

CONTENDING PERSPECTIVES ON WORKERS' EDUCATION IN NIGERIA AND SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

Comparative analysis of the African labour movements is rare, and yet these movements grapple with similar challenges, such as confronting colonial and post-colonial labour regimes. While South Africa and Nigeria boast invaluable literature on workers' education, an educational tool used by the labour movements, no attempts have been made to compare structured workers' education in both countries. To bridge this gap, this article examines workers' education in Nigeria and South Africa, with the aim of unveiling patterns of both similarities and dissimilarities in their implementation. The central focus of the article is to illustrate how workers' education in both nations was influenced and shaped by distinct political and ideological perspectives. In the cases of Nigeria and South Africa, two predominant and contrasting perspectives emerge: the radical approach and the reformist perspective. These competing viewpoints on workers' education have persisted from colonial times in Nigeria and have continued through the colonial and apartheid eras in South Africa, persisting even after both countries embarked on their respective paths to political liberation.

Keywords: workers' education, Nigeria, South Africa, trade unions, Africa

INTRODUCTION

With a few exceptions (Beckman, Buhlungu & Sachikonye 2010; Beckman 2009; Onyeonuru & Hlatshwayo 2020), a comparative analysis of African trade unions is largely ignored by labour scholars, even though it has the potential to illuminate our understanding of labour on the African continent. In a rare and recent contribution to trade unions and worker struggles in Nigeria and South Africa, Onyeonuru and Hlatshwayo (2020) demonstrate that a comparative analysis of both countries contributes to the growing body of literature on African labour movements.

However, the comparative analysis undertaken by Onyeonoru and Hlatshwayo (2020) does not address the history and current situation of workers' education in both nations, which could aid in broadening the analysis of how diverse ideological currents aim to shape and impact workers' education. Nigeria and South Africa both possess invaluable literature on workers' education, dating back to workers' struggles against workplace exploitation, colonialism, and racism (Omole 1998; Akinsanya 2011; Egboh 1971; Cooper 2007 and 2020; Vally, Wa Bofelo & Treat 2013).

Despite the availability of historical and contemporary literature on workers' education in South Africa and Nigeria, there has been no attempt to compare and contrast workers' education, perspectives, and practices in both countries. A qualitative, thematic approach to comparative analysis holds the potential to facilitate the generation of fresh insights for social scientists, especially labour scholars. This approach allows for the exploration of both commonalities and distinctions within the diverse traditions of workers' education in countries like Nigeria and South Africa (cf. Herzog & Kelly 2023).

To this end, the first part of this paper examines the history and progression of workers' education in both countries, which is intricately tied to the evolution of capitalism that has given rise to the labour force in each country. The history of capitalism in both countries dates back to when the Europeans colonised Africa in search of resources to accelerate the development and expansion of capitalism. To be specific, both countries are products of British imperialism.

On the one hand, Nigeria became a British protectorate or client state protected by the British Empire in 1901. On the other hand, some parts of South Africa were first colonised by the Netherlands in 1652 and were taken over by the British Empire in 1806. Formal colonisation in Nigeria ended in 1960. However, formal apartheid, or colonialism, which had a very strong presence of settler colonialists, ended in 1994 (Onyeonoru & Hlatshwayo 2020). Therefore, the second part of the article examines workers' education in post-colonial Nigeria and post-apartheid South Africa. It illustrates that from the colonial era through the end of formal apartheid in South Africa and the attainment of independence in Nigeria, workers' education was consistently a subject of contention among various political and ideological perspectives.

Perspectives on workers' education

Workers in South Africa, Nigeria, and elsewhere in the world engage in individual and collective learning processes without significant organisational intervention. Aye and Udeh (2020:98) indirectly support this notion about incidental or experiential learning of works by saying: "Workers get educated through their daily interaction at work, in their communities, and through struggles to change their conditions of work and life". However, structured workers' education plays a significant role in influencing workers and their trade unions. This is why trade unions and political entities with varying perspectives seek to shape and influence structured workers'

education to advance their political ends. There are different approaches to structured workers' education in South Africa, Nigeria, and other parts of the world (Aremu 2007; Anisha 2013).

In defining structured workers' education from a South African perspective, Cooper (2022) argues that it can be broadly conceptualised into three categories. 1) A radical approach, informed by various strands of socialist and left politics, aims to radically transform society for the benefit of workers in particular and the working class in general; 2) An instrumentalist approach focuses on providing worker leaders with skills and training to incrementally improve social and economic conditions and facilitate upward social mobility for workers; and 3) the human capital perspective centres on training individual workers to enhance productivity and competitiveness, enabling them to access opportunities for upward social mobility in the workplace.

When examining workers' education in Nigeria, Aye and Udeh (2020) adopt a similar approach to the one outlined by Cooper (2022). Additionally, Aye and Udeh (2020) introduce other perspectives on adult education, including development, which primarily concerns how unions can influence the state's national economic and development policies to promote advancement. Another perspective highlighted by these authors is gender, which focuses on education and training for women. However, Aye and Udeh (2020) contend that structured workers' education in Nigeria is largely based on what they call "adult-liberal education". This approach concentrates on educating and training individuals to advance their career prospects in the workplace, resembling what Cooper (2020) describes as a "human capital" approach to workers' education.

