

Mawby, Spencer (2016) Workers in the vanguard: the 1960 Industrial Relations Ordinance and the struggle for independence in Aden. *Labor History*, 57 (1). pp. 35-52. ISSN 0023-656X

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## **Workers in the Vanguard: The 1960 Industrial Relations Ordinance and the Struggle for Independence in Aden**

When the Governor of Aden, William Luce, informed the Colonial Office that he was proposing to ban strike action in the colony, they responded that his proposal would ‘amount to an extreme departure from the labour policies consistently pursued by successive Secretaries of State.’<sup>1</sup> The year was 1960 and since the labour rebellions in the Caribbean thirty years earlier, the Colonial Office had been cultivating properly constituted unions bearing similar rights to their European counterparts as an antidote to full blown workers’ insurrection. This policy entailed, in conscious imitation of the historical development of industrial relations in the old imperial metropolis, extending the right of free association to workers and guaranteeing trade unions against tort action. For Luce, the proposal to deny Adenese unions the right to strike was commensurate with the extremity of the circumstances in Aden: as a dispute at the British Petroleum oil refinery in February had demonstrated, normal industrial relations procedures had become ineffective at a time when the urban workforce had taken up the politics of anticolonialism. On his account, the failure to curb the local trade unions had contributed to an emergent political crisis and necessitated a new Industrial Relations Ordinance (IRO). Yet the affairs of imperial Governors, like Luce, and their overseers in the Colonial Office during the years of the Cold War and decolonisation, have not generally been the concerns of labour historians. Such reticence is easily justified on the basis that it has taken a great deal of scholarly effort to drag the attention of historians away from their earlier preoccupation with the activities of political elites to the lives of ordinary working people; but it is also problematic in the sense that the broader political context is integral to an understanding of industrial conflicts during the years of imperial decline. The political endeavours of the nascent trade unions of Africa, Asia and the Americas were embedded in the wider process of decolonisation and the Cold War. Peter Weiler conducted pioneering work into the role of British labour in the Cold War twenty years ago but his book paid almost no attention to the colonial aspect and there has been very little significant work undertaken since.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> TNA: CO 1015/2605, Watts (CO) to Oates, 20 March 1960. CO 1015/2566, Governor (Aden) to Secretary of State, 5 February 1960, 8 March 1960.

<sup>2</sup> P. Weiler, *British Labour and the Cold War* (Stanford, 1988).

The last years of the British empire are a promising field of enquiry for those wishing to examine the globalised history of labour. The events which accompanied the introduction of the IRO in Aden indicate that three elements of the historiography on industrial relations and decolonisation need a measure of reconsideration. Perhaps the most important of these is the straightforward requirement to place the IRO back into the labour history of the British empire from which it is presently excluded. While the origins of trade unionism in Africa and the Caribbean have garnered comprehensive treatment, most conspicuously in the work of Cooper and Bolland, the Middle East remains relatively neglected and Aden itself still more so.<sup>3</sup> To some degree this reflects the exceptional nature of Adenese labour history and the unprecedented character of the IRO which, as the first section of this essay suggests, were partly determined by the unusual material and political circumstances which prevailed in the colony in 1960. These conditions generated a degree of perplexity in the corridors of British officialdom and eventually produced some singular solutions. However, Adenese circumstances were not entirely unique and policymakers looked both inwards at the domestic history of British industrial relations and outwards to the operation of labour policy across the empire in search of technical solutions to problems which arose in drafting the legislation. In order to understand the motives behind the legislation it is also necessary to register the obsession which British policy-makers had with the regional threat posed by President Nasser of Egypt whose anti-colonial message was eagerly received by Adenese workers.

In the second section the focus widens beyond the drafting of the IRO to consider the battery of anti-labour measures employed by the colonial government. Currently the historiography dealing with colonialism in Aden remains preoccupied with charges of appeasement levelled at the British government by many of those who witnessed or participated in the last years of colonialism in Aden. These indictments attend to three later moments of apparent weakness: the decision to offer independence in 1964, the announcement in February 1966 that Britain would abandon the base and the last minute decision to conduct negotiations with the National Liberation Front (NLF) in October and November 1967.<sup>4</sup> This kind of case becomes

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<sup>3</sup> N. Bolland, *The Politics of Labour in the British Caribbean* (Kingston, 2001, 362); F. Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, 1996)

<sup>4</sup> J. B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* (London, 1980), 32; C. Mitchell, *Having Been a Soldier* (London, 1969), 5; M. Holt, P. Hinchcliffe & J. Ducker, *Without Glory in Arabia: The British Retreat from Aden* (London, 2006), 204-212; S. Harper, *Last Sunset* (London, 1978), 9-10.

rather less plausible once attention is refocused on earlier efforts to suppress anti-colonial sentiment and nowhere was this more evident than in the punitive character of British industrial relations strategy before 1964. This kind of reframing of the historiography is also useful in revealing a significant degree of congruence with a newly emerging literature about the coerciveness of decolonisation. Recent work by French, anatomising the corpus of punitive techniques employed during post-war British counterinsurgency campaigns, and Thomas, on the application of coercion in the industrial relations strategies of European colonialists, provides the pertinent context for a re-examination of the anticolonial struggle in Aden. There was, during the last years of empire, a very significant degree of overlap between the tactics employed to deal with union activists and armed insurrectionists: many of the techniques used to suppress insurgency, including the suppression of dissenting literature, arbitrary deportations and imprisonment, accompanied the introduction of the IRO. French's emphasis on intimidation rather than counter-propaganda can be applied to labour struggle as much as armed struggle, while Thomas's suggestion that workers were in the vanguard of conflict with the colonial authorities is thoroughly validated in the Adenese instance.<sup>5</sup>

If the history of late colonial counterinsurgency needs to incorporate labour history, then it is still more strongly the case that the emergence of trade unions in Aden needs to be reincorporated into histories of labour internationalism because, as the final part of this study demonstrates, the IRO became something of a *cause celebre* in international labour circles during the early 1960s. The labour internationals subjected events in the colonial periphery to careful scrutiny in order to assess their impact on the Cold War balance of power. Prohibitions on strike action and the exclusion of the majority of the working population from the franchise were attacked by both the western-oriented International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the eastern-oriented World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). As an ICFTU affiliate, the Aden Trade Union Congress (ATUC), under the leadership of Abdullah al-Asnag, was able to exploit concerns within the ICFTU that the failure of the imperial state to address political and industrial relations grievances would force colonial unions into the embrace of the WFTU. Such a scenario alarmed the leadership of the ICFTU but the possibility of such communist infringements on to their patrimony seemed implausible to the British Colonial Office who accorded first priority to the containment of

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<sup>5</sup> D. French, *The British Way In Counter-Insurgency* (Oxford, 2011); M. Thomas, *Violence and Colonial Order: Police, Workers and Protest in the European Colonial Empires 1918-1940* (Cambridge, 2012).

