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The Formative Period of the Ethiopian Labour Movement, 1962-1974

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Abstract

As a result of internal and external factors, the imperial regime issued a labour relations decree, Decree No.49/1962 and recognized labour unions and employers' associations for the first time in the history of Ethiopian labour movement on 5 September 1962. This in turn resulted in the birth of the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Union (CELU) on 9 April 1963 and the Ethiopian Employers' Federation (EEF) on 11 April 1964. In a nut shell, the years from 1962 to 1974 can be taken as the formative years in the history of the Ethiopian labour movement. Therefore, this study tries to investigate the formative period of the Ethiopian labour movement in which workers sought to establish an independent labour union and undertaken stiff struggle to that end. As a qualitative research, the study used document analysis and in-depth interview to collect data. It also used thematic analysis to analyze the collected data. The findings of the study showed that the strong subordination of CELU to the state and the enduring internal power struggle among its leaders contributed a lot to the failure of the Ethiopian labour movement to establish an independent national confederation and to be an agent for the 1974 Ethiopian revolution.

Key Words: Formative, Tripartite, Confederation, Labour movement, Strike

Introduction

Exogenous and endogenous factors induced the imperial Ethiopian government to issue a labour relations decree and recognize employers' associations and labour unions for the first time in the history of Ethiopia. Once the formation of labour unions was legally recognized, a number of workers in several industrial plants began to establish local unions. The establishment of a number of local unions in turn resulted in the birth of CELU, the first national labour confederation in the history of Ethiopia. Besides its active involvement in the tripartite relations with the employers' association and the imperial Ethiopian government, CELU called a general strike three months after its establishment. It also worked tirelessly to strengthen its organizational structure and improve the appalling living conditions of members. Furthermore, it managed to establish relationship with international labour unions, inter alia, the African American Labour Center (AALC), the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the International Labour Organization (ILO). On the other hand, the state formed strong alliance with management and worked to control CELU. Thus, the formative period of the Ethiopian labour movement was characterized by the struggle between CELU, which was working with determination to be a vibrant and independent confederation, on the one hand and the state, which feared the growth of strong labour unions as a threat to its political power on the other hand.

This chapter deals with the overall relationship between CELU and the imperial Ethiopian government between 1962 and 1974. Among other things, it tries to delve into such questions: What was the impact of the labour relations decree on the development of labour unions in

Ethiopia? How did CELU emerge and begin to threaten the state? How did the 1963 attempted general strike change the relationship between CELU and the state? To what extent was tripartism practiced during the imperial period? How did the imperial Ethiopian government support CELU's endeavor to establish a viable relationship with international trade unions?

1. The Enactment of the First Labour Law and the Recognition of Workers' Organizations

The early 1960s marked the change in the imperial Ethiopian state's policy towards labour because of external and internal pressures. International and regional labour organizations, as well as indigenous and traditional self-help associations, played an important role in this regard. More importantly, the ever growing insistence of workers on creating associations and the increasing number of their petitions presented to the emperor, and the clandestine support and advice of the intellectuals and the enlightened civil servants pressurized the imperial Ethiopian state to enact a labour relations decree on 5 September 1962. The various industrial disputes that were frequently submitted to the emperor through popular petitions for resolution made the emperor and his government aware of the political dangers that might ensue if a trade union movement was to be suppressed when it had support of the majority of the workers. As a result, the emperor held a series of discussions on the urgency of preparing a labour law with his Council of Ministers in 1961. The emperor and his government envisaged that the labour law would not only change the precarious conditions of the country's labour relations by

guaranteeing the freedom of association for workers but it would also contribute to the political stability and socio-economic development of the country.¹

Following the report of the council of ministers on the necessity of labour laws not only to improve the labour relations but also to facilitate the socio-economic development of the country, the emperor authorized them to set up an inter-ministerial committee and study the overall situation of labour in Ethiopia. The council of ministers in turn appointed a subcommittee of three, including; Yelema Dārēssa, Endalkačāw Mäkonän and *Däjjazmč Zäwdè Gäbrä Selassè*, to study the conditions of labour in the country. The sub-committee set up a technical committee comprised of Seyum Härägot, Mohämmäd Abdulrahman and an expert from the MNCD. This technical committee continued to carry out its task together with labour experts who were working in Ethiopia. Among others, Donald E. Paradis, who was then the advisor in the Prime Minister office, and Count Von Baudissin, a German labour expert who was employed as an advisor in the Ministry of National Community Development (MNCD), provided pertinent analyses of labour relations to the subcommittee.²

The first job of the technical committee and the experts was to conduct basic research and identify the most important provisions to be included in the draft labour relations decree. Besides conducting a thorough investigation of the existing statutory provisions, the committee made a comparative study of various labour legislations promulgated both in developing and

¹Thoms C. Killion, "Workers, Capital and the State in the Ethiopian Region, 1919-1974," PhD Dissertation, University of Stanford: Department of History, 1985, p. 447; Arnold M. Zack, "Trade Unionism Develops in Ethiopia," in Jeffery Butler and A.A Castagno (ed.) *Boston University Papers on Africa: Transition in African Politics* (New York; Washington; London: Frederick A, Praeger Publishers, 1968), p.107.

²Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Rise of the Confederation of Labour Unions (CELU) and Ethiopian Employers' Federation (EEF) under the Haile Selassie Regime," Un Published Monograph, Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York, 2005, pp. 33-34.

developed countries. It also carried out a comprehensive analysis of some of the conventions and recommendations adopted by the ILO. The committee also visited various places in the country and held discussions with different sections of the society. This gave it a virtually complete picture of the general situation of labour in the country. The result of all these studies confirmed that the labour situation in the country was very precarious and needed an urgent legal instrument to improve it.³

The labour relations decree passed through several stages of assessment before it was issued as a decree and became an integral part of the country's law. Labour experts under the direct auspices of the technical committee prepared several drafts and submitted them to the government for consideration. The architect of the labour relation decree was Count Graf Von Baudissin, a German labour expert from West Germany who was employed as an advisor in the MNCD in May 1961. He submitted the first draft to the government on 13 July 1961. The draft focused mainly on three major and core issues of labour such as collective bargaining, labour disputes and methods of conciliation, and regulations and the date of entry into force of the Decree. The draft was further enriched by constructive comments given by some pertinent government bodies and submitted for the second time to the Council of Ministers on 25 July 1961. After a thorough discussion of the second draft, labour advisors and experts redrafted the document for the third time and submitted it to the technical committee on 23 November 1961.⁴ Having made a thorough revision of the document, the technical committee presented the third draft to the Imperial Institute of Public Administration for further scrutiny. The institute on its part made some amendments and submitted the draft to the International Labour Organization (ILO) for

³Georg Graf von Baudissin, "Labour Policy in Ethiopia," *International Labour Review*, Vol. LXXXIX, No. 6, 1964, p. 555.

⁴Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Rise of the Confederation...", pp. 42-43.

evaluation and comments in February 1962. Having incorporated the comments of the international labour organization, the technical committee submitted the final draft to the Council of Ministers in June 1962. The involvement of foreign labour experts, advisors and interested agencies on the drafting of the decree indicated that the imperial Ethiopian government was fully aware of the serious condition of labour relations in the country and worked to introduce a strong legal machinery to improve the situation.⁵

Apart from this, the imperial Ethiopian government also organized a seminar on industrial relations, manpower and employment services on 6 August 1962 to create awareness among officials regarding the proposed labour relations decree. The seminar continued to be given until the beginning of October 1962. The seminar was organized by the MNCD in cooperation with the ILO. It provided officials then employed in various governmental departments and expected to assume responsibilities for labour affairs with a general introductory training in labour relations, manpower and employment services. The seminar was mainly given by two ILO labour experts, Professor Henry Richardson and Robert Jones.⁶ At the end of the seminar, Gètahun Tässäma, the then minister of the MNCD, declared that the government was concluding its preparation to issue a labour relations decree. He stated that:

...Human nature is not always predictable. Labour particularly, tends to be sensitive to authority and discipline. Very often its behavior may even be irritable and yet we have to concede that in the economic progress of a country labour is a vital factor, which can make or mar the industrial progress of a nation... [Thus,... the government which is responsible for guiding the development of the country has to play an effective role in the affairs of labour...[therefore] the proposed

⁵Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Rise of the Confederation...", p. 44; Seleshi Sissay, "Labour in Contemporary Ethiopian Politics: The Case of the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions and its First General Strike," A paper presented to the 71st annual meeting of the American Sociological Association in New York City, September, 1976, p. 5.

⁶Ministry of National Community Development, *Seminar on Industrial Relations, Manpower and Employment Services, August to October 1962*, Monograph, 1962, p. 1.

legislation is meant to encourage labour to organize itself into labour unions and the employers in association.⁷

While the seminar was going on, based on the recommendation of the emperor, the Labour Relations Decree 49/1962 was issued on 5 September 1962. Nearly a year later, the legislative body made some modifications and proclaimed it as Proclamation No. 210/1963 on 2 October 1963. True, with the issuance of the labour relations decree and the legal recognition of labour unions, the protracted struggle of the Ethiopian workers began to give concrete results. The issuance of the decree was certainly a hallmark in the Ethiopian labour movement. It was the first labour legislation in the history of Ethiopia that granted the workers the right to establish labour unions. It encouraged workers to get organized and defend their interests. It also helped them to understand the ultimate value of unity or being organized. It was also following the promulgation of this decree that workers were able to establish the national confederation, CELU, on 9 April 1963.⁸

Even though the factory proclamation of 1944 addressed some concerns of workers, it did not mention labour relations. Likewise, despite the incorporation of some issues of labour in the 1955 revised constitution and in the Civil Code of 1960, labour relations were not given due emphasis. One cannot, however, deny that the Eritrean Employment Act of 1958 was an important experiment from which the labour relations decree of 1962 borrowed its basic provisions. Be that as it may, it was with the enactment of the labour relations decree of 1962 that the legal

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

⁸Berhane Gebre Negus, "The Labour Relations Decree of 1962: Possible Impact on Labour and Management," BA Thesis, Haile Selassie I University: Department of Economics, 1964, pp. 8-10; Thoms C. Killion, "Workers, Capital and the State...", p. 449.

instrument for collective bargaining between the workers and the employers was instituted.⁹ The decree also granted workers the right to form labour unions and bestowed equal bargaining power upon the management and workers. The Department of Labour, which would have the power to solve industrial problems, was also set up within the MNCD. The Labour Board, which was responsible for resolving labour disputes between labour and management, was also established.¹⁰

The main objective of the labour relations decree, as stated in the preamble, was to promote a higher standard of living for the Ethiopian people by establishing a harmonious relationship between labour and management. It stated that:

...The promotion of a higher standard of living for our people is greatly dependent upon the harmonious and voluntary cooperation of labour and enterprises...and such cooperation should have as its objectives the creation of prosperous labour conditions in all enterprises; and... the settlement of labour disputes through collective bargaining between employers and employees or their lawfully established representatives; and... the establishment of principles may be applied.¹¹

The labour relations decree of 1962 aimed at fulfilling three major functions: Primarily, it legalized the formation of labour unions and employers' association for the first time in the history of Ethiopia. Secondly, the decree encouraged both labour unions and employers' association to resolve industrial disputes through collective bargaining. The decree encouraged the conclusion of collective bargaining agreements and even empowered the MNCD to draft and

⁹Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of an Ethiopian Labor Leader* (Baltimore: Publish America, LLP, 2010), p. 66; Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Development of Some Institutions concerned with Labour Relations in Ethiopia," A Monograph, Haile Selassie I University: Department of Public Administration, 1969, p. 26.

