia.<sup>111</sup> Once the renegade unionists returned to Northern

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 294–296.

<sup>111</sup>Comprehensive studies on the ICFTU and its powerful affiliates include Anthony Carew *et al.*, *The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions* (Bern, 2000); and Robert Anthony Waters and Geert van Goethem (eds), *American Labor's Global Ambassadors* (New York, 2013).

Rhodesia, the trade unions proved to be the backbone for organizing international support and strengthening the local anti-colonial movement.

The closer links between black Northern Rhodesian unions and the nationalist, anti-colonial struggle against white rule led by UNIP (and the rivalling ANC) was a larger trend. It was fuelled by the growing strength of the anti-colonial movement and its leaders' desire to assert more control over organized labour, as well as the realization by black radical union officials that the separation between labour and politics was arbitrary and was being used by the Colonial Office to ensure that black unionism remained moderate, for example not engaging in striking and anti-colonial activities.<sup>112</sup> The examples of trade unions' position in state socialist systems, such as Yugoslavia, encouraged this trend. As we have shown, Yugoslav unionists dismissed the rigid divide between unionism and politics propagated by most Western unions and engaged in parallel contact with Zambian party and union activists in the "hubs of decolonization" abroad, thus bringing them even closer together.<sup>113</sup>

We have demonstrated that the heyday of transnational East–South Cold War relations during the 1960s and 1970s cannot be properly understood without going further back into the late colonial period and paying attention to the amalgam of organized labour, politics, and diplomacy. The Zambian unionists' improvised 1959 visit to Yugoslavia had a long-term impact. The politicized trade unionists and proto-diplomats Kalyati and Mubanga established durable networks of exchange. This solidaric activity positioned Yugoslavia as a reliable ally in the minds of many leading anti-colonial activists and future political leaders of independent Zambia. One-third of the ministers in Zambia's first independent government in 1964 had either travelled to Yugoslavia or maintained close relations with Yugoslav diplomats in Cairo and Dar es Salaam in the years preceding independence. Veteran pro-UNIP unionists often occupied prestigious positions in the new independent state. After serving as the AATUF's representative in Accra, Kalyati went on to a career as a diplomat in Kenya and the Ivory Coast before returning to Yugoslavia as Zambian ambassador in the mid-1970s.<sup>114</sup>

In 1966, the Yugoslavs proudly noted that they had been among the few socialist countries invited to an independence celebration ceremony in Lusaka the year before, believing the Zambians had extended invitations "in relation to the assistance given during the liberation struggle".<sup>115</sup> Indeed, our interviews with former UNIP functionaries confirm that the party-state took the assistance in decolonizing efforts from abroad into account when deciding on Zambia's internal

<sup>112</sup>After gaining political independence, UNIP greatly expanded its control over organized labour. Through the Trade Unions and Trade Disputes Ordinance of 1965, the new government created the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), which replaced the UTUC. The top officials of the ZCTU were not elected but appointed by the UNIP government. See Mulenga, "Crises of Expectations", pp. 17–19.

<sup>113</sup>Burton, "Hubs of Decolonization".

<sup>114</sup>A.N. Kalyati (Ambassador Belgrade) to S.G. Mwale, Belgrade, undated [June/July 1976], NAZ, CO 03–5–2; Timothy M. Shaw, "The Foreign Policy System of Zambia", *African Studies Review*, 19 (1976), pp. 31–66, 55; and Mulenga, "Crises of Expectations", p. 17.

<sup>115</sup>An overview of bilateral relations between Yugoslavia and Zambia for 1965, DA, 20 January 1966, PA–1966–218–45649.

development and foreign policies.<sup>116</sup> Zambia's orientation towards the Non-Aligned Movement and Yugoslavia, as an important partner on the international stage, in domestic infrastructural and military projects thus cannot be properly understood without taking into account the early connections described here.

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<sup>116</sup>Interview with the former Director-General of the Zambia Security and Intelligence Service (ZSIS) and Minister of Internal Affairs, Wilted Phiri, Lusaka, April 2023.

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