Arab nationalist influences emanating from Nasser's regime in Cairo. From their perspective, if radical Nasserite nationalists in the labour movement could not be contained then they must be suppressed. An important precedent for this kind of investigation of the interplay between the East-West Cold War factors and North-South rivalries over the strategy of decolonisation was set by Carew's analysis of conflicts within the ICFTU. Unfortunately, the pursuit of these themes since Carew published his work in the 1990s has not been particularly vigorous.<sup>6</sup> In an effort to extend Carew's pioneering approach to the Middle East, the final section of this essay will examine the success of ATUC in mobilising international labour movements to oppose the introduction and implementation of the IRO; but first it is necessary to consider the material circumstances which determined the evolution of trade unionism in Aden.

### **The Industrial Relations Ordinance in a British and Colonial Context**

Unusually for a European colony, manufacturing and services provided the principal opportunities for work and investment in Aden. The port had a deep natural harbour and, after the opening of the Suez Canal, was a convenient stopping point for journeys from South and Southeast Asia to the Mediterranean and Europe. By the 1950s it was one of the busiest ports in the world and the oil bunkering trade was particularly lucrative. Less remunerative to the colonial authorities, but of increasing significance in regional politics, was the base at Aden which during the 1950s and 1960s had to cater to ever larger numbers of British airmen, soldiers and sailors. Having been chased out of first Palestine and then Suez, Aden became the last redoubt of British regional power. Disagreements between the base authorities and the cohort of cleaners, attendants and handymen who maintained the facilities proved one of the most contentious areas of Adenese industrial relations.

Beyond the services provided at the port and base, workers in Aden were also employed in one key form of manufacturing, namely oil refining. BP had relocated its processing operations from Iran to Aden in the aftermath of the Mossadegh coup of 1951 and was anxious to establish a reputation as a model employer. Despite these aspirations, it was a

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<sup>6</sup> A. Carew, 'Conflict Within the ICFTU: Anti-Colonialism and Anti-Communism in the 1950s', *International Review of Social History* 41/2 (1996), 147-181

strike at the refinery in 1960 which precipitated Luce's proposal for new and restrictive industrial relations legislation. It was inevitable that the opportunities provided by docks, base and refinery should lead to an influx of predominantly non-skilled labour. During the 1940s and 1950s many of these Yemeni labourers who came to work in the town congregated under the ATUC banner. ATUC first emerged as a political force when industrial action spread from the docks across much of the town between February and April 1956. Having only recently arrived in the Colony, Luce recorded in September of that year:

‘Aden Colony is going through a period of rapid and violent transition. The face of Aden must have changed astonishingly in these last few years and at the present rate of new building port development and so on it will change as much again in the next few years... the only thing that surprises me is that Aden was able to escape for so long the sort of difficulties which have been part of life in most of these territories for a number of years.’<sup>7</sup>

Two years later, on 26 April 1958, Luce's apprehensions were realised when ATUC organised a widely observed general strike. At this stage their grievances were more economic than broadly political and included increased non-Arab immigration into the town, the lack of social infrastructure and escalating price inflation. Luce and the Colonial Office were unsympathetic and prepared instead for a new conflict with the Yemeni labour force. One motivation for the introduction of the IRO was to correct this imbalance in the labour market by pushing out the numerous Yemeni migrants. The Aden authorities estimated that the Adenese workforce consisted of 28,000 Yemenis, 14,000 incomers from the surrounding protected states and 22,000 Adenis. On top of this there were 6,000 registered and 10,000 unregistered unemployed. The over-supply of labour operated as a disincentive for the colonial authorities to provide any measure of social provision for the new migrants. Any outflux of Yemenis would, they estimated, drive up wages and increase productivity. They concluded: ‘For economic as well as political reasons it would be in the Colony's interest to reduce the labour force at the expense of the migrant workers... If employers could achieve a smaller settled labour force with a higher productivity they would be prepared to give higher wages and fringe benefits.’<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The National Archives, Kew, [TNA]: CO 1015/1132, Luce to Secretary of State, 15 September 1956.

<sup>8</sup> TNA: CO 1015/2605, Discussions held at the Colonial Office on 20 May 1960.

Worse still from the British perspective, the migrants provided an army of recruits for the Arab nationalist cause which was being championed by Egypt's President Nasser. As the only formal British colony ever established in the Arab world, it was almost inevitable that Aden should become a new front in the ongoing conflict between European imperialism and Middle Eastern nationalism. After a century of management from India, the town was transferred to direct British administration in 1937, at a time when European influence in the region was still exerted informally through League of Nations mandates, treaties of protection and advisory relationships. The governance of the Colony remained untrammelled by any element of popular participation until the first elections were contested in 1955. Further polls followed in 1959 and 1964 but ATUC leaders and their external supporters criticised the narrowness of the franchise which excluded almost the entire Arab workforce. It would have been impossible to pass a measure such as the IRO through the Legislative Council had its members been elected by a wider constituency. More significantly still, no popular mandate was requested for the most contentious measure undertaken during the last years of British rule, namely the incorporation of Aden into a federation which was dominated by the ruling families of the hinterland states who were regarded by the Colonial Office as reliable allies, capable of restraining militant anti-colonialism in Aden. The hostility of the Sultans and Sheikhs to democracy and trade unionism ensured that the merger controversy witnessed a mingling of political and economic protest in Aden. Most ominously of all from Luce's perspective, the economic demands of workers for better pay and conditions and their political demands for a greater say in the running of the Colony's affairs and the exclusion of Sultanic influence, were now expressed in a Nasserist lexicon which had been assimilated through the broadcasts of Radio Cairo. In this way notions of Arab unity, social reform and, overshadowing almost everything else, anticolonialism, entered local political debates. By 1962 ATUC had emerged as a champion of Arab nationalism in Aden and it was estimated that its affiliates had a total of 17-18,000 members.<sup>9</sup>

The willingness of ATUC's leaders to climb aboard the Arab nationalist bandwagon was manifest in their decision to affiliate to the Confederation of Arab Trade Unions (CATU) in 1960. This was a move which had been long anticipated and long feared by the British authorities on the grounds that CATU was the industrial arm of Nasserism and Nasser

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<sup>9</sup> Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick [MRC]: TUC records, MSS 292b/956.8/3, Additional Note on the Political Situation in Aden, 18 October 1962.

remained for the British the principal impediment to the smooth workings of British policy in the Middle East. The determination of the British government to retain control of Aden in perpetuity had been made public by Lord Lloyd in 1956 and four years later few imagined that Aden would become independent during the 1960s. British support for federalism was primarily designed to ensure ongoing control of their base facilities in the Colony and to combat Arab nationalism. When the possibility of introducing new industrial legislation was first mooted William Gorell Barnes, the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office, reiterated that:

‘it is the policy of HMG to retain direct control of Aden Colony as long as possible so that it can continue to use it as a base for the essential purpose of protecting our interests in the Persian Gulf if the need arises...the position in Aden is rather different from other colonial territories. The trade union leaders with whom we are dealing here are in a sense Arab nationalists or at any rate riding on the horse of Arab nationalism.’<sup>10</sup>

It was only in 1966 that the British government announced their intention to abandon the base. Six years earlier it had been assumed that a combination of new legislation to contain the influence of the local unions and the expansion of federal influence into Aden would be sufficient to guarantee British strategic interests into the foreseeable future.