My own synthesis is that workers' education is not politically neutral, as previously hinted. The predominant strand of workers' education, especially in post-apartheid South Africa, appears to uphold exploitative relationships between workers and employers. This approach involves delivering and promoting workers' education that enhances the capabilities of individual workers, enabling them to attain upward social mobility within the workplace.

At the trade union level, this perspective aims to train and educate shop stewards so that they can effectively negotiate for promotion opportunities, improved benefits, higher wages, and enhanced working conditions, specifically on behalf of workers and union members. I regard this perspective as being reformist, as it seeks to extract certain gains from the capitalist system without advocating for radical change. In contrast, radical workers' education in both countries does not oppose reforms such as wage increases and better working conditions but views them as partial victories that can be vulnerable to erosion. This is because reformist approaches typically do not want to shake off the roots of capitalism by fighting for a socialist order that empowers workers and the working class to control both the workplace and society. In colonial Nigeria, workers' education witnessed a continuous struggle between the radical and reformist perspectives.

Colonialism and workers' education in Nigeria

Before achieving independence, workers' education was organised by employers who aimed to establish "sound industrial relations". In this colonial era, the government, for example, financed workshops and created labour training institutes for workers and labour leaders. However, due to the Cold War, British imperialists were cautious about endorsing radical workers' education or any association with the Communist bloc. Instead, their overarching strategy was to construct a non-radical and anti-Soviet industrial regime and workers' education. Certain union leaders, colonial government labour officers, and multinational corporations operating in Nigeria facilitated workers' education to ensure that Nigerian workers did not oppose colonialism in the workplace or in Nigerian society (Tijani 2012a:53).

The primary agenda of the colonial regime in Nigeria was to establish anti-communist labour relations and pro-colonial workers' education. This approach to colonial workers' education, which was designed to bolster the colonial system and the activities of the multinational corporations in Nigeria. The colonial regime in Nigeria aimed to ensure that workers aligned with the London-based International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the British Trade Union Congress (TUC), while discouraging them from joining the pro-Soviet World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU).

The colonial regime offered education programmes aimed at enticing workers' leaders and Nigerian workers to participate in vocational and other skill development. Also, there were both local and overseas programmes designed to foster "sound" industrial relations that extended beyond colonialism. Certain Nigerians were being trained and prepared to assume roles previously held by white authorities of the state and foreign companies after achieving independence. This transition aimed to partially ensure the perpetuation of capitalism and imperialism, especially in the post-independence period.

Leftists were always excluded from such programmes because there was a misalignment between the colonial and post-colonialism projects and their radical workers' education, which sought to dislodge colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. Concretely speaking, the colonial government supported workers' education in the form of workshops, training, and skills development programmes offered by both private and public organisations, as well as the establishment of labour training colleges in towns and cities during the last phase of colonialism in Nigeria. However, alongside the prevailing co-optation-focused workers' education system, there were also education programmes inspired by leftist ideologies designed for workers (Tijani 2012b).

The radical approach during colonialism in Nigeria

In the 1940s and 1950s, Marxists, including notable figures like Samuel Ikoku, Ayo Ogunseye, Nuka Eze, along with various Marxist formations, played an instrumental role in providing structured workers' education that was radical and aimed at establishing a socialist or Communist Nigeria. These committed left-wing activists established reading groups, conducted workshops, organised meetings, and engaged in various activities to promote their political perspectives. Their influence extended to becoming influential figures in both the anti-colonial struggle and the Nigerian labour movement (Tijani 2012b).

Furthermore, strikes served as one of the avenues for promoting radical workers' education in colonial Nigeria. In 1945, approximately 200,000 workers in Nigeria engaged in a strike to support their demands for better wages. The imperialists, the colonial regime, and the multinational companies operating in Nigeria were concerned about the radicalisation of Nigerian workers. Workers' education was used as a tool to attempt to moderate and influence trade unions in Nigeria and the workers themselves. In furtherance of this objective, in 1947, the British TUC collaborated with Nigeria's labour department to organise workshops for trade union leaders (Ananaba 1969:42).

Mass media emerged as a significant platform employed by the left-wing to educate workers. In April 1943, *The Nigerian Worker* made its debut as a widely circulated newspaper associated with the first trade union centre, explicitly promoting a socialist perspective. Remarkably, it achieved an impressive circulation of 10,000 within less than a year. However, in 1944, the colonial regime grew concerned about the impact of workers' education delivered through the *Nigerian Worker* to such an extent that the newspaper was censored (Ananaba 1969). *The Labour Champion* carried forward the workers' education initiative of *The Nigerian Worker* when it was established in 1950. This occurred during the brief existence of the Nigeria National Federation of Labour, which was founded in 1948 and led by Imuodu. During the 1950s, young socialists organised educational workshops for the tenants' associations they founded in working-class residential areas in Nigeria (Olorode 2018; Aye & Udeh 2020).

