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*Frank Horwitz*

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Introduction: Comprehending Industrial Relations in Africa

Chris Brewster and Geoffrey Wood

Comprehending industrial relations, and industrial relations in Africa

This book examines industrial relations (IR) in Africa. Africa is a huge continent with a rich endowment of resources that, in most countries, for a series of historical, economic and political reasons have not led to development and membership of the modern world. There are, of course, some existing and potential countries where significant progress has been made. For all these countries, however, a key resource remains the capability, commitment and deployment of their people in economic activity. The way that people are managed, their role in such management and the relationships between people and their representatives and their employers will be crucial factors in Africa’s development.

Since Ben Roberts’ (1964; Roberts and de Bellecombe 1967) studies on industrial relations in African and other developing commonwealth countries almost half a century ago, there have been very few attempts to collate existing knowledge about the continent into one volume.1 Comparative studies of industrial relations have tended to concentrate on the developed world, especially Europe and, to a lesser extent now, North America and Japan (see, for example, Bean, 1994; Eaton, 2000). There have been far fewer studies of the developing world and almost none on Africa. However, there is a growing interest in the relevance of the African experience (see Chapter 17), with two volumes that provide significant coverage of human resource management on the continent, namely Budhwar and Debrah (2001) and Kamoche et al. (2003). This volume, presenting texts on many of the Africa countries, written by experts in, from or on those countries, attempts to fill the gap in research on IR across the continent. There is not space in a single volume to devote a chapter to each African country, and our analysis has been limited by the IR scholars that we know, or could find, were conducting primary research in the area. Hence, for example, whilst the book includes chapters from North, West, East, the Horn, and Southern Africa, there is only one chapter from the Mahgreb states and one from sub-Saharan Francophone
Africa. Two chapters are included on Nigeria and Kenya, given the relative importance of these countries on the continent, and their relative neglect in the international literature, especially when compared to the other continental great power, South Africa. Nonetheless, whilst it would need a second volume to cover the countries left out, this book provides a wider coverage of IR in Africa than previous texts.

We explore the situation across the continent, chapters examining both formal and informal arrangements and practices. In particular, we have been keen to encourage authors to explore the context of industrial relations: something we feel is crucial in all studies of the subject, but is certainly required for any serious understanding of the topic in Africa. Whilst the researchers writing here are based in many different continents, most of the contributors to this volume are African scholars based at African universities, or from that background, with many years research experience on their chapter topics. This has ensured that the contributions do not represent ‘tourist research’, but rather are the product of detailed primary research and knowledge.

This introductory chapter identifies the current economic context in Africa, and outlines the situation of the actors: the State, employers and trade unions. We also examine the crucial role played by the informal sector. We then introduce the chapters in the book and draw some preliminary conclusions.

The context – structural adjustment in Africa: deindustrialisation, informalisation and organised labour

The imposition of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) – needed loan financing in return for neo-liberal reforms centring on radical reductions in the role of the state, marketed as mechanisms for economic recovery – in Africa in the 1980s proved devastating for the continent. Compelled into acceptance of these programmes, most tropical African governments were faced with the worsening, rather than the amelioration, of structural crises. By the close of that decade, it was already clear that the reforms had failed even on their own terms, with increasing debt, poor macro-economic performance, the collapse of education and health care systems, and an inability to meet the basic social needs of the bulk of the population (Naiman and Watkins, 1990).

Meanwhile, as George (1990) notes, currency devaluations and privatisations ensured foreign access to raw materials and infrastructure on discounted terms. Market saturation resulted in diminishing returns for African experts, whilst the stringent terms of SAPs restricted the resources available for diversification (George, 1990). Indeed, any stability attained was at a great cost in areas of domestic investment, even in terms of basic physical and social infrastructure (Mkandawire and Soludo, 2002). The effects of a continent-wide brain drain have been exacerbated by the demoralisation and debilitation of the civil service through ongoing downsizing, outsourcing, and universal vilification as corrupt (ibid.).
More recently, the poor track record of, and growing resistance to, SAPs has led to the IMF replacing them with Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), supposedly better tailored policies, focused on the needs of individual countries, and incorporating local issues and concerns. Yet, PRSPs continue to denigrate the role of the developmental state – other than in terms of policing, patent protection, market access, and controlling the movements of peoples – and represent little in the way of improvement on SAPs (Zack-Williams and Mohan, 2005). In 2005, the major industrialised nations of the world promised to cancel the debts of the poorest; yet, in addition to ‘ending’ corruption, this relief remains contingent on further privatisation and the elimination of blockages on private investment (Willett, 2005).