¹⁰Georg Graf von Baudissin, "Labour Policy in Ethiopia," ..., p. 553.

¹¹*Nägarit Gazëta*, Labour Relations Decree 49/1962, September 5, 1962, p. 136.

circulate model collective bargaining agreements to management and labour unions and guide them in their negotiations. Apart from this, the Department of Labour in the MNCD gave training for conciliators recruited from their own staff and promised to use non-government personnel acceptable to both sides as conciliators and arbitrators. Thirdly, the decree recognized the establishment of a Labour Relations Board with the prerogative to resolve industrial disputes whenever the parties failed to reach an agreement on their own.¹²

The contribution of the decree to the development of the Ethiopian labour movement can be seen from the extent of the rights that it granted to workers and their unions. It granted them freedom of association, the right to protection, and the right to bargain collectively. It also brought some changes in the labour relations of the country. For instance, following the issuance of the decree, there was a marked increase in labour unions' activity. Workers began to organize unions at enterprise level and increase their membership.¹³

As the decree was prepared without the participation of workers, however, it did not include the provisions that workers demanded most. Among other things, the right to strike and the question of minimum wage were not addressed by the decree. Despite workers' struggle for a comprehensive labour law, the decree was not a concession to their demands; rather it was portrayed as a grant by the imperial Ethiopian state. As a result, some of the provisions in the decree were more in the nature of restrictions than concessions. The restriction was even reflected on the right of workers to form unions. The right to form unions was not given to all workers; for instance civil servants were excluded. Since the government was by far the largest

¹²Arnold M. Zack, "Trade Unionism Develops...", p. 108.

¹³Arnold M. Zack, "Trade Unionism Develops...", p. 109; Kiflu Mekuria, "The History of the Growth of Labour Unions in Ethiopia," BA Thesis, Haile Selassie I University: Department of History, 1973, p. 17.

employer in Ethiopia, this provision seriously affected the growth of labour movement in the country. Moreover, according to Article 20 (c) of the decree, domestic servants, agricultural workers working in farms employing less than ten permanent employees and industrial workers in firms employing less than 50 workers were also excluded from any of the provisions regarding either employees or public servants. Article 22(c) of the decree also put further restrictions on unions by ruling out political involvement of labour as illegal and by limiting the opportunity to exercise the right to strike. It stated that: "...Employers' associations and labour unions shall not pursue political aims or engage in any political activities whatsoever."¹⁴

Interestingly enough, the labour relations decree attributed the existence of labour unions only to the good will of the imperial Ethiopian government. The decree empowered the MNCD to implement the labour relations decree. Article 3(g) of the decree, for instance, empowered the Minister "to petition the courts to dissolve employers' associations or labour unions in accordance with Article 461 of the Civil Code of 1960."¹⁵ In addition, the decree gave tremendous power to the Labour Board which was dominated by government officials. The Board was empowered not only to consider, mediate and arbitrate labour disputes but also to prohibit unfair labour practices, to direct workers and organizations to refrain from such acts, to decide upon temporary matters prior to final settlement, to issue decisions and awards, and to enforce them by appropriate means. It had also the power to provide recommendation to the minister to dissolve labour unions. Article 12/a (iv) of the decree, for instance stated that "... the Board has the power to recommend to the minister the dissolution of organizations."¹⁶ Thus, one can argue that since the decree bestowed significant prerogatives on the MNCD and the Labour

¹⁴*Nägarit Gazèta*, Labour Relations Decree 49/1962, September 5, 1962, pp. 146-147.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 140.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 143.

Board, labour unions were forced to remain dependent on the goodwill of the government for their existence and for the legislation of labour laws. Employers and labour unions were only required to bargain in good faith once they were registered in the ministry. In addition, since the provisions of the decree did not address all the demands of workers, it continued to be the center of disagreements between workers and the state until it was substituted by another comprehensive labour law. Workers continued to demand for a comprehensive labour law eight months after the promulgation of the first labour law. Thus, the enactment of the labour relations decree of 1962 and the legal recognition given to the labour unions were primarily inspired by the desire of the imperial Ethiopian government to get a good image among African leaders as it was actively engaged in African issues following the establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). It was not a genuine response to the workers' demands.

Be that as it may, the decree contributed a lot to the development of labour movement in Ethiopia. For instance, it opened the door for workers to organize a national confederation and engage in collective actions. It was also a turning point in the history of the Ethiopian labour movement. Following the proclamation, local unions were recognized and began to get registered in the MNCD. Within a short period of time after the proclamation a relatively large number of plant unions were also established. In the first six months after the decree, for instance, more than thirty plant unions representing more than ten thousand members were registered with the MNCD.¹⁷ Thus, one can argue that the enactment of the labour relations decree and the automatic recognition of labour unions resulted in the establishment of a number

¹⁷R. Stutz, "The Developing Industrial Relation System in Ethiopia," A Teaching Material, Addis Ababa University: Department of Economics, 1967, p. 14.

of local unions in several industrial enterprises. The formation of local unions at enterprise level, eventually, resulted in the birth of the national confederation.

2. The Rise of the Confederation of Ethiopian Labor Unions

Even though the first organized labour movement and the subsequent formation of labour unions in Ethiopia is believed to have been begun by the Franco-Ethiopian railway workers in Dire Dawa on 22 July 1946¹⁸, it required around two decades to develop into a confederation. The initiative to organize a national confederation was taken by the Ethiopian Fiber Factory workers. More importantly, the Ethiopian fiber factory *edder* leader, Abära Gämu, played an important role in the establishment of the first national workers' self-help association that incorporated workers outside their company. The establishment of this association laid down the foundation for the establishment of the country's first national confederation. Abära's cooperative movement, which started in May 1961, eventually, resulted in the creation of *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoče Yä Sera ena Yä Heberät Sändika*, Ethiopian Workers' Development and Cooperative Syndicate, as the first national self-help association in Ethiopia on 15 July 1961. The primary aim of this country-wide self-help association was to support all members in need, especially those who had been illegally dismissed from work.¹⁹ After a year, however, with the intervention of educated individuals both from the state bureaucracy and Haile Selassie I University, the cooperative movement was transformed into a covert national labour union, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoče Yä Heberät Derejit Sändika*, Ethiopian Workers' Mutual Association Syndicate or

¹⁸Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoče Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoče Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC 1976, pp 30-31.

¹⁹Abära Abäbä, "Yä Mozvold Säratäñoče Anäsas," A Personal Record, 1996 EC, p. 2; Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoče Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 42; Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär Wuldät, Edegät, Wudeqät* (Addis Ababa: Image Enterprise PLC, 2004 E.C (2012), pp.32-34.

Ethiopian Labour Unions (ELU).²⁰ Thus, it was from this covert national labour union that, eventually, the national confederation evolved.

In addition to the unrelenting endeavor of the Ethiopian workers to form a national confederation and the imperial Ethiopian government's policy change towards workers' organization, the intervention of the ICFTU contributed a lot to the birth of the CELU. ICFTU had already established a number of affiliated labour unions in the neighboring countries. It was from these countries that it began to influence the Ethiopian labour movement. For instance, Tom Mboya, member of the Kenyan Legislative Council, General Secretary of the Kenyan Federation of Labour (KFL) and president of the East, Central and Southern Africa branch offices of the ICFTU played an important role in this regard. He befriended Bereket Habte Selassie and persuaded the emperor to recognize workers' organizations in the country.²¹ The latter also urged the leaders of the covert national labour union to work with the ICFTU. In the meantime, Bereket met Howard T. Robinson, an African-American, in charge of the education department at the ICFTU at Bole Airport while the latter was transiting to Kenya. He introduced Robinson with Abreham Mäkonän and Beyene Solomon and discussed the labour situation in Ethiopia. After the discussion, Robinson promised them to send labour experts to Ethiopia to support labour activities immediately after the government promulgated a labour relations decree. After the promulgation of the labour relations decree, the ICFTU sent D. Ramanujam, a Ceylonese labour expert who was working in the organization to Addis Ababa from Brussels to help the Ethiopian

²⁰Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, p. 55.

²¹Bereket Habte Selassie, *The Crown and the Pen: The Memoirs of a Lawyer Turned Rebel* (Asmara: The Red Sea Press, Inc, 2007), pp. 144-145.

workers and organize the national confederation.²² This marked the intervention of international labour unions for the first time in the history of the Ethiopian labour movement.

On the other hand, ICFTU had also already started communication with the imperial Ethiopian government and received permission from the emperor to work with the Ethiopian workers. As a result, it sent D. Ramanujam, who launched a training program for union leaders on various issues of labour in Addis Ababa. The training program was organized in cooperation with the University, particularly, the Department of Public Administration, which was the only department offering courses related to labour relations, and the MNCD. While the ICFTU covered the financial expenses of the program, the university arranged one of its student dormitories, *Saba* Hall for the training. The seminar was conducted by Howard T. Robinson and D. Ramanujam from ICFTU, Dr. Seyum Gebregziabher and Raymond R. Gamby from Haile Selassie I University, and Georg Graf von Baudissin from the MNCD. The training was attended by around 40 workers' representatives who came from 33 different enterprises.²³ But, different sources give different figures for the number of participants. For instance, while Stutz puts their number at 60, Seyum has only 35 workers.²⁴ The seminar, which lasted from March 4 to 16, 1963 (*Yäkatit* 25 to *Mägabit* 7, 1955 EC), was officially opened by Gëtahun Täsäma, minister of the MNCD. It was also reported that the seminar was well organized and enthusiastically attended. The main objective of the seminar was to educate the labour leaders about the basic features of labour unions. The seminar dealt with, inter alia, major characteristics of democratic union leadership, problems of union leadership, impediments for collective agreements, union

²²Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, pp. 65-66; Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Rise of the Confederation...", p. 51.