The rise of radical workers' education before democracy in South Africa

In South Africa, endeavours to provide education aimed at empowering black workers to combat social and economic injustices can be traced back to the early 1900s. During this period, activists produced and distributed "accessible educational material" in the form of the *Voice of Labour*, which supported the work and struggles of trade unions and small groups of socialists. In 1919, the International Socialist League, later evolving into the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), organised and facilitated workers' education in the form of night schools (Lockett, Walters & von Kotze 2017).

As part of the resistance against capitalism, colonialism, racism, and despotism in the workplace, black workers established their own organisations. Notably, in 1919, the Industrial

and Commercial Union (ICU) emerged as a significant trade union dedicated to organising black workers across various sectors of the economy. The ICU's organising and education programme was based on using meetings and its own media to organise and educate black workers about their rights and interests. This approach led to exponential growth, challenging the relevance of the African National Congress (ANC), the current ruling party. At its zenith between 1927–1928, the ICU boasted more than 150,000 members. However, internal disputes and a lack of strategic direction ultimately led to the demise of the ICU in the early 1930s (South African History Archive [SAHA] 2022).

Other factors that may have contributed to the decline of the ICU include the fact that it was not allowed to organise in key sectors of the economy, notably the mines and the railways. The union also expelled communists who were inclined to prioritise the organisation and education of workers. These individuals ran reading groups and circulated materials designed to enhance workers' class consciousness and militancy (Vally et al. 2013).

During the 1920s, members of the CPSA, later becoming the South African Communist Party (SACP), displayed a strong commitment to workers' education. They consistently distributed multilingual newspapers aimed at educating workers about the history of capitalism and the political economy. For communists, education also entailed building the night school movement to ensure that black workers could acquire literacy and numeracy skills. Starting in 1925, the party's night school initiative was organised in the slums of Johannesburg, where workers had to rely on candlelight and had no access to desks or blackboards. Despite these challenges, they were taught to read and write, engaging in discussions on intricate political economy questions (Webster 2022).

Moses Kotane, who would later become a stalwart of the liberation struggle, was primarily a self-taught writer, speaker, and worker educator. He eventually taught at the communist night school in Johannesburg, where he honed his understanding of complex Marxist theories. Following this, he rose to prominence as a leader in the communist movement in South Africa. In 1929, Kotane joined the CPSA and played a pivotal role in the establishment of the party's publications, including *Umsebenzi* (The Worker). A decade later, in 1939, Kotane assumed the position of the party's general secretary, the highest-ranking position in communist parties (SAHA 2022).

Founded in 1955, the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) regarded itself as a non-racial union aligned with the ANC (Webster 2022). SACTU was a communist union propagating the Marxist-Leninist version of Marxism. The union believed in a two-stage theory that entails first national liberation and then socialism, which is to be led by the working class. In 1956, the first national SACTU school was convened, providing a platform for young workers and organisers to glean wisdom from the experiences of veteran trade unionists such as Ray Alexander, John Nkadimeng, and Eli Weinberg (Lockett et al. 2017). As tension between the federation and

apartheid regime escalated, many of the leaders faced bans or were compelled to re-establish the union in exile in the 1960s, amid a severe crackdown by the apartheid regime (Webster 2022)

The 1960s marked a significant turning point in South African working-class history in the sense that the manufacturing sector needed an urban-based working class with access to some very basic education and schooling. These factors contributed to the growth of urban dormitories or townships, the establishment of schools, and a notable increase in working-class cultural activities. These developments paved the way for intensified working-class resistance in 1973, 1976, and throughout the 1980s. Despite the repression in the 1960s, workers continued to be involved in self-organised strikes, although the strikes were limited numerically. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as the Urban Training Project (UTP), educated workers about their rights, leading to the formation of nine industrial unions between 1972 and 1975. Between 1991 and 1971, the UTP educated about 51,000 workers and worker leaders (Lowry 1999).

In 1972, the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) and the Black People's Convention (BPC), both proponents of black consciousness politics akin to the Black power movement of the United States of America (USA), jointly established the Black Workers Project (BWP). Inspired by the philosophy of Paulo Freire and the tenets of "liberation theology", which emphasised that workers are a valuable source of knowledge and have the capacity to address their own challenges, the BWP and the Black Consciousness Movement were also actively engaged in educating and mobilising black communities (Hlatshwayo 2018; Vally et al. 2013).

The momentum for these aforementioned initiatives received a significant boost from the strikes that unfolded in Durban. The historic Durban strike of 1973 began in January, and during the first quarter of the year, there were a total of 160 strikes involving 61,000 workers (Vally et al. 2013). These strikes played a pivotal role in fostering the growth of organisations dedicated to worker education and trade unions. In 1973, a group of predominantly middle-class intellectuals and academics established the Institute of Industrial Education (IIE), followed by the founding of the South African Labour Bulletin in 1974. The IIE's educational offerings included, among others, distance learning courses for workers. These courses featured handbooks that dealt with "the economy, the law, the workplace, and worker organisation" (Webster 2022:521). The IIE's educational methodology was rooted in the promotion of participatory democracy and the cultivation of a working-class ethos that values democracy and accountability. All these principles find resonance in Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (Vally et al. 2013; Freire 2020).