If the material demands of the present, most notably the threat posed by Nasserism to British economic and strategic interests, pressed the British forward in pursuit of a more restrictive industrial relations regime, then the past threw up endless obstacles to action in the form of various precedents and non-precedents for the IRO, relating to the legality of withholding labour, the prevention of political strikes and the principle of compulsory arbitration. The first of these historic dilemmas was the non-precedent which had been established by the absence in any other British colony of legislation banning the right to strike as part of a dispute. One critic within the Colonial Office characterised Luce’s proposed legislation as representing ‘a new and unusual degree of *dirigisme* in industrial relations’ and offered a thermodynamic analogy for Aden’s politics which would prove prescient:

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<sup>10</sup> TNA: CO 1015/2606, Gorell Barnes minute, 10 June 1960.



‘Steam is at present let off through a series of strikes, cumulatively damaging and provocative, but not yet in themselves decisive politically or economically. The more these outlets are closed, the greater head of steam can be expected to build up and the greater the prospects that it will break out, if at all, as a direct challenge to law and order and to government.’<sup>11</sup>

It was also necessary to consider Britain’s international reputation and, although officials were justifiably confident that the new legislation would not breach ILO conventions, they also anticipated what was euphemistically described as ‘a lively reaction in international labour circles’.<sup>12</sup> Models for such legislation could be found but they came from outside the formal empire, most notably Australia. To draw the sting from international criticisms, Luce’s initial proposals were revised to enable unions who reached voluntary agreements with employers to obtain exemption from the stipulations regarding compulsory arbitration.

The second issue over which the past loomed was a traditional bugbear of government, the ‘political strike’. The key precedent in this regard was not the refinery dispute which had precipitated the legislation but ATUC’s successful general strike of February 1958. Fallowes, who was appointed to advise Luce on the state of industrial relations in Aden, commented that existing protection against tort actions, combined with the customary provisions allowing freedom of association, had ‘placed in the hands of the trade unions of Aden a power of such magnitude that the community can be held almost to ransom and at the same time be used as an instrument to coerce and undermine Government.’<sup>13</sup> His report prompted officials to consider analogues drawn from the history of British trade unionism including the General Strike of 1926 and the Trade Disputes and Trade Unions Act of 1927. The Aden authorities favoured explicit measures to prohibit secondary action, using the 1927 British act as a model. Restrictions of this kind were rejected by the Colonial Office because they were certain to be denounced by the British TUC who regarded the 1927 act as a notoriously bad piece of legislation and had directed a ‘barrage of criticism’ against it for the previous thirty years. No attempt was made to prohibit secondary action or political strikes in the IRO on the

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<sup>11</sup> TNA: CO 1015/2605, Bennett, minute, 3 May 1960.

<sup>12</sup> TNA: CO 1015/2605, Carstairs (CO) to Luce, 13 May 1960.

<sup>13</sup> TNA: CO 1015/2605, Fallowes to Luce, 14 April 1960.

assumption that if trade unionists encouraged workers to strike on political matters they could be prosecuted under penal laws dealing with sedition and incitement.<sup>14</sup>

The third perplexity arising from Luce's proposals related to the principle of arbitration and proved the trickiest of all to resolve. Under the planned legislation compulsory arbitration was to be imposed in all sectors where trade unions and employers had failed to come to a voluntary agreement. There was no expectation that ATUC would agree to voluntary procedures and, in these circumstances, parties would be required to register any dispute with the Labour Officer for mediation, from which point strike action would be prohibited. If mediation failed the system of compulsory arbitration by an Industrial Court would be imposed and the award of the court would constitute a final settlement. Drafting problems arose because the Treasury and the Service departments of the metropolitan government upheld the principle, which dated back to the aftermath of the General Strike, that the British Crown would not tie itself to any system of compulsory arbitration; in their view, any breach of these protocols would constitute judicial infringement on the prerogatives of Parliament and undermine the disciplinary regime which was essential to the maintenance of order on British military bases.<sup>15</sup> The system of voluntary arbitration had been tested and maintained by the Services under similar circumstances at other British bases, including Malta and Singapore. Particular political difficulties arose in Aden because workers employed by the civil administration and by the forces on the base would, under the new legislation, be deprived of the right to strike, while the Crown as their employers would not be bound by the award of the Court. After a great deal of head-scratching the situation was resolved by giving the Crown the right to refuse arbitration in particular cases but restoring the workers' right to strike in any such instance.

### **Implementing the Ordinance: Industrial Relations Legislation and the Struggle for Independence**

There were three phases in the struggle for independence in South Arabia, each of which witnessed a gradual escalation both in anti-colonial activity and the punitive measures

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<sup>14</sup> TNA: CO 1015/2605, Note on the Legality of a General Strike, 18 May 1960, Hiron to Bryce, 19 May 1960, Secretary of State to Aden (Luce), 19 May 1960.