²³*Addis Zämän*, *Yäkatit*, 26, 1955 EC (March 5, 1963); *Mägabit* 9, 1955 EC (March 18, 1963).

²⁴Stutz, p.114; Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Development of Some Institutions concerned...", p. 56.

administration, democratic union meetings, and the constitution and the labour laws of the country.²⁵

Besides acquainting union leaders with the various issues of labour, the seminar created a platform for the birth of the national confederation. Even though it is difficult to argue that CELU was the direct result of the seminar, it is possible to assert that the seminar enhanced the awareness of workers concerning how to establish and lead a confederation. Apart from this, it was at the closing of the seminar that CELU was formed and the constitution which had been drafted earlier was unanimously endorsed and adopted in the same place. When CELU was formed, it comprised 29 local unions with a total membership of 15,000 workers. On the same day, a general election was held and the first leaders of CELU were elected. Accordingly, Abreham Mäkonän from Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Factory Workers' Union was elected as president and Zäläqä Wäldä Mariam from Dire Dawa Cotton Mill Workers' Union was made vice president. Furthermore, Beyene Solomon from Heavy Freight Transport Workers' Union was appointed as secretary general, Alämu Bogalä from Ethiopian Fiber Factory Workers' Union; as assistant secretary, Haylu Aga from Ethiopian Airline Workers' Union; as assistant secretary, Däjänè Mäkonän from Fogstad Woodworks' Workers' Union; as treasurer, Šekurlah Yussuf from Ethiopian Fiber Factory Workers' Union as assistant treasurer, and Abära Abäbä from Mozvold Woodworks Workers' Union was elected as auditor. While the president, vice president and the auditor were elected for two years by the General Assembly, the rest were appointed by the General Council for unspecified terms. On the same day, a Board consisting of 15 members was

²⁵*Addis Zämän, Yäkatit* 26, 1955 EC (March,5 1963); Ethiopian Herald, March 17, 1963 (*Mägabit* 8, 1955 EC); Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoče Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel* 1, 1976 EC, p .58; Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Rise of the Confederation...", p. 52; Stutz, p. 114.

set up.²⁶ Nearly a month later, CELU was registered with the Labour Department of the MNCD and officially started functioning on 9 April 1963. In a letter written to all concerned institutions of the imperial Ethiopian government dated 1 May 1963 (23 *Miyazeya* 1955 EC), the MNCD announced that: "...የኢትዮጵያ ሠራተኞች ድርጅት አንድነት ማህበር ከሚያዝያ 1 ቀን 1955 ዓም ጀምሮ በህግ ታውቆ የተፈቀደ መሆኑን እናስታውቃለን።"²⁷ The president of CELU also dispatched it to all member local unions and to a few international labour unions with a covering letter dated to 2 May 1963 (24 *Miyazeya* 1955 EC).²⁸

Figure 2.1. Participants of the First Seminar Organized by ICFTU at *Saba* Hall in HSIU.



Source: Beyene Solomon, *Fighter for Democracy*:..., p. 134.

At the beginning, CELU was not a well structured organization. The absence of qualified personnel and the prevailing financial constraints were the major factors that hindered CELU

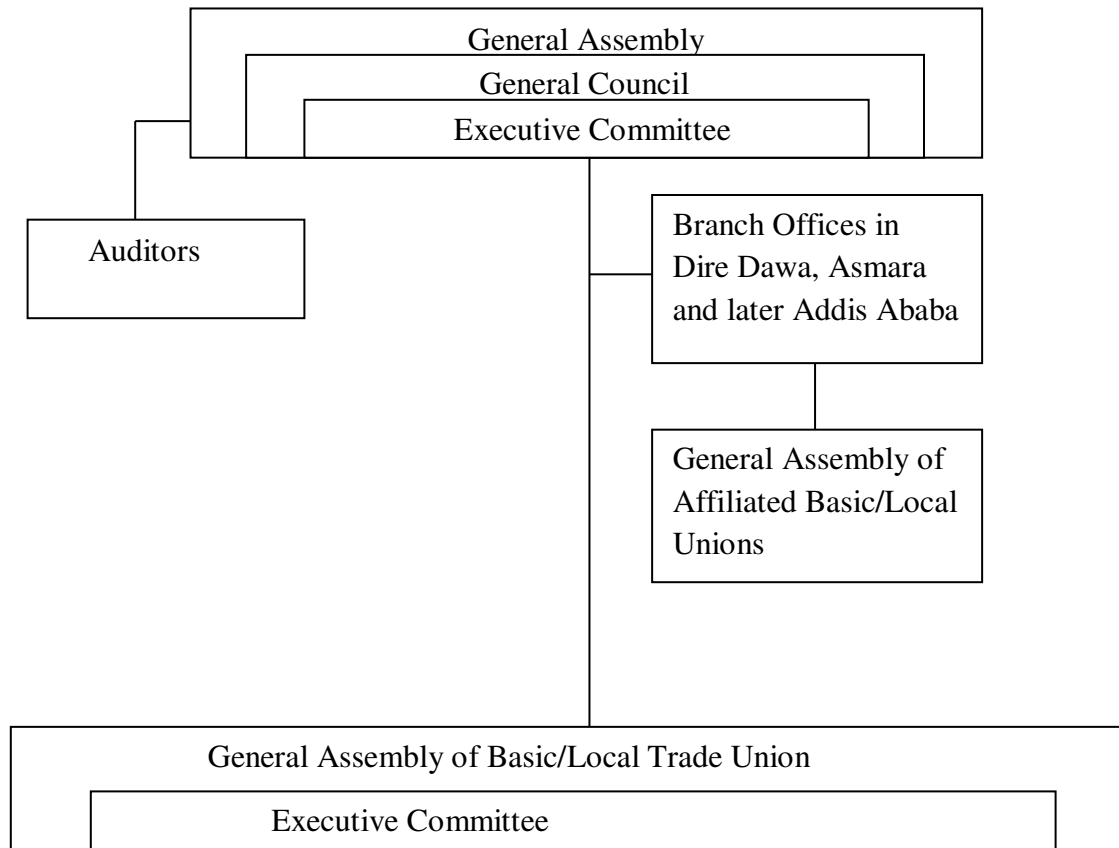
²⁶R.Stutz, p. 114; Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, pp. 59-60; Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, pp. 68-69.

²⁷"...We would like to notify that the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions is legally recognized and allowed to function as of April 9, 1963." See also Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Union's Archive hereafter (CETU): CETU, Box No. 48, File No. 03, A letter written from Täfära Haylä Selasè to all concerned organizations. The letter announced the establishment of CELU to all concerned organizations.

²⁸CETU, Box No. 9, File No. 1, A letter written from Abreham to Ministry of Pension and Property Distribution *Miyazeya* 24, 1955E.C (May 2, 1963). It deals with the formation of CELU.

from establishing a good organizational structure. A number of positions at the department level were left vacant until the third term election in 1967. More importantly, most of the departments such as Education Department, Legal and Economic Department, Institutional Building Department, Information Department, Administration Department and International Relations Department were virtually vacant. The works of each department was carried out by the other top officers of CELU. However, after the third term election, all the departments were filled by qualified personnel.²⁹

Figure 2.2. The Structure of CELU



Source: The First Constitution of CELU, *Miyazeya 1*, 1955EC (April 9, 1963), pp. 2-4.

²⁹Informants: Gäbrä Selasè Gäbrä Mariam, Gètačäw Mängäša and Abära Abäbä

Since its establishment, CELU tried to be a democratic organization. It aimed at improving the socio-economic and moral conditions of workers all over the country. It also aspired to help affiliated local unions throughout the country. All duly registered local unions had the right to become member of the confederation. According to Article 2/b of the first constitution of CELU, any local union which aspired to join CELU had to submit a written application together with its rules and regulations to the Secretary General of the confederation. Article 2/c of the constitution also stated that the executive committee had the power to accept or reject membership applications. Nevertheless, if the executive committee rejected the application, the applicant had the right to appeal to the General Assembly of CELU which met every two years.³⁰ In order to avoid such circumstances, however, the confederation often distributed samples of regulations to all the newly organized local unions. As a result, membership was almost automatic. Apart from this, at the beginning, rejection of the application of local unions for membership was rare because CELU was engaged not only in organizing local unions but also in increasing its membership. Thus, it is possible to argue that CELU served as an agent in organizing local unions and registering them as members of the confederation.