As Hoogevelt (2005) notes, through modest reforms, adherents of neoliberalism have been able to co-opt many of the concerns of groundswell campaigns in the West, such as ‘Make Poverty History’, through debt relief, a renewed commitment to basic education and health care, whilst retaining a commitment to the hollowing out of the developmental state, and the denigration of economic alternatives. Hence, it is hardly surprising that the campaigning musician-cum-entrepreneur, Bono, was able to state that Rupert Murdoch was one of his most helpful supporters (ibid.). In reality, there is more to Africa’s economic reconstruction than further debt relief; ultimately the promotion of economic alternatives in Africa is contingent on indigenous associations, such as national labour movements. No country has successfully industrialised in the absence of an active developmental state, with the possible exception of Britain that was able to count on the captive market of India. Nor is there any indication that SAPs have had anything other than detrimental effects on the economic diversity of target nations.

The ‘War on Terror’ has further contributed to the closing off of economic alternatives. Developmental resources and aid have increasingly been directed in the support of full-scale military adventures, and low key conflicts; yet, neo-liberal policies have worsened domestic and economic tensions in many areas of the developing world, further fuelling violent conflicts, rather than underwriting future prosperity (Willett, 2005).

In practical terms, the effects of neo-liberal reforms on unions have been four fold. First, over two decades of under-spending on education at all levels (with the exception of a handful of southern African states) has eroded national skills bases, placing new-labour market entrants at a very much weaker position vis-à-vis their employers. Quite simply, increasing numbers of Africans lack access to basic – let alone technical – education, condemning them at best to poorly paid jobs. Lower skills profiles place employees in a very much weaker bargaining position. Secondly, the destruction of large areas of industry in the face of intense overseas competition and wholesale job cuts has greatly reduced the pool of potential union members. Large-scale job cutbacks have also taken place in the public sector in most African states. Again, the resultant rises in unemployment would weaken the bargaining position of
those in jobs. Thirdly, significant currency devaluations have made for effective pay cuts; unions have had to devote a great deal of attention simply to slow the declining material conditions of members. Finally, the emasculation of the state has resulted in an inability to enforce labour laws effectively in many tropical African states.

The actors

The state

The state is ‘a politically organised body of people occupying a definite territory and living under a government entirely or almost free from external control and competent to ensure habitual obedience from all persons within it – in other words, possessing external and internal sovereignty’ (Anderson and Parker, 1964: 234). Governments represent the means through which states operate: they encompass the people and agencies designated to carry out the state’s purpose (ibid., 235). Theoretically speaking, the government serves as an instrument through which the state serves its citizens. In reality, many tropical African states fail to fulfil these basic functions: some, such as the case of Somalia, fail to meet the basic prerequisites of a state at all. Nonetheless, most African states retain at least some functions of government, and, formally speaking at least, are engaged in the business of promoting social progress, even if their actual track record is patchy.

Conservatives blame Africa’s endemic economic crises squarely on individual national governments on the continent. More sophisticated theories of the failure of the state again argue that the African state has failed to live up to the legitimate expectations and needs of their people (Hyden, 2002: 5). However, unlike neo-liberal conceptualisations, these theorists acknowledge that states can make a difference, and that human agency mediated by public institutions can provide the basis of general social progress and development (ibid.: 5). Theories of the failure of the state focus on the inability of the state to make peasants – and indeed, many of those working in the informal sector – comply with its interests; this is of real significance in Africa, where a very high proportion of employment is in the informal sector. Others argue that deeply embedded patronage networks make progress impossible (ibid.: 5).

In the field of industrial relations, states seek to regulate both the conditions under which labour power is sold, and how it is used (Edwards, 2002: 162). The former would encompass interventions such as social security, which would guarantee basic living standards, so that the supply of labour power is not totally dependent on the market (ibid.). With the exception of a small number of states – mostly in southern Africa – social security provisions on the continent tend to be either negligible or totally absent. This means that individuals are compelled to sell their labour power at any cost – and/or rely on extended, informal family based networks of support. The demands of the latter place great strains on those already in employment, and make having
work inherently far more stressful than would otherwise be the case. Other ways the state can regulate the sale of labour power would be by imposing age limits on employment or through the operation of minimum wages. Again, across much of the continent, the hollowing out of government – as a result of both structural adjustment programmes and internal failings – has greatly weakened the capacity of governments to enforce the law in this area, whilst the continued ideological hegemony of neo-liberalism has emasculated the political will. Finally, enforcement of any type of labour legislation is at best patchy; most informal sector operatives are entirely beyond legal restrictions in this area.