The aftermath of the Durban strikes led to the formation of industrial unions that still have a presence in post-apartheid South Africa. An example is the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA), which can trace its roots back to the Durban strikes of 1973. Its largest component at the time, known as the Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU), was founded in 1974. These industrial unions coalesced to launch the Federation of South African

Trade Unions (FOSATU) in 1979. FOSATU played a pivotal role in advancing structured workers' education in the 1990s and early 1980s (Forrest 2011; Webster 2022).

Academics and other intellectuals were instrumental in facilitating access to structured programmes for workers' education. Additionally, in the 1980s, several labour support organisations, or labour NGOs, were formed to conduct workers' education activities across the country. In this regard, Webster (2022:521) writes: "This involvement of academics in workers' education was part of a broad flowering of labour support organisations, such as the Labour Research Services in Cape Town, and progressive research entities at universities, such as the Trade Union Research Project (TURP) at the University of Natal and the History Workshop at the University of the Witwatersrand".

The South African Committee for Higher Education Trust (SACHED), founded in 1958, evolved to become the largest and arguably the most influential education NGO in South Africa by the 1980s. SACHED demonstrated its adaptability by responding to the ongoing education crisis and the changing political landscape by constantly adjusting its curricula, making them relevant to current and local dynamics. One systematic response was the formation of its more radical wing, the Labour and Community Committee (LACOM), which undertook educational work with community organisations and trade unions. LACOM's and SACHED's work continued with a strong radical working-class orientation at Khanya College, which was established in 1986 (Hlatshwayo 2018).

Unions and workers' education in Nigeria and South Africa: The communist/left influence

Workers' education in Nigeria and South Africa was not immune to the influence of Marxism and communism. In 1950, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) was founded by various trade unions under the leadership of Michael Imoudu, a left-wing trade unionist who was also a liberation fighter. However, the NLC eventually dissolved, largely due to its international affiliation during the Cold War era. Imoudu supported the WFTU, which was formed in 1945. Subsequently, Imoudu and his left-wing faction founded the All-Nigeria Trade Union Federation (ANTUF) in 1953, which also aligned with the WFTU (Gogo 2013).

As explained earlier, both the ANTUF of Nigeria and SACTU of South Africa were aligned with the communist-dominated WFTU in the 1950s and 1960s. SACTU, a non-racial Marxist-Leninist union federation, took this alliance further by being part of what was regarded as the Congress alliance, which comprised political leaders who sought to unite South Africans along ethnic and colour lines. As was the case in Nigeria before and after independence and political liberation, communists and socialists of various strands, despite their relatively small numbers, actively undertook the responsibility of organising and educating workers. This obsession with working closely with the workers stems from the political philosophy of Marxism, which sees the

workers and the working class as the social force capable of overthrowing capitalism, colonialism, and capitalism (Webster 2022; Gogo 2013).

Similarly, in South Africa, the night schools organised by the SACP (as explained in the earlier sections of this paper) played a crucial role in the development of many activists and leaders of the SACP, many of whom would eventually assume leadership positions within the party. However, the communist tradition was initially led by white communists who saw the black working class as a force capable of leading the South African revolution (Webster 2022:519).

The literacy classes and the political education conducted by the party yielded positive results, as several key leaders of the party emerged from African communities. They went on to assume leadership positions within the party, contributing to the 'Africanisation' of the party. In his letter to the party leadership, Kotane (1934:1) wrote, "My first suggestion is that the Party become more Africanized or Afrikanized, that the CPSA must pay special attention to South Africa, study the conditions in this country, and concretize the demands of the toiling masses from first-hand information, that we must speak the language of the Native masses and must know their demands".

The strike waves and radical workers' education in Nigeria and South Africa

The early phase of unionism in Nigeria tended to be dominated by workers' education, which sought to extract some gains for workers without dismantling the colonial order (Onyenouri & Hlatshwayo 2020). In South Africa, during the early phases of capitalism, compliant workers' education was driven by white trade unions and leaders with a trade union history. These unions provided workers' education primarily to white workers, while black workers, who endured super-exploitation, meagre wages, and deplorable living conditions in the mines and later in the black urban areas, were excluded from these educational efforts (Callinicos 1980).

The strike waves in both countries served as critical opportunities for reviving radical workers' education, as strikes encompassed intense activities involving meetings, debates, the dissemination of educational fliers, radio broadcasts, and other platforms used to educate not only striking workers but also their counterparts.