Regardless of the number of members, each local union, whether it had 50 members or 8000 members, had a fair, if not equal, say in the confederation's administration and the formulation of its policy. Each local union was represented in the General Assembly and in the General Council of CELU's organizational structure proportional to the size of its membership. The General Assembly was the highest organ of the confederation. It met every two years in April to hear progress reports, determine general policies and to pass resolutions. Every member union was

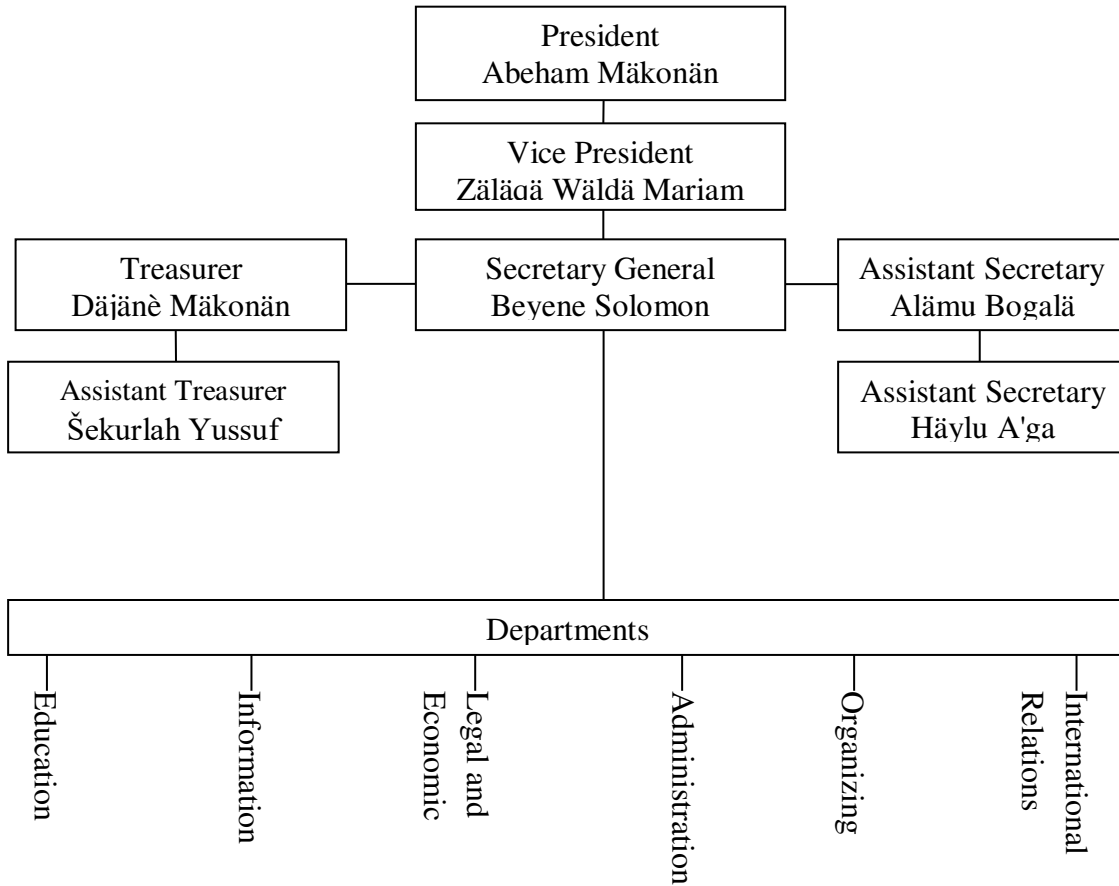
³⁰*ibid.*

represented by at least one member. But, a union with more than 1000 membership was represented by two members and one additional member for every 1000 until it reached seven.

The General Council, however, met every three months and was a policy making body. It controlled and coordinated CELU's administration and voiced the opinions of labour in between General Assembly's meetings. The General Council included the executive officers of CELU and representatives of member unions. Member unions with a total membership of above 1000 were represented by two delegates whereas unions with a total membership of below 1000 were represented by only one delegate. Moreover, it was only those delegates whose unions had paid their annual dues who were allowed to attend the General Councils' meeting. Between the meetings of the General Council, very urgent issues including those which needed major policy modifications were decided by the Executive Committee. It constituted members elected from the general council and the officers. It was chaired by the president and met every month; it reported its work to the General Council. The Executive Committee also organized a subcommittee which was only called upon occasionally. Most of the members of the Executive Committee were officers, including; the president, vice president, secretary general, assistant secretaries, treasurer, assistant treasurer and auditor, who carried out the day today routine works of CELU.³¹

³¹CETU, Box 9, File No. 04, It is a compilation of the various regulations developed by CELU in 1955 EC (1963); The First Constitution of CELU, *Miyazeya* 1, 1955EC (9 April, 1963), pp. 4-5.

Figure 2.3. The First Executive Committee of CELU



Source: The First Constitution of CELU, *Miyazeya* 1, 1955EC (9April 1963), pp. 2-4

The organizational strength of an institution is partially determined by its financial strength. Even though CELU managed to set up its organizational structure, it could not work to the satisfaction of member unions because of financial problems. True, according to Article 4 of the constitution, new members had to pay E\$ 1 for registration fee during admission, E\$3 annually thereafter.³² The membership fees and registration fees were not, however, enough for CELU to carry out its activities. As it was common in other labour unions in developing countries, CELU

³²*Ibid.*, p. 1.

had too many book memberships and too little members who actually paid their dues. At the beginning, the financial position of CELU was highly precarious.³³

Nevertheless, the leaders of CELU tried to solve this problem by encouraging the check-off system in which employers deduct dues from members and passed it on to the treasurer of the local union or directly sent the money to CELU. The application of this system in a few industrial plants helped CELU to get dues regularly. But, since the local unions themselves were not yet well organized, CELU remained reluctant to force them pay their dues. On the other hand, employers also often refused to deduct workers' dues. As a result, many member unions had arrears and faced difficulties to participate in the General Assembly and General Council meetings.³⁴

After some time, however, CELU managed to get substantial amount of financial assistance from ICFTU and AALC. These international trade unions contributed a lot to the growth of CELU. They helped CELU not only financially but also in expertise. For instance, since the establishment of CELU, a few ICFTU and AALC experts came voluntarily to help CELU. Apart from this, the strong relationship created between CELU and international trade unions further encouraged a number of workers in various industrial plants to join CELU. This further strengthened the amount of dues collected from members.³⁵

³³Tamrat Bekele, "The Emergence of Labour Unions and Government Policy in Ethiopia," MA Thesis, California State University, Hayward: Department of Business Administration, pp. 31-32; Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Development of Some Institutions concerned with ...," pp. 58-59.

³⁴*Voice of Labour*, A Special Issue for the Seventh Year Anniversary of CELU and the Inauguration of its New Headquarters, April 9, 1970, p.17.

³⁵Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Development of Some Institutions concerned with ...," p. 62.

3. The Institutionalization of Tripartism

Since its establishment in 1919, ILO has been considered as the only international organization in which voting power in setting standards and policies was distributed among governments, employers and workers. It promoted cooperation among the three partners to bring about social justice. These three partners have been taking part in all discussions and decision making concerning labour matters. This tripartite structure in the work and governance of ILO has been viewed as a unique feature of the organization. It is one of the basic features of the ILO that provided equal status to the representatives of the three parties in its General Conference.³⁶

Tripartism can, thus, be defined as "...the process by which workers, employers and governments contribute to the setting of workplace standards and the protection of workers' rights worldwide."³⁷ The concept of tripartism is defined based on Article 3(i) of the ILO constitution.

It stated that:

...The meetings of the General Conference of representatives of the members shall be held from time to time as occasion may require, and at least once in every year. It shall be composed of four representatives of each of the members, of whom two shall be government delegates and the two others shall be delegates representing respectively the employers and the workpeople of each of the members.³⁸

³⁶Gerry Rodgers, Eddy Lee, Lee Swepston and Jasmien Van Daele, *The International Labour Organization and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2009), p. 12.

³⁷William R. Simpson, "The ILO and Tripartism: Some Reflections," *Monthly Labor Review*, Vol. 117, No. 9, Special Issue Commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the International Labor Organization September, 1994, pp. 40-41, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41844334>.

³⁸"The original text of the Constitution, established in 1919, has been modified by the amendment of 1922 which entered into force on 4 June 1934; the Instrument of Amendment of 1945 which entered into force on 26 September 1946; the Instrument of Amendment of 1946 which entered into force on 20 April 1948; the Instrument of Amendment of 1953 which entered into force on 20 May 1954; the Instrument of Amendment of 1962 which entered into force on 22 May 1963; and the Instrument of Amendment of 1972 which entered into force on 1 November 1974."

True, despite its limited membership, the Governing Body of ILO is also tripartite. Apart from its constitution, the ILO also promoted tripartism by issuing three important instruments such as Recommendation No.113/1960 (A Recommendation on Tripartite Consultation at Industrial and National Level)³⁹, Recommendation No.152/1976 (A Recommendation on Tripartite Consultation on ILO's Activities),⁴⁰ and Convention No.144/1976 (A Convention on Tripartite Consultation to Promote the Implementation of International Standards.)⁴¹

The tripartite structure was not only institutionalized in the headquarters of ILO in Geneva but also expanded to member countries. The founding members of ILO, for instance, began to institutionalize tripartism as the same time with the organization. Nevertheless, some members institutionalized it much later than the ILO and even long after being a member of ILO.⁴² Ethiopia can be taken as an example in this regard. Even though it joined ILO on 28 September 1923, it had never been represented with delegates who could meet the tripartite structure of the organization until 1963. This was mainly because Ethiopia had no employers' association and labour unions yet.⁴³ In June 1963, however, Ethiopia sent its tripartite delegation to the 47th ILO General Conference for the first time. The delegation comprised of Gètahun Tässäma (Minister of MNCD) and Colonel Dawit Gäbru (State Minister of MNCD) from the government, and

³⁹http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12100:0::NO:12100:P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312289

⁴⁰International Labour Organization, *Trade Unions and the ILO: A Workers' Education Manual, Second edition* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1988), p. 21.

⁴¹<http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12030::NO::>

⁴²Gerry Rodgers, Eddy Lee, Lee Swepston and Jasmien Van Daele, *The International Labour Organization and the Quest for Social Justice, 1919-2009* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2009), p.15.

⁴³Lynn G. Morehous, "Ethiopian Labor Relations: Attitudes, Practice and Law," *Journal of Ethiopian Law*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1969, p. 6; Georg Graf Von Baudissin, "An Introduction to Labour Developments in Ethiopia," *Journal of Ethiopian Law*, Vol. II, No. 1, 1965, p. 108.

Abreham Mäkonän and Dr. Seyum Gäbärä Egziabhèr from CELU and Ethiopian Employers' Federation (EEF), respectively.⁴⁴

Apart from sending a tripartite delegation to the ILO General Conference, the MNCD established a tripartite institution to enhance the socio-economic development of the country. True, this was supported by the imperial government which realized that economic and social development was an all-embracing process requiring national efforts, involving all the people in the country, including labour and management. Socio-economic development cannot be achieved only through the dynamic and impartial leadership of the government but also through the active participation of interested groups. Recognizing the role of interest groups in the socio-economic development of the country, the imperial Ethiopian government issued a labour relations decree which guaranteed the workers and the employers to form labour unions and employers' association respectively. It also legalized the establishment of a tripartite institution, the Labour Relations Board. Institutionalizing the tripartite structure in the country helped CELU and EEF to play a vital role in the socio-economic endeavor of Ethiopia. In general, tripartism helped these interest groups to realize that they had a responsibility to give their support to all genuine measures taken by the government for the economic and social development of the country.⁴⁵

The Labour Board comprised of five members appointed for a three years term by the emperor upon the recommendation of the MNCD, was instituted and began its function on 20 February 1963 (*Yäkatit 13*, 1955EC).⁴⁶ True, its establishment was already guaranteed by the labour

⁴⁴*Voice of Labour*, Vol. I, No. 1, *Hamlè 1*, 1955EC (July 8, 1963), p. 2.