The second area where the state may regulate the employment relationship is in the deployment of labour power (Edwards, 2002: 162). This would include union organisational rights, restrictions on working hours, health and safety legislation, employment protection, including anti-discrimination and anti-harassment measures, and formal grievance proceedings. Again, the general capacity of most governments on the continent to regulate these areas of the employment relationship remains weak and uneven; and, again, often entirely absent in relation to informal working.

During the early years of independence, most tropical African governments pursued active industrial policies, with a large role being accorded to parastatal enterprises. Traditional areas of industrial strength on the continent have included industries such as textiles, food processing and beverages, in addition to agriculture and mining. Many countries also developed a range of other industries, most notably motor components and assembly. IMF imposed neo-liberal reforms devastated most of these areas of activity, with the notable exception of beverages, reflecting the strength of national brands, strong distribution networks and the relative costs of shipping short versus long distances. Hasty and poorly conceived privatisations have been followed by wholesale asset stripping or cherry picking, both contributing to the ongoing shrinkage of formal sector work and employment: in very few cases have national governments been able to reverse the damage done.

**Employers**

Within Africa, private sector employers can be divided into three broad categories. Firstly, there are foreign owned multinational corporations (MNCs). Such companies may tailor their employment relations towards practices in their country of origin. Instances of the latter are relatively uncommon in tropical Africa, but can be found, *inter alia*, in South Africa’s motor industry, where major German motor manufacturers have successful disseminated advanced cooperative production paradigms. Secondly, they may follow practices in the country of operation: this may result in subsidiaries basing their activities on cost-cutting, taking advantages of local institutional shortcomings to engage in higher levels of labour repression and/or pay very much lower wages (even in relative terms) than would be acceptable in their country of origin.
Thirdly, they may adopt a mixed model, reserving most senior positions for expatriates, consigning indigenous employees to relatively lowly paid positions.

A third cluster of employers are indigenous-owned firms, the overwhelming majority of which are small. In more developed southern African states, such as South Africa and Botswana, such firms tend to be governed in a manner similar to their counterparts in the developed world. However, in much of tropical Africa, the ownership of a large proportion of firms tends to be via extended families, with employment relations being acted out on patriarchal lines. Not only is capital accessed by personal networks, but also labour (c.f. Kimemia, 2000; Wood and Frynas, 2006). However, returns are often low and volatile, precluding such networks from moving beyond a basic subsistence and coping level, unlike their counterparts in the Far East (Wood and Frynas, 2006).

As Wood and Frynas (2006) argue, both pre-colonial and colonial societies left a legacy of paternalism in the workplace: this has led to the persistence of Taylorist (and pre-Taylorist) work systems, characterised by authoritarianism, fixed divisions of labour, limited and informal training (also a product of weak local training institutions), and low levels of participation and involvement. On the one hand, it could be argued that increased consumer pressures have forced indigenous firms linked to global commodity chains to upgrade their practices. On the other hand, it can be argued that, in the operation of such networks, labour standards continue to receive a low priority when compared to cost or quality concerns (Mellahi and Wood, 2002). Again, insecure tenure has become the norm in most tropical African states, compounded by wholesale job shedding as a result of SAPs.

Trade unions

In their classic account, Freeman and Medoff (1984) argue that unions enhance social efficiency. Whilst neo-liberals charge that they distort the operation of labour markets in the direction of monopoly, this is offset by the provision of voice mechanism, that allow employees to express concerns, and hence providing a basis for fairer, more equitable and sustainable employment relations – and indeed, raise social concerns of importance beyond the workplace. To this, Kaufman (2004) adds a third face: they offset the monopsony powers of the employer. The dominance of neo-liberal ideologies in setting government policies in Africa has generally resulted in the positive aspects of unionism being ignored; rather, through labour market deregulation, or more commonly, through poor enforcement of existing labour laws, unions have been forced onto the defensive, a process exacerbated by wholesale job losses in manufacturing and the state sectors continent-wide.

Yet unions can play a role of inestimable value on the continent. As agents of civil society, unions may serve – and in many African countries have served – as campaigners to promote democracy within the wider society, challenging authoritarian regimes, and providing a mechanisms for voicing a broad range of social concerns when formal political structures are moribund or
semi functional (Wood, 2004b). They may also serve as guardians of hard-won democratic gains, and/or as partners in accommodations between competing interest groupings (ibid.). At the workplace, they have a vital role in deflecting employers away from low wage low skill production paradigms, and towards higher value added models; as employers are precluded from reaping gains accruing from labour repression, they are forced towards more cooperative labour relations paradigms, characterised by high wages and high skills (Wood and Glaister, 2006). Through combining country studies with general overviews, this book explores the current state of labour unions in Africa, and the prospects for revitalisation.