In Nigeria, the Railway Workers Union played an active role in the 1945 general strike on Cost of Living Allowance (COLA). This strike, which involved tens of thousands of workers, was renowned as the largest strike in West Africa at the time. The strikers demanded a 50% increase in the COLA to cushion the effects of post-war inflation (Oyemakinde 1975). Fearing the rise of communism among the unions, the colonial regime in Nigeria made some legal reforms seeking to tame the unions and workers, but these actions further fuelled radicalism within the unions and among workers (Adekoya 2019).

On the other hand, as alluded to earlier in this article, South Africa witnessed mass strikes by workers in 1973. These were preceded by the activities of NGOs, left-wing academics,

students, and radical political formations, such as the Black Consciousness Movement, involved in organising and educating workers about their rights and interests. The strikes gave birth to the labour movement, which went on to confront the apartheid regime and employers in the 1970s and 1980s (Hlatshwayo 2018).

The Cold War, global trade unions, and workers' education in post-colonial Nigeria

Due to Nigeria's strategic geographic, economic, and political significance as a country rich in oil and other natural resources, Nigerian unions attracted considerable attention from international labour organisations in the Global North after gaining independence. In 1960 and 1961, a British trade unionist from Public Service International (PSI), an international trade union federation of public employees, visited Nigeria to contribute to the advancement of the Nigerian Trade Union Movement in terms of national, moral, and technical progress (Egboh 1971:90).

IN 1960, A.A. Tulatz of the International Labour Organisation, an expert in workers' education and Vice-President of the Workers' Federation of Labour in Western Germany, and C.F. McRay from the Trade Union College in Kampala, Uganda, played key roles in organising week-long residential courses and workshops for the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUCN), a union federation established in 1943. Many Nigerian trade unionists pursued studies in the United Kingdom and the USA in the form of short courses and formal degrees related to trade unionism. Additionally, Nigerian union leaders also participated in many conferences organised by international trade union centres located in Europe and the USA (Egboh 1971).

Following a split within the TUCN, the National Trade Union Congress (NTUC) was established in 1960 by leaders and members who sought alignment with the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), an organisation associated with the Soviet bloc and non-aligned countries. In his analysis of this Marxist or Soviet-aligned union federation, Waterman (1973) noted the presence of education subcommittees within the union. These subcommittees were dedicated to educating members and leaders about the role of trade unions in a colonised capitalist society and the Soviet version of Marxism. In the early 1970s, the WFTU provided the union with reading materials, access to conferences, paid for university education for some leaders of the union, and a publishing house. In 1978, the union merged with the United Labour Congress (ULC) and the smaller Labour Unity Front and Nigeria Workers' Council to form the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) (Okechukwu 2016).

The competition between the Global Union Federation and Nigeria expressed itself institutionally. In the 1960s, the ULC, which was founded in 1962, maintained fraternal ties with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICTFU), which assisted in the establishment of the Trade Union Institute. On the other hand, the NTUC received support from the WFTU to launch the Patrice Lumumba Academy. This rivalry between international trade union centres had far-reaching implications for the division within trade unions and the workers'

education movement in Nigeria. Competition was intense and involved initiatives such as overseas trips, scholarships for studying abroad, and programmes aimed at entrenching the hegemony of each international trade union centre in Nigeria. Subsequently, after its formation in 1978, the NLC and its affiliates engaged in collaborations with international union federations, predominantly based in Europe (Aye & Udeh 2020).

The reformist approach to workers' education in post-colonial Nigeria

Aye and Udeh (2020) contend that the reformist approach, specifically termed by these educators and scholars as a "remedial and liberal-adult education approach", was often initiated by the Global Union Federation with the goal of fostering industrial peace and incorporating trade unions into formal industrial relations in Nigeria. Additionally, some gender-based interventions organised by these federations have taken on a developmental role, in prompting unions to reflect on the significance of gender within Nigerian society and trade unions.

With a focus that includes the development of individual skills and social partnerships between employers, trade unions, and the government, the Michael Imoudu National Institute (MINI) was formed in 1986. The institute promotes what could be described as a social democratic model called social partnerships in Nigeria. The specific aim of the institute is to encourage workers not to "rock the boat" by challenging the social system in Nigeria but to create industrial peace and harmony (Aye & Udeh 2020).

However, socialists, or the broader left, engage with such institutions because they believe that they need to be contested by progressives. The developmental efforts of organisations such as MINI offer a platform for socialists and the left to expose the limitations of the social democratic model of these institutions. Additionally, socialists and the left also tend to argue that these institutions can also be contested by radical educators (Aye & Udeh 2022).

Radical workers' education in post-colonial Nigeria

The Nigerian Socialist Workers and Farmers Party (SWAFP), which had ties to the young socialists, was established in 1963. The party also had connections with the Nigerian Youth Congress (NYC) and the NTUC, both founded in 1964. However, after the military seized control for the first time in the country, SWAFP was forced to go underground just three years later. Nevertheless, it continued to operate until 1970, when internal conflicts led to its dissolution. The party played an active role in educating workers about socialism, publishing its own newspaper, and operating socialist publishing enterprises. In the 1960s, SWAFP's biweekly journal, *Advance*, served as an active collective educator and organiser for workers, with a particular focus on the NTUC (Otegbeye 1999).