⁴⁵*Voice of Labour*, A Special Issue for the Seventh Year Anniversary of CELU and the Inauguration of its New Headquarters, April 9, 1970, pp. 39-40.

⁴⁶*Addis Zämän*, *Nähäsè 25*, 1955EC (31 August 1963).

relations decree of 1962 and supported by the government. In principle, while the three members of the Labour Board were appointed by the government, employers' association and labour unions were represented by one member each. Be that as it may, all the original members of the Labour Board were, however, appointed by the government. Perhaps, this was apparently a result of the vagueness of Article 5(a) of the labour relations decree concerning the composition of the Board. It stated that: "...the Board shall consist of five (5) members appointed by Us upon the recommendation of the Minister, one of whom shall be designated as Chairman. An adequate number of deputy members shall also be appointed." It further stated in Sub article (b) that "...employers' associations and labour unions may be invited to nominate candidates for appointment as members and deputy members of the Board."⁴⁷ Thus, because the phrase 'may be invited' was so vague, employers' associations and labour unions were not represented in the Labour Relations Board in its first term election. The original members of the Board were Blatta Terfè Šumeyä (Chairman), *Blatta* Qeṭaw Yetaṭäqu, Yelma Haylu, *Blatta* Keflä Egzi Yehädego and Seyum Harägot. They were all government officials and lawyers by profession. Contrary to the vagueness of Article 5, CELU argued that "...በመጀመሪያው ጊዜ ሹመት ግን ሁለቱም ወገኖች ወኪሎቻቸውን እንዲያቀርቡ አልተደረገም። በህዝባዊ ኑሮ ዕድገት ብቻ ተመርጠው የቀረቡ አባሎች ነበሩ። ይህም የሆነበት ዋናው ምክንያት ድርጅቱ ገና አዲስ በመሆኑ እና የሰራተኞችም ሆነ የአሰሪዎች አቋም ገና ጨቅላ ስለነበር መንግስት ሀላፊነቱን ወስዶ ቢሸም የተሻለ ነው በሚል ነበር። በአሁኑ ሹመት ገን ሁለቱም ተቋሞች ወኪሎቻቸውን ልከው በበርዱ አባልነት ተካፋዮች እንዲሆኑ አድርገዋል።"⁴⁸

⁴⁷*Nägarit Gazēta*, Labour Relations Decree 49/1962, September 5, 1962, p. 141.
⁴⁸"...The main reason for this was that since the labor relations board, labour unions and employers' associations were still infant organizations, it was found better if the government took the responsibility and appoints all members of the Board. In the second term, however, both organizations sent their representatives as members of the Board." See also *Voice of Labour*, A Special Brochure Prepared on the Occasion of the 5th CELU Annual Conference and Anniversary , *Mägabit* 28, 1960 (6April 1968), p.10.

Apart from the composition, the Board members were also criticized for lack of practical experience about labour relations disputes. Consequently, the government was forced to keep the tripartite nature of the Board by taking representatives of employers and workers as members. Thus, the composition of the Board was changed in the second term election; it began to include not only the representatives of the government but also representatives of employers and workers. While Yelma Haylu, *Blatta Keflä EgziYehädego* (Chairman) and Tefera Haile Selassie were appointed by the government as members of the Board, Dr. Seyum Gebre Egziabher and Aläm Abdi were also elected as members of the Board from EEF and CELU respectively.⁴⁹

The Labour Board was a semi-independent statutory body which had authority over the labour relations of the country. According to Article 12 (a) of the labour relations decree of 1962 the Board had the power "...to consider, conciliate and arbitrate labour disputes, including the power to decide upon temporary measures, if appropriate, prior to final settlement, to issue decisions and awards."⁵⁰ It had also the power to consider any complaint of unfair labour practice and to enforce its decisions and awards by appropriate means. Labour disputes which the labour relations section failed to settle were referred to the Labour Relations Board. Decisions and awards issued by the Board were legally binding. Appeals to the Supreme Court were allowed only on the question of law and not on the question of facts.⁵¹

Whenever an employee had a complaint against his employer, he had three options: to appeal to his employer, to sue his employer in court or to take his complaint to the Labour Relations Board in the MNCD. The last choice was the most frequently used method to resolve labour disputes.

⁴⁹Stutz, p. 93; Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Development of Some Institutions concerned with ...," p. 67.

⁵⁰*Nägarit Gazèta*, Labour Relations Decree 49/1962, September 5, 1962, p. 143.

⁵¹*Ibid.*,

An employee who brought a complaint to the MNCD filed it in the labour relation section of the Labour Department, a division of the Ministry. All disputes brought by local unions were first seen in this section. Its power was strictly conciliatory. Its functions would come to an end when it failed to bring the parties to an agreement. Then, the matter was brought to the Labour Relations Board for arbitration.⁵²

In carrying out its responsibilities, the Board had the right to require the parties to appear at its hearings and to present their testimony and evidence, and to enter the premises of any enterprise to obtain information relative to any matter which it had under consideration. It was also possible for the Board to delegate these rights to staff members. At first, disagreement arose among members of the Board over the amount of time and effort that should be expended in conciliation, aimed at voluntary settlement of a dispute, before it reverted to arbitration. Finally, it was decided to relegate the conciliatory activity to the labour relation section and concentrate more on the arbitration process.⁵³ Nevertheless, the decree gave due emphasis to conciliation, a process that required the two parties to solve their complaints through voluntary means.⁵⁴

The labour relations decree urged the Board to settle all labour disputes submitted to it through conciliation. Therefore, when any dispute was submitted, an attempt was made either by the Board itself or staff members to help the parties settle the dispute themselves through the conciliation process. This process involved the convening of a meeting and the offering of advice and suggestions for the settlement of the dispute which the parties were free to accept or reject. True, the Board was also empowered by the law to arbitrate any labour dispute submitted to it.

⁵²Morehouse, p. 52.

⁵³Stutz, pp. 93-95.

⁵⁴Arnold M. Zack, "Trade Unionism Develops...", p. 87; Georg Graf von Baudissin, "Labour Policy...", p. 559.

When the conciliation effort failed, the Board began to conduct an arbitration hearing, which was similar to a court procedure in that testimony was taken under oath, witnesses were subject to examination and cross examination, arguments were made and a decision or an award was given which was binding on the parties to the dispute. The only course of appeal against a decision of the Board was to the Supreme Imperial Court on questions raised concerning the interpretation of the law, and if the court found that the Board erred on a question of law or that the Board's procedure violated the law, the case was returned to the Board for final action.⁵⁵

The Board worked two days a week, only in the afternoon. Regardless of the short time allocated for arbitration, it solved several cases raised by the workers. It often focused on appeals presented in groups, rather than individually. It referred individual cases to the regular court.⁵⁶

Article 33 of the labour relation decree allowed workers to take their cases to the regular courts. It stated that: "...የስምምነቱ አፈጻጸም በጊዜው ጸንቶ ያለውን ማንኛውንም የህብረት ስምምነት ወይም የበርዱ ውሳኔ ወይም ብይን የማይቃወም ከሆነ ማንኛውም ሰራተኛ የውሉን ድርድር ተገቢ በሆኑ ፍርድ ቤቶች ወይም መስሪያ ቤት ለማስፈጸም በዚህ ድንጋጌ የተጻፈው አይከለክለውም።"⁵⁷ But, the Board often referred individual cases to the court using this provision as a pretext apparently to reduce its burden. Regardless of the procrastination of many cases submitted to it, however, the Board settled 31 cases by conciliation and closed 20 cases by arbitration or decision in the period between 20

⁵⁵Stutz, pp. 58-59.

⁵⁶*Voice of Labour*, A Special Brochure Prepared on the Occasion of the 5th CELU Annual Conference and Anniversary, *Mägabit* 28, 1960 (April 6, 1968), p.11.

⁵⁷"Nothing herein contained shall be deemed to prevent an employee from enforcing the terms of his contract before the appropriate courts or bodies so long as such enforcement is not inconsistent with the terms of any collective agreement or decision or award of the Board then in effect." See also *Nägarit Gazèta*, No. 18, Labour Relations Decree 49/1962, September 5, 1962, p. 150.

February 1963 (when the Board started work) and 31 July 1963 (when the Board received a general strike ultimatum from CELU) ⁵⁸.

Apart from the Labour Board, there were several other tripartite institutions. For instance, the Labour Standard Advisory Board was a tripartite body that provided the MNCD advice and recommendations on general or specific issues relating to labour conditions, and assisted the minister in formulating labour standards or working conditions so as to ensure the physical integrity, the health and well-being of workers.⁵⁹ The Employment Advisory Board was also a tripartite body established to advise the Public Employment Administration on various employment problems in the country.⁶⁰ Moreover, the Manpower Information Advisory committee was a tripartite body that assisted the manpower, research and statistics section in the Public Employment Division. This section was responsible for the gathering of labour statistics and manpower information.⁶¹ These tripartite institutions ultimately created a constructive set of labour relationships that depended on the degree of mutual confidence and respect between management, labour and the government.⁶²

In general, tripartism was an important institution which created a platform for the government, employers and workers to work together for the common good and for the socio-economic development of the country. True, the three parties shared a common interest on several issues like the raising of the national income, the improvement of the standard of living, the raising of productivity etc. Nevertheless, they had also divergent interests concerning the modus operandi

⁵⁸Stutz, p. 95.

⁵⁹Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Development of Some Institutions concerned with ...," pp. 90-91.

⁶⁰Georg Graf Von Baudissin, "An Introduction to Labour Developments in Ethiopia," *Journal of Ethiopian Law*, Vol. II, No. 1, 1965, p. 108.

⁶¹Seyum Gebre Egziabher, "The Development of Some Institutions concerned with ...," pp. 88-89.