<sup>15</sup> TNA: CO 1015/2606, Radice (Treasury) to Watt (CO), 24 June 1960.

undertaken by the British government to contain nationalist dissent. In the first, which occurred during the 1950s, some of the elites of the Colony and the surrounding protected states enlisted in the Arab nationalist cause. In Aden this new ideological orientation found expression in the United National Front (UNF) and in the Protectorates it was represented by the South Arabian League (SAL). The flight of the SAL leadership in 1958 and the boycotting of the Adenese elections by the UNF in 1959 demonstrated the inability of local elites to deflect the British from their chosen course of reforming rather than severing the colonial relationship.<sup>16</sup> In the second phase, which lasted from 1959 to 1963, the workers of Aden found themselves at the vanguard of the independence movement under the umbrella of ATUC. Increasingly frustrated by their political and economic marginalisation, both the migrant and indigenous labour forces adopted the anti-imperialist messages promulgated by Nasser in Cairo. The Industrial Relations Ordinance was a reaction to this increasing politicisation and provided the pretext for a crackdown on dissent in the town. By 1963 labour relations had reached stalemate as the British refused to rescind its provisions and the ATUC refused to cooperate with the local Ministry of Labour. The four years after 1963, which marked the final phase, were dominated by escalating violence. Some of the most significant fighting moved upcountry with the launch by the National Liberation Front (NLF) of a revolutionary insurgency in the Radfan but the streets of Aden also became the setting for urban warfare. There was some continuity across these different periods: former leaders of the UNF and ATUC would later reappear in the 1960s as key figures in, first, the People's Socialist Party (PSP) and then the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY). The latter became embroiled in a chaotic civil war with the Marxist revolutionaries of the NLF. The 1967 revolution ended in victory for the NLF insurrectionists of the interior who pushed aside the old trade union leadership in Aden, as well as the British.<sup>17</sup> In many respects the inability of the British to contain the post-1963 insurrection replicated the failure to curb the growth in labour militancy in the earlier period and was grounded in the same tactics of confrontation and punitive action.

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<sup>16</sup> S. Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates: Last Outpost of a Middle East Empire* (Abingdon, 2005), ch 3.

<sup>17</sup> J. Kostiner, *The Struggle for South Yemen* (London, 1984); H. Lackner, 'The Rise and Fall of the National Liberation Front as a Political Organisation' in B. R. Pridham (ed.) *Contemporary Yemen* (London, 1984), 46-63; V. Naumkin, *Red Wolves of Yemen* (Cambridge, 2004).

From the outset the connection between the political and industrial struggle in Aden were obvious to all parties: trade unionists made little attempt to camouflage their interest in promoting Arab independence and, while the colonial authorities put more effort into maintaining the distinction in public, they utilised the IRO as a weapon to suppress political dissent in the Colony. Restrictive industrial relations legislation was designed to challenge the ATUC's 'unprecedented control of the workforce' which was interpreted by local intelligence as a threat to British control of the town and the base. Reports described union meetings as the principal forum for subversion; the breaking up of such gatherings signalled the intention of the authorities to challenge ATUC's accumulating influence over popular opinion.<sup>18</sup> Anybody who voiced support for strike action at such meetings was vulnerable to legal action. By February 1963 there had been 229 prosecutions under the IRO and, although many of those convicted had paid fines to avoid imprisonment, 11 union members were in jail at that time.<sup>19</sup> In some respects these legal processes were less significant than the pretext the IRO provided for a crackdown on those identified by the local security forces as militants. Suspected troublemakers were forcibly deported over the Yemen frontier and dissenting literature was suppressed. An examination of the impact of the IRO on workers at the oil refinery, where employers were notably lukewarm about the new legislation, the port, where the legislation had consequences unimagined by its drafters, and at the base, where a state of permanent conflict between the services and their employees developed, reveals a history of tactical defeats for British goals which amounted to a wider strategic failure.

It was not just the expected refusal of ATUC to cooperate with the Industrial Court which prevented the effective implementation of the IRO. Unanticipated problems arose, first, as a consequence of BP's reluctance to abet the colonial authorities because of the damage they feared that any endorsement of restrictions would inflict on their attempts to portray the company as a progressive employer and secondly, from the difficulties which non-ATUC workers experienced in attempting to operate the new industrial relations machinery. When it became evident, during the drafting of the IRO, that BP was unwilling to endorse restrictions on the right to strike, the Colonial Office were horrified. BP was represented on the local Legislative Council, by one of its employees, Sharpe, who had been nominated by the

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<sup>18</sup> India Office Records, British Library [IOR]: R/20/B/3036, Conway to Chairman Local Intelligence Committee, 16 August 1960.

<sup>19</sup> TNA: CO 1055/223, Aden (Johnston) to Secretary of State, 11 February 1963.

governor. Sharpe told the Chief Secretary in August that 'BP as a matter of policy took scrupulous care to avoid giving public support to any form of restrictive legislation.' Under extremely strong pressure from the Aden authorities, which included discussion of the British government's role as majority shareholder in the company, Sharpe was eventually persuaded to vote in favour of the legislation, rather than as BP had initially proposed, to absent himself on the grounds of oil company business.<sup>20</sup> After the introduction of the legislation another BP employee, Cliff Tucker, was sent out to negotiate directly with the ATUC's leadership. As well as being an executive in BP, Tucker was a member of the Labour Party and served as a councillor for the party in London. He liaised regularly with Marjorie Nicholson of the TUC and it was difficult to tell which of them was more uneasy about the confrontational tactics being pursued by the British government in the field of colonial industrial relations.<sup>21</sup> During his meetings with Al Asnag, Tucker 'stressed the desire of the Company to finalise an agreement and work together outside the new legislation... he wanted to work with the trade union and ignore the new legislation.'<sup>22</sup> The accommodationist stance of senior BP negotiators could not insulate the base from ongoing industrial relations conflicts but it strained the company's relationship with the colonial government. When a new strike broke out at the refinery in December 1961, BP entered further reservations concerning the decision to prosecute union leaders and urged government officials to consider what could be done to make the IRO 'more palatable both in Aden and externally.'<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps even more damaging than the unwillingness of the leading employer to support the legislation were the actions of some non-ATUC employees who inadvertently delivered a damaging blow to the operations of the Ordinance. A handful of expatriate Indian workers employed by the oldest and most prestigious merchant house at the port, Cowasji Dinshaw, formed their own staff association which was unaffiliated to ATUC. When the company proposed altering the terms by which it calculated severance pay, a dispute arose. Under the terms of the IRO, the Industrial Court made an arbitration award which favoured the workers. It was hoped by the colonial administration that this would encourage others to cooperate with the new system but, instead, the company took the case to the local appellate court. When their case failed there, Cowasji Dinshaw persisted in pursuing the matter with the

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<sup>20</sup> IOR: R/20/B/3035, Chief Secretary's Minutes, 9 August 1960, 10 August 1960, 13 August 1960.

<sup>21</sup> MRC: TUC Records, MSS.292b.956.8/1, Nicholson minute, 3 August 1960.

<sup>22</sup> MRC: TUC Records, MSS.292b.956.8/1, Meeting with Cliff Tucker, 26 October 1960.