In the 1980s and 1990s, as the regimes assuming political power after achieving political independence implemented austerity measures designed to disrupt the working class and the

poor in Nigeria, socialists and other left-wingers increased the tempo of workers' education. The Workers' Education and Recreation Centre (WEDUREC), which was formed in 1984 in Lagos, organised correspondence and contact sessions to advance this cause. The primary goal of the centre's education was to mobilise working-class and impoverished communities in Nigeria. The organisation, which collapsed in the early 2000s, also published an educational magazine called *Forward*. The organisation ceased to exist at the beginning of the 2000s. Another educational organisation, the *May 31st Movement*, was established in January 1991 in Ilorin, North-Central Nigeria. In 1989, a group of young activists spearheaded efforts against the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). The campaign sought to educate and motivate workers, students, young people, informal sector workers, and the unemployed. It aimed to shed light on how corrupt administrations, living opulent lifestyles, were adopting SAPs, causing economic and social hardships for the Nigerian population (Aye & Udeh 2020).

The campaign that culminated in the protests on May 31, 1989, provided valuable lessons. The youth who initiated the May 31st Movement were particularly concerned about the limited engagement of socialists and the broader left in the struggles of Nigerian workers and youth. In 2000, the movement underwent a name change, becoming the Socialist Workers Movement. Then, in 2011, it merged with the Socialist League to form the Socialist Workers League (Aye & Udeh 2022).

Another indicator of the renewed vitality of left-wing organisations in Nigeria stemming from the anti-SAP struggles of 1989 was the establishment of the Socialist Revolutionary Vanguard (SRV) in 1989, comprising multiple left-wing factions. Additionally, the left utilised the *Labour Militant* newspaper as a tool to educate Nigerian workers. Planned educational activities included education sessions during breaks in workplaces and on weekends in working-class areas and public spaces. Several magazines and journals were published and distributed in factories and other working-class environments. Presently, the Socialist Workers' League conducts non-sectarian bi-weekly educational seminars and classes in select workspaces, engaging workers, worker leaders, and trade unionists in Nigeria. The Campaign for Workers' Alternative and Democratic Socialist Movement, two socialist initiatives, regularly organise public discussion forums focused on worker-related issues, aimed at educating workers (Aye & Udeh 2020). Despite the constraints posed by trade unionism, which involves a complex relationship with the state and employers, the NLC also made efforts to promote radical workers' education.

The NLC and the effort to radicalise workers' education in post-colonial Nigeria

The NLC was banned in 1994 as part of the Nigerian military dictatorship's attempt to suppress social forces advocating for democracy in Nigeria. The end of the military dictatorship in 1999 marked the formal return of the NLC to Nigeria's economic and political landscape. The

union federation recognised workers' education as a crucial component of its revival, which prompted the organisation of the National Education Summit in 2000 (Enoghase 2022). According to Aye and Udeh (2020:97), "The Education Summit was a watershed. The policy document it produced declared: 'NLC Education must seek to build political awareness among the working class and must be geared to attain social change that deepens democracy and builds a more equal society'".

Reviewing a report on the one-week-long 18th NLC Rain School, which took place at the Workers' Solidarity Centre in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, from July 25 and 29, 2022, as documented by Enoghase (2022), it becomes evident that the school embraced a radical critique of the Nigerian national government and the state of industrial relations in the country. The event boasted a participation of 250 individuals, including members from NLC affiliates, NLC state councils, and union activists from Kenya.

The theme of the school was 'Promoting Gender Mainstreaming in Labour, Politics for National Development, and Social Justice in Nigeria'. The rallying cry of the school was the need to return to the founding principles of radical trade unionism. The delegates and the speakers critiqued the Nigerian political elites, who are accused of mismanaging the economy, as well as the government's role in the closure of universities. They also expressed a strong commitment to fighting the divisive "demons" of ethnicity and religious chauvinism. The school committed trade unions and workers to work towards building a united and democratic Nigeria that responds to the needs of workers, women, and the oppressed in general (Enoghase 2022).

The radicalisation of the NLC resulted in attacks on its leadership. Socialists and leftists in Nigeria condemned these attacks on the labour movement, including the burning of NLC President Comrade Joe Ajaero's house in Lagos. Tragically, the entire house was destroyed, and nothing could be salvaged, with the unfortunate loss of one life. In its educational article published on June 20, 2023, the Socialist League argued that the attacks on the NLC leadership were connected to its role in challenging various economic issues, including an inflation rate, a 200% increase in petrol prices, a 70% devaluation of the Naira (the Nigerian currency), a 40% hike in electricity prices, rising food prices, and the overall impoverishment of the Nigerian population. These issues were seen as linked to the government's neoliberal policies, the interests of the wealthy in Nigeria and abroad, and the influence of imperialist countries (Olamosu 2023).