⁶² Stutz, p. 87.

to achieve socio-economic development in the country. The orderly harmonization of divergent interests, that is the desire for economic development on the one hand and the maintenance of the rights and interests of workers and employers on the other hand constituted the core of industrial relations. On the other hand, the government on its part realized that a prosperous and contented labour force was a prime necessity for the peaceful industrial and agricultural development of the country. With this objective in mind, the government tried to provide a fair deal for both labour and management to create a good condition in which both employers and unions could work in harmony. It was such tripartite cooperation based on such principles that not only resulted in enormous benefits for the employers' federation and labour unions but also provided tremendous impetus for the socio-economic development of the country.⁶³

4. The Attempted General Strike of 1963

Even though the labour relations decree was issued to enhance the mutual benefit of both the workers and employers, it was not enthusiastically accepted even if not utterly rejected by the management. The employers believed that the decree was introduced to benefit only the workers and they continued to violate it on different occasions. They also thwarted the formation of labour unions in their respective enterprises. More importantly, foreign investors who owned several enterprises continued to treat their workers with heavy hand. For instance, they fired workers at whim, thereby breaking rules and procedures. This made the conditions of workers in some enterprises more precarious than ever before. Consequently, a number of cases were brought to the newly established Labour Board though the employers were not yet ready to

⁶³*Voice of Labour*, A Special Issue for the 7th Anniversary of CELU and the Inauguration of its First Headquarters, *Miyazeya* 1, 1962 EC (9April 1970), pp. 40-41.

accommodate the demands of workers. The leaders of local unions were the target of employers' intimidation. The employers' assault on the leaders of local unions increased after the president of CELU left for Geneva on 4 June 1963 to participate on the 47th session of the annual General Conference of ILO. It was the first conference in which Ethiopia participated with full delegation for the first time since it became a member of ILO on 28 September 1923. The delegation included Abreham Mäkonän, president of CELU, Dr. Seyoum Gebre Egziabher, and General Secretary of the Ethiopian Employers Federation which was in the process of formation and Gètahun Tässäma, Minister of the MNCD. Nevertheless, since African countries including Ethiopia boycotted the meeting because of the participation of Apartheid South Africa, Abreham could not get the chance to speak about the conditions of Ethiopian workers to the participants of the conference who came from 107 countries. However, he held separate discussions with a number of trade union leaders and was able to get immediate invitation to visit their organization and support from some of them.⁶⁴

While he was in Europe, Abreham heard about the influx of a number of newly established local unions into CELU and he was pleasantly surprised by the achievement of the confederation within two months of its establishment. Nevertheless, when he returned on 14 July 1963 and tried to share his experience with the newly formed local unions, he encountered a lot of shocking labour problems and observed despair among a number of member unions. In addition, he found that some workers had been dismissed from work and their case was being considered by the Labour Board in the MNCD. Nevertheless, the Labour Board, which had been organized to solve labour disputes created between labour unions and management, failed to give

⁶⁴*Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No.2, *Hämlè* 20, 1955 EC (27 July1963), pp. 5-6; *Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No. 1, *Hämlè* 1, 1955EC (8 July1963), p. 2.

appropriate solutions to local unions' petitions submitted to it. In fact, employers were not yet ready to respect the provisions of the labour relations decree. Surprisingly, the government kept silent while a number of workers were fired by the management from several industrial plants. The MNCD did not force the employers to attend court and accept judgments.⁶⁵

Having understood the dire situation of local union members, Abreham began to take appropriate steps in accordance with the constitution before a general strike was declared against employers and the government. Even though his measures were ridiculed as premature and counterproductive, Abreham continued to uphold workers' grievances, risking his life. Accordingly, he held a meeting with the leaders of all member unions from 27-28 July 1963 (20-21 *Hämlè* 1955 EC) and discussed as to how to solve the prevailing workers' problems. At the closing of the meeting, the participants agreed to present their complaints to the Labour Board and the management. Moreover, they set up a committee of 14 members to study the problem and draft a list of complaints.⁶⁶

In the draft complaints, the committee stated that since May 1963, unions were suppressed at the Nikola, Fogstad, and Vaskin Woodworks, Aqaqi Steel Factory, Addis Ababa Bricks Factory, Indo-Ethiopian Textile Factory, Ethiopian Fiber Factory, Dire Dawa Textile Factory and Dire Dawa Cement Factory. It further noted that the leaders of several local unions, including; Aqaqi Steel Factory Workers' Union, Fogstad Woodworks Workers' Union, Dire Dawa Textile Factory

⁶⁵Informants: Abreham Mäkonän and Beyene Solomon; *Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No. 3, *Nähäsè* 4, 1955EC (August 10, 1963), pp.1-2; IES/MS 38/18, Abreham Mäkonän, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär Tekekeläña Se'el," A Paper Presented in the Conference of Ethiopian Studies on 29 January 1976, p.7.

⁶⁶IES/MS 38/18, pp.7-8; *Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No. 3, *Nähäsè* 4, 1955EC (10 August 1963), p. 2.

Workers' Union, and Diabaco Cotton Mill Workers' Union were dismissed in July 1963. In addition, the committee reported that workers from Lazaridis Cotton Mill were arrested when they attempted to petition the emperor concerning the fired union leaders. Thus, on the basis of these complaints, a petition of ten points was prepared by the General Council of CELU to the MNCD demanding the reinstatement of dismissed union members, the release of the arrested workers, clarification of the legal rights and benefits of union members, and state support for these rights in the face of employers' resistance. In conclusion, the petition threatened that if the MNCD did not act upon these demands within 60 days, CELU would call a general strike. Abreham signed the petition or ultimatum and circulated to the employers and the various offices of the government with a covering letter dated 31 July 1963 (*Hämlè* 24, 1955 EC).⁶⁷

The government received the ultimatum with great anger but remained silent for about two weeks while discussing on its content and the possible measures to be taken against the leaders of CELU. A month before the scheduled general strike, however, Gètahun Tässäma telephoned to Abreham and asked him to come to his office and discuss on some of the problems of workers which needed to be addressed. During the discussion, Gètahun stressed that CELU was still an infant organization which was established five months ago, in the face of serious opposition raised from some government officials. He further added that if CELU could not refrain from its action, it would strengthen the reservations of those officials about its establishment. He also urged the president of CELU to retract the decision and work hand in hand with the ministry to solve the problems. He further added that the problems should only be solved through consultation with the management and the ministry rather than through

⁶⁷Abreham Mäkonän's Private Collection, A four page ultimatum written from Abreham to the Labour Department in the MNCD in *Hämlè* 24, 1955 EC (July 31, 1963), pp. 1-4; IES/MS 38/18, pp. 8-9.

confrontation. He also asked Abreham to order member unions to call off the general strike by writing a formal letter to them indicating that he had already reached an agreement with the MNCD on the appropriate solution of the problems. Abreham agreed to call off the general strike and left the ministry. The next day, however, Abreham changed his mind and broke the promise that he had made to the minister. Moreover, he wrote him a letter indicating that it was beyond his power to call off the general strike as the decision was made by the General Council.⁶⁸ Abreham told me that he refused to call off the intended general strike because he believed that if he did so, he would automatically lose the trust of the workers.⁶⁹

Following its failure to convince the president of CELU to call off the intended general strike, the Department of Labour in the MNCD opened a campaign against the leaders of CELU through television, radio and news papers. It insisted that CELU must withdraw its demands, for there could be no dispute between unions and government, but only between unions and management. It also demonized the leaders of CELU as traitors who worked to sabotage the socio-economic development of the country. Moreover, it belittled the call for general strike as a premature decision. The intended action of CELU was considered as a deliberate act to hold back the development of industry in the country. In the press statement it released, the Department of Labour stated that:

...The department of labour has tried repeatedly to convince the CELU leaders of the illegality of their intentions, but unfortunately has failed to persuade them to, withdraw from their rash ill-considered line of action which would imperil the interests of thousands of law abiding citizens. These leaders were advised that insistence upon their intimidation must be regarded by the government as a deliberate plot designed to destroy labour peace and to create trouble at an important period of economic and social progress of the country. It was also

⁶⁸Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, pp. 72-73.

⁶⁹Informant: Abreham Mäkonän.

pointed out that the department of labour could not sit back inactively whilst illegal action as announced by CELU leaders endangered peace, tranquility and industrial development. It is now the responsibility of the labour relations board to consider the case as a matter of urgency, to order such measures as are necessary to implement the law, recommended appropriate steps to safeguard the real welfare of the community, and to protect it from illegal intimidation.⁷⁰

In addition to the pressure and intimidation made by the Department of Labour, the government controlled media continued to call for security measures to be taken against the leaders of CELU. For instance, the Ethiopian Herald, in its September 5, 1963, edition, discredited the legal basis of the intended general strike as follows:

...There is a point beyond which patience ceases to be a virtue. And that is the point the Department of Labour in the Ministry of National Community Development has now reached at the unlawful CELU ultimatum to paralyze the capital with an all out labour strike unless demands are fulfilled on the terms dictated by labour. The Ethiopian labour legislation does not empower CELU to trigger-off a general strike. But some CELU leaders want to take the law in their hands and pretend as a legislative body, 'a parliament' of a kind. Such an illegal move must be made to bear legal measures.⁷¹

In addition to its attack through the media, the Labour Department raised financial matters to discredit the leaders of the confederation. They were, for instance, asked to submit the financial accounts of the organization for auditing by the ministry. The Labour Department also tried to associate CELU's intended general strike with international trade union experts who were working in the confederation as volunteers. The mounting pressure and intimidation from both the officials of the Labour Department and the security apparatus created serious concern for the leaders of CELU. Thus, the leaders of CELU decided to petition the emperor on 3 September

⁷⁰Ethiopian Herald, 3 September 1963 (*Nähäsè* 28, 1955EC).