<sup>23</sup> TNA: CO 1015/2641, Foggon minutes, 16 January 1961, 31 January 1961.

highest judicial authority available which was the East African Court of Appeal in Nairobi. The court, whose territorial remit extended to Aden, decided in favour of Cowasji Dinshaw and ordered the staff association to pay costs.<sup>24</sup> This unwelcome East African intervention, which effectively bankrupted the staff association, dismayed the colonial authorities who began examining ways to detach Aden from the jurisdiction of Nairobi.<sup>25</sup> In the interim, employers at the port used the precedent established by this ruling to revoke an earlier deal regarding end of service payments which had been made with the ATUC affiliate, the General Port Workers' Union. Unsurprisingly, this series of events was taken by critics of the legislation as demonstrating its counter-productive character. In November 1961, George Woodcock, the General Secretary of the TUC, complained to the new Colonial Secretary, Reginald Maudling, 'at least one major employer had found it possible to rely upon the mere existence of the Ordinance to refuse, and to maintain his refusal to pay benefits to his staff, even though the President of the Industrial Court subsequently held they should be paid.'<sup>26</sup>

From ATUC's perspective the Cowasji Dinshaw case vindicated their refusal to cooperate with the new industrial relations regime. Although for the first year of its operation, there were few direct challenges to the new system, during 1961-62 workers at the base, who were represented by the Forces and Local Employees Union (FLEU), emerged as the most committed opponents of the IRO. As their employers, the British armed services had been reluctant to submit to arbitration and this had caused problems during the drafting of the legislation. They hesitantly agreed to accept the principle of compulsory arbitration, other than on disciplinary matters, precisely in order to circumvent the provisions of the IRO which would reinstate the union's right to strike in cases where the employers were unwilling to be bound by awards of the Industrial Court. For their part, as the most militant affiliate of ATUC, the FLEU decided to challenge the new industrial relations regime from two directions. The first was to internationalise the conflict by direct appeals to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the ICFTU and the Public Services International (PSI); the effect of this strategy will be considered shortly. The second was to confront the colonial government and employers by organising various forms of non-cooperation culminating with a 72-hour strike in October 1962. A long period of tactical manoeuvring preceded this

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<sup>24</sup> TNA: CO 1015/2640, Civil Appeal #35 of 1961, Court of Appeal for East Africa, Judgement of J. A. Newbold.

<sup>25</sup> TNA: CO 1015/2641, Aden (Johnston) to Secretary of State, 21 March 1962.

<sup>26</sup> MRC: TUC records, MSS 292b/956.8/1, General Secretary to Maudling, 15 November 1961.

confrontation, during which union leaders established a series of emergency committees of vigilance in an effort to evade the provisions of the IRO. In response, the Aden authorities targeted ATUC and FLEU leaders for exemplary counter-measures. When intelligence sources suggested that the union was planning a strike for 1 March 1962, five of its leaders were imprisoned.<sup>27</sup> The colonial government in Aden rejected pleas for leniency in their case until they agreed not to encourage further strike action. The Acting Governor explained on 8 August 1962:

‘the opposition to the provisions of the industrial relations Ordinance by the ATUC is primarily political and is deliberate. For as long however as it is necessary to retain the ordinance in its present form everything possible must be done to ensure respect for the law, and to enforce provisions of the Ordinance. This cannot be achieved unless persons who deliberately commit offences under the Ordinance are prosecuted.’<sup>28</sup>

Other leaders of trade unions who ignored the prohibition on strike action were also gaoled including Abdullah Ali Murshid of the Technical Workers Union in October 1961 and Ali Obeid of the BP Refinery Employees Union in December 1961. When a strike finally did break out at the base, Luce’s replacement as High Commissioner, Charles Johnston, assured the Colonial Office that he was taking ‘firm action’, including the prosecution of more than 40 workers.<sup>29</sup>

Aside from prosecuting and imprisoning union organisers and strikers, the colonial government found other means to suppress political dissent emanating from the labour movement, including the deportation of workers and restrictions on press freedom. Deportations were primarily intended to instil fear among political opponents and became a source of grievance for ATUC and their external supporters. The precedent was set by Luce who authorised daily deportations of migrant workers as a means of containing industrial unrest in November 1958.<sup>30</sup> ATUC complained to the Colonial Office that Yemeni workers

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<sup>27</sup> TNA: CO 1015/2641, Governor’s Deputy (Aden) to Secretary of State, 3 March 1962.

<sup>28</sup> TNA: CO 1015/2601, Acting Governor (Aden) to Secretary of State, 8 August 1962.

<sup>29</sup> TNA: CO 1015/2643, Aden (Johnston) to Secretary of State, 6 November 1962, Gibbs minute, 6 November 1962.

<sup>30</sup> IOR: R/20/B/3002, Simmonds to Luce, 15 November 1958, Luce minute, 15 November 1958, Simmonds minute, 18 November 1958, Luce minute, 18 November 1958.

in the town 'suffer ill treatment for the police, from time to time, get hold of a number of building labourers and throw them over the borders.'<sup>31</sup> As prosecutions under the IRO became increasingly problematic from a political point of view, deportations offered a punitive substitute. A strike by builders who were members of the Technical Workers Union in October 1961 led to the deportation of 12 workers. By 1963, the new High Commissioner, Kennedy Trevaskis, had become sceptical of the possibility of combatting industrial militancy through the courts and instead relied on the security forces to round up workers who were held to be engaged in political strikes. In response to rumours that nationalist leaders would organise strikes to coincide with the visit of a UN investigatory team to the Yemeni frontier in May 1963, Trevaskis declared that 'a sudden deportation of 30 or so bad hats... would have a sobering effect.' The deportations were timed to ensure that the deportees were stranded on the frontier with no possibility of getting back to Sana' in time to tell their stories to the UN delegation.<sup>32</sup> When yet another dispute broke out at the base in November 1963, Trevaskis complained to his diary, 'with London so timorous, it w[oul]d be difficult to get away with prosecuting. I have therefore resorted to deportation of Yemenis. I signed 20 orders today.' On 27 November he attempted to cover his tracks by telling the police 'we must deport non-strikers to lend substance to our claim that we are deporting on security grounds & not because people are striking... They are going to pick up some of the agitators who, tho' not on strike have been inciting & intimidating.'<sup>33</sup> In his correspondence with the ICFTU General Secretary, Omar Becu, Al Asnag claimed that the British had initiated 'a wave of terror amongst innocent families.' The expense entailed in offering legal support to workers who had been arrested or deported eventually compelled the ICFTU to seek additional assistance from the leader of its most well endowed affiliate, George Meany of the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO).<sup>34</sup>

The trade union movement in Aden was also on the frontline of the propaganda war with British colonialism in the Middle East. Although the destruction, redaction and withholding of records continues to present problems to historians attempting to establish the ambit of the

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<sup>31</sup> TNA: CO 1015/2013, ATUC to Secretary of State for Colonies, 14 February 1959.