Labour and workers' education in post-apartheid South Africa

In 1995, shortly after South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, labour law became a point of contention between labour groups on one side and the government and business on the other. The campaigns in favour of a pro-worker Labour Relations Act (LRA) were extensive and vigorous. The epicentre of these efforts was the COSATU's Wits region, located in the Gauteng Province, which had a higher concentration of workers. Here, COSATU, its affiliated unions, and various

NGOs engaged in mass education campaigns. Radio, TV, newspapers, fliers, workshops, meetings, and other communication channels were employed to emphasise that the Labour Relations Bills were designed to restrict the right to strike and diminish workers' power to negotiate with employers. Workers participated in the anti-LRA march in their millions. However, the laws were passed, and when evaluating their worker representatives, the COSATU Wits region called it a "miserable compromise" made by COSATU, which negotiated on their behalf. These shop stewards were not simply making this statement up; they had undergone intensive workers' education on the LRA and grasped the workers' demands (Gall 1997).

When GEAR was adopted without consultation in 1996, various COSATU affiliates, including NUMSA, the South African Municipal Workers (SAMWU), CWU, Khanya College, the International Labour Research and Information Group (ILRIG), a labour and community support NGO, and others, organised extensive workshops, conferences, and authored popular publications aimed at exposing the neoliberal nature of the ANC and GEAR. They applied Freirean approaches to workers' education, ensuring that the education around GEAR and related issues was dialogical. The booklets written by NGOs and unions sought to summarise what was discussed by worker leaders in workshops (Khanya College 1998; ILRIG 1998). Right from the 1990s up to the 2000s, under the leadership of Dinga Sikwebu, a union educator, NUMSA gained recognition for its commitment to workers' education. The union arranged residential political education schools, workshops, conferences, and meetings, and produced many educational fliers, booklets, and journals. Additionally, they initiated a post-graduate student programme in collaboration with select universities, with the goal of enhancing shop stewards' comprehension of socio-economic issues from a political and theoretical perspective (Hlatshwayo 2020).

The decline of the power and influence of the radical traditions of workers' education saw the emergence of what Webster (2022) describes as the "professional tradition" of workers' education. This tradition coincided with the drastic decline of overseas funding that used to sustain the radical tradition of workers' education. One of the outcomes of funding drying up was the collapse of many NGOs that used to deliver structured workers' education programmes. The saddest part is that the collapse of these NGOs takes place in a context where workers and the working class are facing attacks from the state and big business, and they need this type of education to help them mobilise against the neoliberal onslaught. Of course, as Dinga Sikwebu warns, education is not a solution to all the problems facing labour. However, it does facilitate the raising of working-class consciousness and mobilisation (Sikwebu 2020).

The general decline of radical workers' education is not a new phenomenon. Andrew (2003) conducted a comprehensive study using COSATU policy documents, in-depth interviews, and secondary sources on the evolution of COSATU's policy on workers between 1985 and 1992. The conclusions confirmed that COSATU shifted from a radical and socialist policy on workers' education, which was about struggling for a socialist society between 1985 and 1988, to a reformist and liberal-individualist policy that sought to view education as a tool for economic

reconstruction and the individual worker's career between 1989 and 1992. The radical orientation of South African workers' education evolved in a context similar to that of other newly industrialised countries such as Brazil, South Korea, and the Philippines, characterised by what has been described as "social movement unionism": a "highly mobilised form of unionism based in a substantial expansion of semi-skilled manufacturing work, which emerged in opposition to authoritarian regimes and representative workplaces in the developing world" (von Holdt 2002:8-9). COSATU developed more structured forms of education, attempted to build workers' control over education by establishing worker-led education committees, and began holding an education conference every two years (Andrews 2003).

The emphasis on skills development and the professionalisation of workers' education began to take root institutionally shortly after the first democratic elections. Two years after the general election, in 1996, several trade unions came together to establish the Development Institute for Training, Support, and Education for Labour (Ditsela). One of the primary objectives of this organisation was to design and deliver structured education programmes to respond to the multiplicity of challenges facing labour in post-apartheid South Africa.

One of Ditsela's significant academic programmes is Trade Union Practise Qualification (TUPQ), which is accredited at level 4 by the University of the Western Cape. It is offered as the Further Education and Training Certificate and is funded by the Education Development and Training Practices Sector Education Training Authority (EDTP SETA). The certificate course includes modules on how trade unions work, political economy, the law as an organising tool, organising workers, women's and other forms of oppression, building an effective organisation, and a selection of elective courses (Webster 2022).

While radical workers' education may not be as prominent as before in South Africa, it has not entirely disappeared. With the increasing prevalence of precarious workers, who are often overlooked by established unions, some NGOs have taken on the role of providing structured workers' education for this demographic, which predominantly comprises black women. In the 2000s, Khanya College has evolved as an innovation hub for educating, organising, and mobilising community health workers. The college has organised various activities, including workshops, conferences, meetings, and book fairs, and health workers have adopted Freirean approaches to education. As a result, health workers have gained confidence and subsequently established their own organisation called the Gauteng Community Health Workers Forum (GCHWF). Community health workers produced booklets, newspaper articles, newsletters, and other forms of media to strengthen their struggle for recognition by the Gauteng provincial government. The government initially viewed these workers as something other than their employees who were supposed to earn a decent salary with benefits (Hlatshwayo 2020).