⁷¹Ethiopian Herald, 5 September 1963 (*Nähäsè* 30, 1955EC)

1963 concerning its unfair treatment by the ministry and the security apparatus. On reaching the palace, however, the petitioners were denied access to the emperor by the palace guards. When they were denied an audience at the palace, Abära and his colleagues adamantly refused to leave. After spending a lot of time near the gates of the palace, however, they were told that some of their colleagues who entered through another gate had already been inside and had already had a discussion with the emperor and left the palace. But, that was a trick by the palace guards.⁷²

On the same day, some Board members of CELU had gone to see *Ras* Emru, a nephew of the emperor and who had a reputation as a 'liberal' to mediate between CELU and the emperor. Although *Ras* Emru expressed his sympathy, he told the leaders of CELU that he could not mediate between them and the emperor. He further advised them that they should withdraw their demand and exhort Abreham Mäkonän to resign, if they wished to save CELU from complete destruction. Moreover, *Ras* Emru promised them that he could search for a job for Abreham in the MNCD in return for his resignation. The response of *Ras* Emru shattered their hope of getting justice from the emperor. Having understood the situation had become unpredictable and very dangerous, Abreham wrote a letter of resignation and submitted it to the office of the confederation on 3 September 1963 (*Nähäsè* 28, 1955EC). In his letter written to the General Council of the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions, Abreham stated that:

...የኢትዮጵያ ሰራተኞች ድርጅቶች እንቅስቃሴ ከተጀመረበት ጊዜ ጀምሮ እስከ ዛሬ ድረስ ያላንዳች መሰናክል በጠቅላላው ጉባኤ ምርጫ መሰረት ለኢትዮጵያ ሰራተኞች ድርጅት ፕሬዝዳንት ሆኖ በሚገባ ሳገለግል መቆየቴን ሁላችሁም እንደምታውቁት ነው። አሁንም ቢሆን ጠቅላላው ጉባኤ ስለ እኔ አገልግሎት ያለውን አስተያየት ሳስበው ምንጊዜም ከምስጋና ጋር አስታውሰዋለሁ። ለጊዜው ግን ሐምሌ 24 ቀን 1955 ዓ.ም ሁላችሁም ተሰብስባችሁ ባደረጋችሁት ውሳኔ መሰረት በታዘዥነቴ ጉዳዩን ለሚመለከተው የመንግስት ባለስልጣን አቅርቤአለሁ። ይህም ሀሳብ በተለይ ለራሴ እንደሰራሁት በማሰኘት ግምት ስለተወሰደና በኔም ምክንያት ብዙ ችግሮች በማህበሩ ላይ

⁷²Kiflu Mekuria, p. 19; IES/MS 38/18, p. 12; Informants: Abreham Mäkonän, Abära Abäbä and Tadässä Amarä.

ከሚፈጠሩ የመላውን የኢትዮጵያ ሰራተኞች ድርጅት አንድነት ማህበርን ደህንነት በመመኘት ከዛሬ ነሀሴ 28 ቀን 1955 ዓ.ም ጀምሮ የነበረኝን ኅላፊነት የለቀኩ መሆኔን በትህትና እገልጻለሁ።⁷³

...As you all know, being elected as president of CELU on the basis of the election carried out by the General Assembly, I have been serving from the beginning of the movement of the Ethiopian labour unions to this day with diligence. I still remember the General Assembly's commendation of my service with great gratitude. For the time being, abiding by the collective decision that you made on 31 July 1963, I submitted the matter [the problems of the Ethiopian workers] to the concerned government officials. But, since they have come to suspect that I raised the issue for my own sake and in order not to endanger the confederation,, I wish CELU all the best and hereby resign from my post as of 3 September 1963.

Figure 2.4. Abreham Mäkonän, the First President of CELU



Source: Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Plantation Workers' Unions, *Wonji ena Tegelu*, A Bulletin published by the workers' unions on *Ter* 5, 1970 EC, p.16

⁷³Abreham Mäkonän's Private Collection, A letter of resignation sent from Abreham to the General Council of CELU on 28 *Nähäsè* 1955 EC (August 3, 1963).

In another development, on the evening of 3 September 1963, Abära Gämu reportedly committed suicide. Even though his death was officially declared as suicide, Thomas Killion who interviewed Abära's daughter noted that she believed that her father was murdered by state security agents. He further argued that "...in any case, whether he died by his own hand or that of the secret police, the cause of his death was state repression."⁷⁴ According to him, the death of Abära marked the climax of the conflict between the confederation and the state. Nevertheless, most of my informants argued that his death was suicide. For instance, Gäbrä Selasè Gäbrä Mariam, who met Abära after he returned from the palace, noted that he looked very distraught and emotionally unstable. Moreover, Abreham Mäkonän stressed that Abära had a pistol when they went to the palace and that had created disagreement with the palace guards. He added that, even before they went to the palace, Abära had been talking to some of his colleagues that he planned to kill the emperor; if he refused to accept their demands. His plan was apparently a bluff, but the security agents focused on him as soon as they arrived at the palace; probably, news of the alleged assassination plan might have reached their ears. He further argued that it was the intimidation of the security agents and the appalling condition of workers that apparently tempted him to commit suicide. This assumption is further strengthened by Dawitè Ayana, the wife of Abära Gämu. Dawitè lived with Abära for about nine years. She noted that he was very upset when he came home in the evening of September 3, 1963. She further asserted that after a few minutes, when he tried to take out his pistol from around his waist a shot was heard and soon he began to bleed. Thereafter, she said, I cried and the workers of the fiber factory came to their house as it was located adjacent to the factory and they took him to Balča Hospital, where he died. She believed that it was because of this accident that he

⁷⁴Thoms C. Killion, "Workers, Capital and the State...", p. 467.

lost his life.⁷⁵ Thus, I argue that since the daughter of Abära was below nine years old when he died, what Killion described about the death of Abära by interviewing his daughter is highly suspect.

The death of Abära Gämu who was considered as 'the father of the Ethiopian labour movement' shocked all workers in the country. A number of workers attended his funeral which was held in the Church of Ledäta Mariam on 4 September 1963. This militant labour leader was born in Kämбата *Awraja* in Wuha Gäbäta Qäbällè in 1912. He came to Addis Ababa in search of a better life during the Italian occupation period. He was employed in the Ethiopian fiber factory since its erection. As already described in chapter one, Abära's contribution to the development of the Ethiopian labour movement was immense and unforgettable among many Ethiopian workers. Recently, as a tribute to his exploits, the confederation named its newly established multifaceted training center located at Däbrä Zäyet after him.⁷⁶

Figure 2.5. Abära Gämu and the Training Center named after him

⁷⁵Informants: Abreham Mäkonän, Gäbrä Selasè Gäbrä Mariam and Dawitè Ayana.

⁷⁶*Voice of Labour*, Vol. 3, No. 5, *Mägabit* 20, 1999EC (14March 2007), p. 1.



Source: *Voice of Labour*, Vol. 3, No. 50, *Mägabit* 20, 1999EC (March 29, 2007).

On the same day Abära was buried, the President and General Secretary of CELU went to *Ras Emru's* house and pleaded with him to mediate between CELU and the emperor. Nevertheless, he reiterated that unless the president of CELU resigned, the emperor was not ready to discuss with the leaders of CELU. Thus, they called the General Council for a meeting on 5 August 1963 (*Nähäsè* 30, 1955EC) to decide on Abreham's letter of resignation. After a thorough discussion, the General Council unanimously accepted the resignation of the president and also retracted the 60 day ultimatum. On the same day, the executive committee prepared a letter and sent to the Labour Relations Department of the MNCD indicating the resignation of Abreham as president of CELU and the retraction of the 60 day ultimatum. It stated that:

...አቶ አብርሃም መኮነን የኢትዮጵያ ሰራተኞች ድርጅት አንድነት ማህበር ፕሬዝዳንት ሆኖ ሲያገለግሉን መቆይታቸውን እናስታውሳለን። ዳኑግን ነሀሴ 28 ቀን 1955ዓ.ም የማህበሩን ጠቅላላ ጉባኤ በመሰብሰብ ያቀረቡትን ሀሳብ ትክክል ግልባጭ ከዚህ ደብዳቤ ጋር አያይዘን በመላክ ሀሳቡንም ጠቅላላው ጉባኤ የተቀበለው ስለሆነ ከማህበሩ ስራ ውስጥ ያሰናበትናቸው መሆኑን በማክበር እየገለፅን እንዲሁም ሀምሌ 24 ቀን 1955ዓ.ም በቁጥር U11/101/10/55 ለመስሪያቤትዎ

የፃፍነውን የስድሳ /60/ ቀን የስራ ማቆም ማስጠንቀቂያ ደግመን የሰረዘን መሆናችንን በትሀትና እናመለክታለን።⁷⁷

...We recall that Mr. Abreham Mäkonän had been serving as president of the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Unions. Nonetheless, he called the General Council for a meeting on 3 September 1963 and submitted a letter of resignation. We are, thus, respectfully notifying you that the General Council accepted his resignation. Likewise, we humbly inform you that we have also cancelled the 60 day ultimatum written to your office with a letter number U11/101/10/55 on 31 July 1963.

Dämāna Läm̄ma, Ṭägayä Abäbä and Beyene Solomon presented the letter to the labour tribunal in the labour relations department of the MNCD. Following this development, the government announced the resignation of the president and the withdrawal of the sixty day ultimatum for a general strike issued by CELU on Ethiopian Television. Despite Abreham's resignation, the leaders of CELU decided to pay his salary until he was employed by the MNCD as an archivist.⁷⁸

Like many government officials who derided CELU's decision of calling a general strike as premature and unwise, Abreham also retrospectively noted that it was a premature one. In retrospect, Beyene Solomon and Gäbrä Selassè Gäbrä Mariam also argued that Abreham and the whole leadership over estimated the strength of the organization and the consequences of the action. Thus, they noted that they should have handled the matter more skillfully; rather than rushing to call a general strike. Abreham also believed that it could have been possible to handle the problems more delicately than through confrontation. Regardless of his retrospective

⁷⁷CETU, Box No. 42, File No.1, A letter sent from the General Council of CELU to the Labour Relations Department in the MNCD in *Nähäsè* 30, 1955 EC (3 September 1963)

⁷⁸Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, pp. 76-77.

judgment, however, he still has no regret on his decision because he believed that he did everything for the sake of the workers and the confederation.⁷⁹

Since the 60 day ultimatum of CELU had created panic among government officials, their response to the confederation threat was very repressive. For instance, the officials of the labour relations department in the MNCD and the security agents intimidated the leaders of the confederation into retracting the intended national strike. They also used the government controlled media as an instrument to demonize and defame labour leaders. This finally resulted in the resignation of Abreham as the president of CELU and the retraction of the intended general strike. Moreover, the intimidation and pressure of the government was not confined to the leaders of the confederation; rather it was also extended to the experts of international trade unions who had been giving voluntary service in the confederation. They were considered as conspirators who provided illegal advice to the leaders of CELU. Those liberal scholars who clandestinely and publicly supported CELU also stopped their support. State control over CELU began to be strengthened after the aborted general strike.⁸⁰ Thus, I argue that the relationship between the state and the confederation began to follow a new direction. Consequently, CELU's hope to be an autonomous institution eventually disappeared and it was forced to become subservient to the state.