The events of the past two decades have not been wholly detrimental to unions. In most African countries, the immediate post-independence period saw a drift to one-party rule; the authoritarian political systems that emerged invariably subsumed any trade unions into little more than transmission belts for official policy. At the same time, ideological commitments to socialism or progress helped secure a range of basic employment rights, helping legitimise otherwise fragile political institutions.

The 1990s saw a dramatic return to multi-party democracy in many African states, after many years of single party rule (Southall, 2003: 142). As Southall (2003: 142) notes, whilst conservative accounts have argued that this largely represented the product of Western pressure in the aftermath of the cold war, there is little doubt that, in reality, internal forces played a central role in the reversal of authoritarian rule. Within many African countries – ranging from Kenya to Zambia – trade unions played a central role in protest movements that impelled democratic reforms (ibid.). However, in most cases they proved incapable of challenging the imposition of neo-liberal reforms once multi-partyism had been achieved. Even in South Africa, the Congress of South African Trade Unions has proved incapable of checking the imposition of market-driven policies, although it has proved somewhat more successful in checking an ambitious privatisation agenda.

**Employers and employment in the informal sector**

No discussion of industrial relations in Africa would be complete without pointing out the importance of the informal sector in the continent. The informal sector constitutes an important part of economic social life everywhere, particularly in developing economies. In Africa, the informal sector forms a major, perhaps the major, part of economic activity.

The exact nature and effects of the informal sector remains a subject of much contention. It has variously been seen as part of the creeping marginalisation of vulnerable labour market categories worldwide, a response to over-regulation, a cause and effect of inequality, a creative field of operation for the entrepreneurially minded or a survival strategy of last resort. The informal sector can be defined as economic activity based on small enterprises,
an especially important survival strategy for the poor, when state social security is weak or non-existent (Martin, 2000).

There is a strong relationship between the size and scale of unregulated economic activity and social inequality; poverty is a major cause of informal sector activity (Rosser and Rosser, 2001). Informal sector operatives – especially larger operatives within the underground economy – have sometimes been depicted as latter day versions of the ‘robber barons’ of early capitalism who later turned into respectable philanthropists; as essentially productive capitalists fleeing rapacious officialdom (Rosser and Rosser, 2001). However, informal sector activity more commonly may represent a survival strategy of last resort, with ‘negative feedback loops’ (weakening regulatory machinery and a coterminous emasculation of state benefits) resulting in a vicious circle of exclusion (ibid.).

In contrast, it has been suggested that the lack of regulation contributes to the ‘Brazilianisation’ of an economy, with the inevitable pressures being downward rather than upward (Financial Times, 31/8/2000). If informal sector activity constitutes a large segment of an economy, this will invariably result in increased tax shortfalls, reduced social spending, and, hence, an increasing number of individuals being forced to turn to the informal sector for survival (Rosser and Rosser, 2001). This can result in the informal sector threatening to totally overwhelm the formal one (ibid.). In Africa, the proportion of informal jobs is ever-increasing; rather than the uniform pattern of progress depicted by modernisation theorists, it seems that development trajectories are polarizing, with a large proportion of the world’s population being forced to turn to the informal sector for survival (Williams and Wildebank, 2000).

In summary, the key industrial relations issues emerging from the informal sector centre on its scale, its marginality, and the tenuous, dangerous and poorly rewarded nature of work. A growing proportion of African workers are confined to the informal sector: indeed, a case can be made that the typical employment relationship in Africa is in the informal sector. What makes it particularly complex is that many engaged in these activities are both workers and owners. This, and marginal and fragile livings, makes any attempt at unionisation extremely difficult; whilst there are politically powerful informal traders associations in many parts of Africa, these tend to have populist-reformist orientations, and often closer to political elites than the bulk of those employed in this area.