Other socialist-led NGOs, including the Casual Workers Advice Office (CWAO) and the Workers World Media Productions, used radio, social media, and print media, along with popular education in languages that accommodated precarious workers to organise these workers.

Through these efforts, CWAO and the Simunye Workers Forum (SWF), a forum of precarious workers that emerged from the organising and education of the CWAO, won crucial court victories for precarious workers, such as the recognition of organisations of precarious workers who are not members of the established unions (van der Merwe 2023).

Workers' education under post-colonial Nigeria and post-apartheid South Africa

The extension and intensification of SAPs in Nigeria took the form of fuel price hikes. In the 1970s, the fuel price subsidy was introduced to reduce the cost of fuel in the country. One of the first actions taken by Nigerian President Bola Tinubu when he came to office was to remove fuel subsidies, causing petrol prices to rise to 617 nairas (\$0.78) per litre. This marked a record high cost of petrol in Nigeria, a country whose economy is heavily dependent on oil (Aljazeera 2023). Petrol prices in Nigeria and South Africa are comparable, and yet South Africa is not considered an oil production country. To make matters worse, Nigeria's oil refineries are dysfunctional, causing crude oil to be exported, processed overseas, and brought back to Nigeria as a refined product. The fuel price is most likely to be another cause of discontent in Nigeria. NLC President Joe Ajaero has this to say about the fuel hikes: "We woke up this morning (Tuesday) to the news that NNPC [Nigerian National Petroleum Co] has increased the pump price of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) from the hitherto draconian N500/litre to N617/litre.... We strongly condemn this latest unilateral increase and warn the government to desist from trying the patience of Nigerians" (cited in Ahiuma-Young 2023:1).

In the South African context, the literature indicates that the radical approach to workers' education that was hegemonic, especially in the 1970s and the 1980s, had declined dramatically. What Webster (2022) characterises as the "professionalisation" of workers' education has become the norm. This shift towards workers' education concentrating on enhancing individual job skills and being provided by private service providers and labour-related institutions can be traced back to the 1990s when the ANC was on the verge of being elected as the democratic government. COSATU began to focus on skills development for the economy and the need to ensure that workers have upward social mobility in the workplace. Parallel to that, the concerns of the labour movement were about the development of education programmes that sought to support the ANC as a government sympathetic to workers. Workers' education was unable to provide a radical critique of the ANC government that was advancing neoliberalism quickly in the form of GEAR, and workers' rights were under attack. Many leaders of the trade union movement who used to help deliver structured workers' education programmes in the 1970s and 1980s were at all levels of government and business. The tie between the ANC and the SACP provided workers' education that would not challenge COSATU's ally – the ANC that governs South Africa (Cooper 2005; Vally et al. 2013).

On the other hand, workers' education in Nigeria is taking on a more developmental approach and, to some extent, a radical stance. Labour in Nigeria has often been viewed as an

opponent by various Nigerian governments, including those reported to have been elected by the Nigerian people. Unlike the situation in South Africa, where COSATU was in alliance with the ruling ANC, the NLC established the Party for Social Democracy in 2002; the party later changed its name to the Labour Party after the general elections of 2003. In the general election of 2023, the party obtained support from the NLC and the TUC. However, the party, despite endorsement by Nigerian labour, has not performed well in general elections. The fact that the Nigerian trade unions operate outside of the formal political establishment parties in Nigeria explains their developmental and radical education. Workers' education in Nigeria tends to be oppositional, focusing on raising developmental concerns. From the anti-SAP struggles of 1989 to the recent fuel and general price hikes, the NLC has consistently been at the forefront of battles against neoliberalism in Nigeria, which is one of the reasons why it was banned by the military in 1999.

CONCLUSION

Workers' education in Nigeria and South Africa played a major role in the conscientisation of workers during the struggles for independence and liberation against colonialism, racism, and apartheid, in the case of South Africa particularly. Initially, workers' education in Nigeria tended to be about creating a workforce that would support colonialism. However, workers became radicalised through the efforts of Marxists and other left-wing groupings and individuals. In this process, workers' education also became part of the liberation struggle. In the South African context, communists played a significant role in establishing trade unions and fostering working-class resistance against colonialism, racism, and apartheid. Unlike in Nigeria, white activists were also instrumental in the educational activities of workers and trade unions. Parallel to that, other traditions were led by black intellectuals who were part of the black consciousness tradition, and churches also delivered workers' education programmes to support workers' struggles. Radical workers' education became dominant in South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s. However, this tradition declined in post-apartheid South Africa, giving way to reformist and individualistic workers' education. Meanwhile, in Nigeria, the economic and political crises in Nigeria led to the resurgence of radical workers' education in independent Nigeria. This strand of workers' education coexists alongside individual career-oriented and corporatist approaches to workers' education.

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