<sup>32</sup> Rhodes House Library [RHL]: Trevaskis Papers pt.2 (s.546), Box 2B, Diary, 23 May 1963, 24 May 1963, 25 May 1963.

<sup>33</sup> RHL: Trevaskis Papers pt.2 (s.546), Box 2B, Diary, 22 November 1963, 27 November 1963, 28 November 1963.

<sup>34</sup> International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam [IISH]: ICFTU 4955, Al Asnag to Becu, 28 November 1963, Braunthal to Meany 24 December 1963, AFL-CIO telegram to ICFTU, 31 December 1963.



British propaganda campaign directed against nationalist groups in Aden, what is clear is that for a period in the late 1950s and early 1960s one of their key aims was to discredit ATUC. The colonial government was particularly perturbed that workers in Aden were drawing moral support from nationalist propaganda broadcast by Radio Cairo. A document written by David Treffry of the Aden administration's Co-operative and Marketing Department offers some insights into the tactics adopted by British officials. Treffry was instructed by Luce to take control of information policy during the period when the IRO was introduced. He argued that radio was the most important medium for the dissemination of anti-ATUC propaganda. A number of personalities were invented by Treffry and his colleagues; these fictitious characters made short broadcasts purporting to reflect the views of Arabs living in or visiting Aden. For example, Mohammed al Naqabi was a fictional trade unionist who conducted regular discussions about local affairs with his cousin, Ahmed. According to Treffry, when broadcast, these avuncular colloquies provided 'an excellent vehicle for digs at the union leadership.' The aim was to enhance the standing of loyalist Adenis by making them believe that they had popular support and to foster disillusionment among rank and file members of the ATUC.<sup>35</sup> The Colonial Office also sought to suppress dissenting commentary on the IRO by banning of ATUC's daily newspaper, El Amel. The silencing of trade union journalism was the one issue on which the ILO censured the Aden authorities. Although, at one point, the local administration responded to these criticisms by authorising the publication of a weekly trade union periodical, they were unwilling to countenance the return of El Amel in its earlier format. From a local perspective efforts to stymie nationalist propaganda emanating from the labour movement were an integral part of a wider strategy to counter anti-imperialism among the working population.

### **Aden in a Global Context: International Labour, Decolonisation and the Cold War**

The promulgation of the Industrial Relations Ordinance brought the politics of Aden to the attention of the international labour movement. Ranging in feeling from irritation to anger and listed in ascending order of animosity to the colonial regime, the key institutions which became involved in the controversy were the British TUC, the ICFTU, the PSI, the WFTU and the CATU. There was very little difference between protests lodged at the International Labour Organization (ILO) by the nationalist-oriented unions of CATU and the communist-

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<sup>35</sup> IOR: R/20/B/3038, Treffry to Acting Chief Secretary, 13 August 1960.

oriented unions of the WFTU: both emphasised the political context provided by British imperialism, and particularly the exclusion of most workers from the franchise and the imposition of a federal system of government in Aden. Nevertheless, the involvement of the WFTU, which represented unions sympathetic to the Soviet cause, and CATU, which was committed to the Nasserist brand of anticolonial nationalism, demonstrated that industrial conflict in Aden had both a Cold War and a colonial dimension. Western labour organisations, including the TUC, the ICFTU and the PSI, also interpreted the conflict through the prism of the Cold War but their concern was that the preoccupation of the British government with containing Nasser's independent brand of nationalism would provide the WFTU with an opportunity to enhance its credibility in the Middle East.

When Alfred Braunthal, the Assistant General Secretary of the ICFTU met Luce on 20 August 1960 to urge him to postpone the enactment of the IRO he emphasised that ATUC was 'organised by men without much schooling, who... were generally trying to build up something sound and permanent.' He also warned that 'the ICFTU would not accept the necessity of such legislation except in time of war.'<sup>36</sup> Braunthal's intervention failed and after the introduction of the IRO, the ICFTU entered into a competition with the WFTU regarding who could make stronger representations about Aden case at the ILO. The WFTU was the first into the field, issuing a complaint on 5 September and the ICFTU responded with its own submissions on 30 September and 7 November. None of them got very far: the only aspects of these complaints which were upheld related to the suppression of trade union publications. Restrictions on the right to strike were judged not to breach the minimal standards on freedom of association which the ILO was pledged to uphold.<sup>37</sup> Rivalry between the ICFTU and the WFTU for colonial affiliates strengthened the hand of ATUC. This was a game that almost all trade unionists in the periphery of empire learned to play and al-Asnag proved dextrous in his efforts to secure diplomatic and financial assistance. On 23 August 1961 he wrote to Becu complaining about the ICFTU's inactivity and, in particular, its failure to follow up on their initial complaints to the ILO:

'The ATUC deplores Communism, that is why we are in the ICFTU. But we shall never accept British oppression as a substitute of a so called threat of spread of

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<sup>36</sup> IOR: R/20/B/3035, Notes of a Meeting, 20 August 1960.

<sup>37</sup> IOR: R/20/B/3037, ILO 57<sup>th</sup> report of the Committee on Freedom of Association, May-June 1961.

Communism to our country. To be honest with you, at some times my friends feel that so far we have not tried Communism, it might be a good idea to advocate its cause here as a substitute to the wild British rule.’<sup>38</sup>

Despite resentment at al-Asnag’s shameless gamesmanship and widespread and justified scepticism about their likely efficacy, it was this logic which prompted the ICFTU to begin a second round of protests to the ILO,

While for the labour movement in the West it was the intervention of the WFTU which was of greater significance, for the British government al-Asnag’s embrace of Arab nationalism and the CATU had greater salience and required decisive counter-measures including the dismissal, imprisonment and deportation of ATUC activists. The punitive treatment of workers involved in labour stoppages proved particularly irksome to critics of the Colonial Office in the metropolitan and international labour movements because it offered the WFTU an opportunity to expose the shallowness of western governments’ commitment to freedom for workers to organise. The dismissal of 155 government employees because they had participated either in the one-day general strike called in 1960 to protest about the implementation of the IRO, or the subsequent token one-hour strikes, became a chronic feature of the Colonial Office’s arguments with the representatives of international labour. At the forefront of the remonstrations was the Belgian trade unionist and General Secretary of the PSI, Paul Tofahrn. In January 1961 he suggested to Braunthal that ‘discrimination against the Yemenite workers and their deportation from Aden appears to be particularly shocking and vengeful.’<sup>39</sup>

Like the ICFTU, the PSI accentuated the Cold War implications of the colonial administration’s assaults on ATUC. Tofahrn protested in May 1962 that the provisions of the IRO were ‘incompatible with morality and justice as understood in the democratic world.’ More seriously still, Tofahrn became aware that the WFTU were offering assistance to those arrested for participating in or encouraging local strike action. In such circumstances, he feared, it would be the communist international which would appear as the ‘the sole defender

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<sup>38</sup> IISH: ICFTU 4592, Al Asnag to Becu, 23 August 1961.