Individual national experiences and common trends

Any overview of the state of employment relations in such a vast and variegated continent as Africa must necessarily begin with caveats. Countries on the continent vary greatly in their stage of economic development. On the one hand, in most countries, the peasantry remains important, and the informal sector has become increasingly so, whilst the lifting of protective tariffs
as part and parcel of structural adjustment programs has devastated large areas of industrial activity. On the other hand, there are vast differences in employment relations practice between failed and criminal states, and functional and stable multi-party democracies with growing economies. We have sought to illustrate this diversity through a range of country chapters, encompassing a wide cross-section of countries. However, space required certain omissions. Firstly, we have not concentrated on coverage of North Africa, because of the very different nature of political systems in that region, and its closer affinity with the Middle East. Secondly, our coverage of Francophone Africa is more limited; this reflects both the serious political crises experienced in some countries (e.g. Ivory Coast and DRC) and the limited nature of existing industrial relations research in others (e.g. Chad, Cameroon, Togo, Mali).

The book that you have in front of you has been written by country experts from a wide range of African countries. Section A consists of country studies from East and Central Africa, Section B, southern Africa, Section C, West and North Africa, whilst Section D covers issues of continent-wide relevance.

**Part I: country studies from East and Central Africa**

Chapter 2 – by Fitsum Ghebregiorgis and Luchien Karsten – explores the nature and extent of industrial relations practice in Eritrea. They examine the extent of free union activity, the role of collective agreements, and the relationship between industrial relations to civil society and citizenship behaviour. It is concluded that workplace conflicts tend to be resolved by dispute settlement mechanisms internal to the firm. On the one hand, industrial relations practice is based on Western practices centring on trade unions and collective bargaining. On the other hand, industrial relations in the country ‘is characterised by the republican virtues owing to the active participation of Eritrean citizens in the country’s rehabilitation and reconstruction process to promote economic growth and catch up with the world economy.’

In Chapter 3, George Hagglund examines the emergence of the modern Kenyan industrial relations system, as a product of trade-offs between various interest groups. Kenyan industrial relations remains dominated by the needs of succeeding national governments, and their desire to exercise control over both unions and private sector firms; meanwhile the Kenyan economy remains in a highly precarious position, not conducive to stable long term employment relations. The companion Chapter 4, by Tayo Fashoyin, provides a more detailed account of the present state of play of Kenyan industrial relations, according special attention to the possibilities and prospects of tripartism in one of Africa’s most important economies.

In Chapter 5, Lewis Dzimbiri looks at the changing nature of Malawian industrial relations over the past four decades: a central theme of his analysis is on the role of the state and donors in shaping industrial relations practice in that country. Whilst the labour movement was reduced to a subservient role during the Banda years, it regained a more independent role in the
1990s: at the same time, job losses during that decade as a result of structural adjustment programmes have posed new problems for Malawian trade unions.

In Chapter 6 on Uganda, Joy Kirenga examines the IR situation in one of the African countries that has suffered most from the fluctuations in global markets and exploitation by those outside the country. Making the point strongly that this is mainly a rural, subsistence, economy, she sets industrial relations within the country in context. The case has extra resonance for the editors as industrial action and associated riots almost stopped the author from completing the text in time and it was only through her considerable ingenuity and persistence that the chapter is here.

Part II: country studies from Southern Africa

Chapter 7, by Lloyd Sachikonye, looks at the Zimbabwean case: again a story of labour union activism and collective bargaining, mixed with extensive state intervention. The chapter explores the linkages between political crises, economic decline, and the volatility of present-day Zimbabwe industrial relations. Sachikonye concludes that the practice of industrial relations has been heavily – and adversely – affected by the combined processes of economic decline and state authoritarianism: ‘any improvement in the climate of industrial relations will be bound up with economic and political reform on a democratic path.’

Chapter 8, by Eddie Webster and Geoffrey Wood, provides an overview of the state of Mozambican trade unions. It seeks to shed further light on the effects of structural adjustment and political liberalisation on unions and the practice of employment relations. Whilst focusing on the case of organised labour in a newly democratised developing economy, the dilemmas posed by a shrinking of employment bases in traditional areas of union activity, reduced security of tenure and \textit{de facto} legal deregulation, and the need to reach out to highly marginalised categories of labour, are also shared by unions in many developed countries.

Chapter 9, by Gilton Klerck, evaluates the effects of the changing Namibian regulatory environment on firm level practices. Klerck concludes that a low-wage, low-skill, low-trust, numerically-flexible paradigm is becoming embedded in both industrial and work relations in that country. Furthermore, new technologies and work practices have contributed to widening the gap between more secure, skilled, core workers, and more vulnerable categories of labour.

Chapter 10, by Pauline Dibben, explores changes in employment regulation in South Africa, and the challenges facing organised labour in that country. She notes that whilst workers enjoy strong – and effectively enforced – protection from one of the most progressive bodies of labour legislation in the world, unions have battled to cope with wholesale job losses, and to make themselves relevant to the needs of those employed in the informal sector. Dibben goes on to explore the potential of alternative strategies for union organisation, to ensure that organised labour has the capacity positively to shape South Africa’s
future trajectory. In the following chapter, Thabo Seleke looks at industrial relations in Botswana. Despite being a multi-party democracy, unions have battled to secure political independence, and, until relatively recently, to act independently of government.

**Part III: Country studies from West and North Africa**

Chapter 12, by Mohamed Essaaidi, outlines the employment context and the framework of industrial relations in Morocco. A French-type civil law based system, formal legislation plays a very much greater role in determining the practice of employment and work relations than would the common law systems commonly encountered in Anglophone Africa. Yet, despite this key difference in employment regulation, the Moroccan industrial relations context has much in common with other countries on the continent: above all, the increasing importance of the informal sector, and the inability of employers and organised labour to reach and maintain legitimate and enforceable collective agreements.

Chapter 13, by Salo Fajana, outlines the development and the historical context of industrial relations in Africa’s most populous state, Nigeria. The colonial legacy and the sometimes very depressing developments in government since that time provide a rich context, within which industrial relations has developed. The recent economic developments and the influence of petroleum on the state in general and industrial relations in particular are clearly outlined and the impact of the successive political developments on industrial relations are manifest. Chapter 14, by Dafe Otobo, goes into more detail on the current industrial relations scene in Nigeria, bringing out the role of the various parties and the impact of the successive acts of parliament and legal institutions on industrial relations in the country. As elsewhere in Africa, the public sector is both a politically charged factor in the economy in its own right and a more significant element of the picture of industrial relations than might be found in many developed countries. Detailed examples and case studies of strikes and other developments indicate the impact of industrial relations in the public sector in Nigeria.

In Chapter 15, Garth Frazer looks at industrial relations in Ghana. Despite the negative effects of wholesale redundancies in recent years, unions continue to have a significant presence in the formal sector, whilst there has been a general trend towards greater pluralism and the more professional handling of disputes, the latter trend being the converse to what has been experienced in many other countries on the continent.

The final chapter of the section explores the changing nature of industrial relations in a sub-Saharan Francophone African state, Niger. Despite differences in colonial experiences and legislative traditions, Richard Croucher notes that, in common with their counterparts in Anglophone African countries, unions in Niger have had to contend with membership declines as a result of wholesale job losses in the formal sector, which have followed on the
imposition of structural adjustment policies. In turn, this has drained away union resources, resulting in the fragmentation of the labour movement. Whilst some efforts have been made to organise the informal sector, in practice, this has yielded mixed results.

Part IV: Trans-Continental trends and issues

In Chapter 17, Richard Croucher looks at central industrial relations issues in the informal economy in Africa. Any attempt to understand IR in Africa without understanding the role of the informal economy is bound to be extremely partial. Using the example of Ghana and Ghanaian experiences of organizing within the informal economy the results and prospects of these efforts are examined. Croucher argues that whilst there is little doubt as to the desirability of unionisation, it is hindered by limited union resources to defend members, especially as historically speaking unions have not been geared for this purpose. It is argued that unionisation has been most successful when founded on self-organisation, and when it has enjoyed state support.

Chapter 18, by Frank Horwitz, looks at trans-continental trends and issues. Horwitz identifies the key elements of employment relations in African emergent and transitional economies as colonial impact, nationalism, post-colonial state formation and crisis, structural adjustment, democratic reforms, and pressures for social partnership. This is followed by a more detailed look at employment relations problems and challenges in selected African states.

Conclusion

The global ascendancy of employer interests at the expense of organised labour following on the economic crises of the 1970s represents only one of many pressures recasting industrial relations in Africa. Neo-liberal reforms have had particularly adverse consequences on the continent, weakening the capacity of the state to enforce existing and new industrial relations legislation, and resulting in wholesale job-shedding in the formal sector. Whilst the spread of multi-partyism has allowed unions in many African countries to exert increasing independence, the latter still face difficulties both in relations with political parties, and in being relevant to what is, in most cases, the bulk of the workforce, informal sector workers.

Note

1. There are only four other collections with a continent-wide scope that deal explicitly with IR (as adverse to human resource management and related areas of management) – Damachi et al. (1979), Fashoyin (1992), ILO (1964) and Essenberg (1985). The latter is a short monograph, and the ILO collection the proceedings of a seminar.
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