<sup>39</sup> IISH: ICFTU 1954g, Tofahrn to Braunthal, 19 January 1961.

of the victims of British colonialism.<sup>40</sup> When news reached the ICFTU that ATUC had accepted WFTU funds in order to pay for legal assistance they issued a rebuke to al Asnag but also offered to renew their funding and stepped up their assistance to imprisoned trade unionists.<sup>41</sup> This was successful in the sense that when al-Asnag was arrested later in the year for his part in orchestrating strike action he turned to the western labour movement for assistance. The British Labour Party and the Socialist International cooperated in arranging his legal defence. David Ennals of the Labour Party's International Department offered a Cold War rationale for assisting al-Asnag which echoed that which was ringing around the portals of ICFTU headquarters in Brussels: 'there was the fear that they would turn to the Communists if aid was not coming from democratic socialist circles.' Al Asnag requested that the former Labour Attorney General and future Home Secretary, Frank Soskice, should act in his defence but Soskice recommended a less well known lawyer called Christopher French who eventually secured the ATUC leader's release.<sup>42</sup>

By this stage the ICFTU was developing a wider critique of British colonial practices in Aden. In February 1962 Salah Galaoui of the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) visited Aden at the behest of the ICFTU to investigate the operation of the IRO. In his meetings with Colonial Office officials their differences over what measures were required to fight the Cold War and enable decolonisation became apparent. Galaoui told the Labour Commissioner:

'that the ICFTU, which plays a great role in the fight against the expansion of communism, could not understand why certain authorities in the free world persisted in frustrating the action of trade union organisations which are animated by this same idea. At the same time as the British authorities proclaimed their intention to leave Aden to independence, they took steps to suppress a great organised popular force which was equipped to contribute to the future of Aden.'

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<sup>40</sup> TNA: CO 1015/2601, Tofahrn to Secretary of State, 31 May 1962, Tofahrn to Foggon, 4 June 1962, Tofahrn to Foggon, 3 July 1962.

<sup>41</sup> IISH: ICFTU 4954e, Nedzynski to Tofahrn, June 1962, Tofahrn to Nedzynski, 15 June 1962, Nedzynski to Al Asnag, 8 June 1962, Al Asnag to Becu, 12 July 1962, Becu to al Asnag, 16 August 1962.

<sup>42</sup> Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester [LHASC]: Labour Party Archive, International Sub-Committee: Minutes and Documents, Ennals Memo on PSP, 29 November 1962, Minutes of a Meeting of the Overseas Sub-Committee, 4 December 1962; International Committee Aden Files, Ennals to Callaghan, 16 October 1962.

In reply, the Labour Commissioner criticised the willingness of the ICFTU to air its grievances at the ILO rather than dealing bilaterally with elected representatives in Aden and suggested that the organisation ‘did not seem to know there was a local government based on elections.’<sup>43</sup> On his return, Galaoui, told the Tunisian press that Adenese unions ‘met with all kinds of persecution’, and noted that, when migrant workers were dismissed, there was a practice of ‘taking them to the Yemen border and throwing them out.’<sup>44</sup> At the seventh world congress of the ICFTU in July 1962, ATUC secured endorsement for a resolution condemning the perpetuation of British colonialism in Aden. In response to pressure from ATUC, the ICFTU also renewed its complaints to the ILO about the manner in which the Aden administration were conducting industrial relations. The ILO responded by reiterating their view that the British authorities in Aden had met the minimum standards required to enable freedom of association by workers.

While continental Europeans, such as Tofahrn, and Maghrebi Arabs, such as Galaoui, issued unvarnished criticisms of colonialism, British trade unionists were more reticent. Prior to 1960 the British TUC had embraced the task of shepherding their Adeni equivalents to respectability. The process had benefits for all parties: British colonial officialdom believed the metropolitan trade unions would curb radicalism in the periphery, the TUC had an opportunity to extend its influence and construct some institutional defences against communist infiltration and the colonial unions hoped to gain financial and administrative support and to mobilise their metropolitan allies to influence debates in Whitehall and Westminster. In March 1957 Luce suggested that the intervention of the British TUC would be welcome.<sup>45</sup> Subsequently, James Young, Herbert Lewis and Andrew Dalglish became the key intermediaries between ATUC. The TUC was often critical of the ICFTU’s anti-communist zealotry, which they believed was inspired by Cold War partisans in the AFL-CIO. They were also more sceptical than the American unions about the probity and efficiency of colonial unions and considered that the paternal role they adopted in relations with the nascent unions of the imperial periphery was jeopardised when labour activists from across the Atlantic trespassed onto British colonial territory. The strike at the refinery in 1960, which acted as a catalyst for the introduction of the IRO, was not supported by the

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<sup>43</sup> TNA: CO 1015/2601, Marsh (Brussels) to Formoy (CO) enclosing Galaoui report.

<sup>44</sup> TNA: CO 1015/2641, Thomson (Tunis) to Wallis (Labour), 21 February 1962.

<sup>45</sup> TNA: CO 1015/2013, Governor (Aden) to Secretary of State, 15 March 1957.

TUC who did their best to discourage the ICFTU from offering financial assistance from their International Solidarity Fund. The General Secretary, Vincent Tewson, suggested: 'I do not think that we should use the Solidarity Fund to run strikes and particularly not this strike.'<sup>46</sup> Such efforts to moderate local militancy and circumscribe the actions of international labour were appreciated by British governmental officials. Considerably less gratifying to the Colonial Office was the TUC's reaction to the implementation of the IRO. British unions adopted a meliorist line which balanced their loyalties to ATUC and the international trade union movement against its sense of obligation to the Colonial Office. This strategy failed to satisfy either party. Before the introduction of the legislation the TUC urged the Colonial Secretary, Iain Macleod, to suspend its provisions. The Colonial Office told the Governor: 'Tewson we feel has no illusions about character of ATUC but does have some doubts about whether action you are taking is going to improve situation.'<sup>47</sup> Partly in order to appease Tewson, the Colonial Office offered to suspend the enactment of the IRO, but this manoeuvre was founded on the warranted assumption that al-Asnag's 'hot-headed colleagues' would not allow him to reach a compromise deal.

Once it became clear that the British administration in Aden intended to use the legislation to suppress political dissent, the metropolitan labour movement became increasingly uneasy. Marjorie Nicholson of the International Department of the TUC and the Labour MP, Bob Edwards, who had close links to the TUC, were the most prominent British critics of the IRO. One Colonial Office functionary described Nicholson as 'an ardent apologist for the ATUC cause.'<sup>48</sup> Her primary concern was that the IRO had generated deadlock on the industrial relations front in Aden which would ensure that discontent spilled over into political activity: 'there is a danger of illegal strikes getting out of control of the ATUC and the further danger of ATUC ceasing to try to control them.'<sup>49</sup> In August 1961 she arranged a meeting between ATUC and ICFTU representatives to discuss the most effective means of lobbying the Colonial Office. Pressure from the TUC and the ICFTU appears to have played a role in the licensing of a weekly ATUC newspaper and the reinstatement of some of those who had lost their jobs as a consequence of the 1960 strikes. The implications of the Cowasji Dinshaw

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<sup>46</sup> IISH: ICFTU 4954c, Tewson to Millard, 16 March 1960.

<sup>47</sup> IOR: R/20/B/3035, Secretary of State to Governor (ud).

<sup>48</sup> TNA: CO 1015/2640, Watt minute, 17 November 1961.

<sup>49</sup> MRC: TUC records, MSS 292b/956.8/1, TUC/ICFTU/ATUC meeting at Congress House, 4 August 1961, Nicholson minute, 7 August 1961.

case and the strike by the Technical Workers Union on 19 October 1961 generated new tensions. Grievances about the arbitrary dismissal of 16 building workers and the even more punitive decision to deport another 12 led George Woodcock to complain directly to Maudling.<sup>50</sup> In March 1962 Robert Willis, who played the role of TUC troubleshooter on many colonial issues, expressed concern about ‘the severe almost vicious application of the provisions of the IRO.’ He also alluded once again to the Cold War implications: ‘If the position was not improved political activities would increase and outside influences would exploit the situation.’<sup>51</sup>

Further fuel was added to the fire when Bob Edwards visited Aden in June 1962, in the company of another Labour MP, George Thomson. Whereas Woodcock and Willis had disregarded the political issue of Aden’s incorporation into a federation of Sultanates and Sheikhdoms, Edwards insisted that the planned merger had alienated local workers. He described a situation of ‘grave industrial unrest’ in Aden and broadly accepted ATUC’s characterisation of the IRO as ‘an insult to their trade union integrity.’ Rather than the irresponsible firebrands of Colonial Office memoranda, the ATUC leaders were characterised in Edwards’s report as ‘moderate intelligent young men’. He recommended that Labour should demand the withdrawal of the Ordinance and press for the inclusion of ATUC representatives in constitutional talks. In October 1962 members of the TUC General Council met the latest Conservative Colonial Secretary, Duncan Sandys, to demand that any merger of Aden with the federation should be preceded by elections in the Colony. Sandys’s justifications were, on their account, thoroughly unsatisfactory.<sup>52</sup> As late as 1964, the Labour MP, Dick Taverne, advised the Party’s International Department that ATUC was ‘the most mature and responsible trade union movement in the Arab world.’ On the other hand, Taverne was also concerned about the use of strike action as ‘a political weapon’ and such reservations led to a final distancing of relations between Adenese unions and their international and metropolitan sponsors.<sup>53</sup> Any hopes of reforming the IRO were submerged beneath the rising tide of urban insurgency. In September 1963 a Joint Advisory Council

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<sup>50</sup> MRC: TUC records, MSS 292b/956.8/1, General Secretary to Maudling, 15 November 1961.

<sup>51</sup> IOR: R/20/B/3039, Record of a Meeting in the Minister of State’s Room, 23 March 1962.

<sup>52</sup> LHASC: Labour Party Archive, International Committee Files on Aden, Windrich memo, 3 September 1962 enclosing ‘Crisis in Aden’ by Bob Edwards.

<sup>53</sup> LHASC: Labour Party Archive, International Committee Files on Aden, ‘Aden and the Protected States’ by Dick Taverne, March 1964.

(JAC), on which ATUC was represented, was established. Two years later the JAC published plans for major revisions to the legislation which would still have curtailed the right to strike but which removed some of the objectionable elements associated with operation of the Industrial Court. Legislative action was suspended amidst the collapsing security situation and in August 1965, ATUC withdrew from the JAC and the Industrial Relations Ordinance remained in unenforced existence until the final British withdrawal in November 1967.

## **Conclusion**

The presence of an oil refinery, a military base, a busy port and the only British governor in the Arab world made Aden a singular example of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century British imperialism and the exceptional character of the Industrial Relations Ordinance may partly be explained by these circumstances. The activities of the British Governor provided unmistakable evidence of the lack of local political autonomy, while the demand for labour to staff Aden's service and manufacturing economy established the basis for a trade union movement with the potential to exercise significant political power. Frederick Cooper in his work on Africa has demonstrated that labour played a decisive role in resisting the imposition of western systems of control into the last years of European imperialism and to some degree the Adenese case replicates his findings.<sup>54</sup> Yet in explaining why Aden became the location for the introduction of the most restrictive piece of trade union legislation enacted during the last years of the British empire, metropolitan and international circumstances must also be accounted for. With regard to the former, the disabling features of the IRO suggest that the liberalisation of industrial relations regimes envisaged by Government House and Whitehall had a provisional character. When set alongside the other measures undertaken to contain ATUC's influence it seems feasible to extend David French's work concerning the punitive character of British counterinsurgency strategy to the field of labour politics.<sup>55</sup> Long before the British had lost faith in the possibility of suppressing strikes through the application of legal penalties, they had been supplementing the legal restrictions with two other devices drawn from the repertoire of counterinsurgency, namely deportations and restrictions on free expression. It was this punitive aspect of British colonial administration which engrossed the international labour movement. Western trade unions seemed more alive to the Cold War implications of

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<sup>54</sup> F. Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labour Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, 1996).

<sup>55</sup> D. French, *The British Way in Counterinsurgency* (Oxford, 2011).



the legislation than the British government. The Colonial Office were preoccupied with the threat which ATUC posed to orderly politics and, although they were insistent that many of their problems were attributable to external manipulation, they believed the principal troublemakers were inspired by Cairo rather than Moscow. ATUC responded by drawing on the dense institutional web of the international labour movement and it is this aspect of the affair which makes it such an interesting case of the globalisation of labour conflict. As they pursued an agenda which sought greater equity in the treatment of workers and political independence, trade unions were subject to many restrictions, but one resource which they could exploit was their global connections. In the case of ATUC they drew at different times on support from the Arab unions of CATU, the western-oriented unions of the ICFTU and the eastern-oriented unions of the WFTU. By this means a local conflict over trade union legislation became embroiled in much wider debates about the role of labour in the Cold War and decolonisation.