Thomas Killion also argued that "...the debacle of the attempted general strike effectively determined the relations between CELU and the state for the succeeding decade. The illusion of

⁷⁹Informants: Abreham Mäkonän, Gäbrä Selassè Gäbrä Mariam and Beyene Solomon.

⁸⁰CETU, Box No. 42, File No.1, A letter written by the General Council of CELU to the labour relations department in the MNCD on *Nähäse* 30, 1955EC (3 September 1963)

CELU's autonomy was destroyed, and one former leader believed the strike attempt 'probably set CELU back five years' in terms of workers' organization and militant action."⁸¹

Following the aborted general strike, several leaders of local unions stopped participating in the confederation. A number of workers also lost hope in the confederation and refused to pay their annual dues. Consequently, CELU faced serious financial problems. During this period, CELU was greatly weakened both financially and in terms of its institutional legitimacy. The leaders of powerful local unions preferred to consolidate their local power rather than expose themselves to the pressure and intimidation that the state exercised over CELU's leadership. Consequently, the leadership of CELU was transferred from trade unionists to non trade unionists or bureaucrats.⁸²

5. CELU under Crisis, 1964-74

Immediately after the resignation of Abreham, CELU was thrown in organizational crisis in general and in a leadership vacuum in particular. Even though the Board of CELU decided the tasks of the president's office were to be covered by Zäläqä Wäldä Mariam, the vice-president, and Beyene Solomon, the Secretary General, until the next election period, it did not go as expected since the former was working outside Addis Ababa (in Dire Dawa textile factory) and CELU had no budget to pay him. Above all, Zäläqä was sentenced to three years imprisonment on account of attacking Tadässä Bezunäh, a liaison officer in Dire Dawa textile factory.⁸³ The Board also passed an immediate and crucial decision on the membership fee collection system.

⁸¹Killion, "Workers, Capital and the State...", p. 467.

⁸²Informants: Abära Abäbä and Gëtačäw Mängäša.

⁸³*Voice of Labour*, Vol. III, No. 48, *Mäskäräm* 30, 1999 EC (10 October 2006), p. 14.

So far, every member union collected 3birr from each member annually. In order to solve the financial crisis of CELU, the Board decided that the membership fee should be collected three times a year. Even then, CELU could not solve its financial crisis.⁸⁴ Beyene described the crisis of CELU and the responsibility of leading CELU given to him as follows:

...After his resignation, Abreham continued to draw his former salary without working. Zelleqe Wolde Mariam, the vice president had to return to Dire Dawa because that was his work place, so the burden of the presidency fell squarely on me. This problem was exacerbated because one of the assistant secretaries, Hailu A'ga did not bother to show up at the CELU office after his election while the second one was dismissed by the executive committee for poor conduct. Furthermore, some of the member unions failed to live up to their commitments for paying their monthly dues. Consequently, CELU was not able to pay the salaries of the recruited office staff, Abreham and myself. We were also unable to pay 'pocket money' to the two university students, Gebre Selassie Gebre Mariam and Mesfin Gebre Michael, who have been assisting us in organizing and coordinating our activities. In order to address this acute financial problem I proposed that all salaries be reduced by half, and with immediate effect.⁸⁵

Moreover, the newly assigned leaders of CELU preferred to use personal appeal to the emperor which was already guaranteed by the constitution, instead of democratic organization and action as a mechanism to get their demands heard and addressed. In doing so, CELU dropped its organizational ideals to be an independent trade union and came under the control of the state. The leaders of CELU began to demonstrate their loyalty to the emperor on different occasions. For instance, they went to the palace on 9 January 1964 and expressed their gratitude for the role that the emperor played in the promulgation of Proclamation No. 210/1963 on 1 November 1963. Moreover, they also went to the palace on 15 February 1964 and showed their solidarity to the emperor against the government of Somalia. They read to the emperor the letter that they wrote to the prime minister of Somalia, Abdirashid Ali Shermarke. In the letter, they stated that all the

⁸⁴Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 71.

⁸⁵Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, pp. 77-78.

50, 000 members of CELU were determined to defend the sovereignty of the country. Following this, Beyene was immediately assigned as a member of the fund raising committee chaired by *Däjazmač* Kefelè Eregätu for the defense of the Ogaden region of the country from the invasion of Somalia.⁸⁶

On the other hand, the decision of Beyene and his supporters was not accepted by the militant workers and leaders of local unions who were working to make CELU an independent and strong confederation. The leaders of local unions stopped paying their dues to the confederation; rather they continued to strengthen their own union. They also continued to praise Abreham Mäkonän and Abära Gämu, who had sacrificed themselves for the cause of CELU. This opposition, eventually, resulted in the outbreak of a series of internal power struggles for control of CELU. This internal power struggle in turn created good opportunity for the government to strengthen its control over CELU by manipulating their differences.⁸⁷

Besides expressing their loyalty to the MNCD and the emperor, the leaders of CELU (Beyene Solomon and his colleagues) continued to strengthen their relationship with international trade unions to get the confederation out of crisis. For instance, CELU received some grant from ICFTU and hired two university graduates, Gäbrä Selassè Gäbrä Mariam and Mäsfen Gäbrä Mikaël, who had completed their education in July 1964, on fulltime basis by paying each 500 birr. In September 1964, before they left for USA to continue their studies sponsored by AALC, they brought two of their colleagues, Fesseha Şeyon Täkiè and Täsfa Gäbrä Mariam to take over their position in CELU. The coming of these four university graduates boosted the critical need

⁸⁶Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär Wuldät, Edegät, Wudeqät* (Addis Ababa: Image Enterprise PLC, 2004 E.C/2012), pp. 86-87.

⁸⁷Killion, "Workers, Capital and the State...", pp. 467-468.

for qualified personnel in CELU. As soon as they were employed, they began to serve as interpreters, advisers and educators for the leaders of CELU. Moreover, they were assigned to teach workers to raise their consciousness about trade unionism through newsletters (*Voice of Labour*), film shows and educational material.⁸⁸

Moreover, the executive committee of CELU, in cooperation with ICFTU, organized a two week seminar to the leaders of local unions at Haile Selassie I University from September 4-18, 1963. The seminar was given by two ICFTU labour experts, Howard Robinson and Ivan Gore, and prominent scholars from HSIU and the bureaucracy.⁸⁹ The seminar was apparently organized to approach local union leaders who had begun to withdraw after the resignation of Abreham and challenge the new leadership.

The first serious challenge to Beyene's administration came in 1964 from Alämu Bogalä, assistance secretary and legal officer of CELU. Alämu began to conspire against Beyene while the latter was attending the 48th General Conference of ILO in Geneva in June 1964. It was in his absence that Alämu tried to remove Beyene from office by organizing his supporters into a committee that would investigate and charge the secretary general with incompetence and lack of constituency (trade union). A number of smaller unions such as Mitchell Cotts Company Workers' Union, Besse Company Workers' Union, Ethiopian Fiber Factory Workers' Union and Ethiopian Airlines Workers' Union supported his idea and worked to remove the secretary general. But, Alämu failed to convince the leaders of large industrial unions like the Franco-Ethiopian railway workers' union, Wonji-Šäwa Sugar Estate Workers' Union, Diabaco Cotton Factory Workers' Union and others which represented the majority of CELU members. The

⁸⁸Informants: Beyene Solomon, Fesseha Tejon Täkiè and Gäbrä Selassè Gäbrä Mariam.

⁸⁹*Voice of Labour*, Vol. I, No. 4, *Nähäsè* 18, 1955EC (24 August 1963), p. 9.

leaders of these large industrial unions gave their support to Beyene because he provided them with short term training which was allocated on the basis of membership. As a result, he was able to control the president position with the support of these unions in the General Assembly in three subsequent elections. When the committee failed to remove Beyene, Alämu continued to try to convince the leaders of large industrial unions not to give their vote to Beyene in the 1957 election. Nevertheless, Beyene and his colleagues discovered the plot and fired him before the election under the pretext of disciplinary problems.⁹⁰

But, one can argue that Beyene's crude description of the dismissal of Alämu by the executive committee for 'poor conduct' was merely a cover.⁹¹ The conflict between Alämu and Beyene set the pattern of conflict in the confederation in the years to come. Since Alämu was an educated person, for instance, his principal supporters were white collars workers. White collar workers were more militant, politically active and progressive in the struggle against the management and the state. On the other hand, the majority of blue collar workers and the leaders of CELU became complacent after some economic changes were introduced by the imperial government.⁹²

After the dismissal of Alämu Bogalä, Beyene and the four university graduates consolidated their control over CELU's administration. This was clearly observed in the second election of the leaders of CELU which was held on 8 April 1965. Before the election, the General Assembly, which comprised one hundred delegates, unanimously agreed to make some amendments on the constitution of CELU. As a result, the two years term of office was changed into four years for the officers of CELU. Accordingly, Beyene Solomon was elected as president, Aläm Abdi as

⁹⁰*Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1975 EC, p. 7; Thoms C. Killion, "Workers, Capital and the State...", p. 474.

⁹¹Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, p. 77.

⁹²Abära Abäbä, "Yä Mozvold Säratäñoč Anäsas," A Personal Record, 1996 EC (2004), pp. 2-3; Thoms C. Killion, "Workers, Capital and the State...", p. 474.

vice president and Fesseha Şeyon Täkiè as secretary general. Täsfa Gäbrä Mariam and Mäsfen Dämsè were also elected as assistant secretaries. Moreover, Ibrahim Ahmääd was elected as treasurer, Däjänè Mäkonän, assistant treasurer, and Abära Abäbä and Wäru Agäñähu as auditors. Before the election, some participants of the General Assembly urged the meeting to exclude those candidates whose unions were in arrears and those who represented no union. Despite the opposition of those trade union leaders, however, Fesseha Şeyon Täkiè and Täsfa Gäbrä Mariam were elected as secretary general and assistant secretary of CELU.⁹³

In doing so, Beyene and his supporters breached Article 6/c which restricted the participation of union members in arrears in the General Council and Article 20/b which forbade the participation of workers who did not have a union of the CELU's constitution. Interestingly enough, the MNCD and the international labour experts who were working with CELU did not oppose the election of university graduates who did not represent any union affiliated to CELU.⁹⁴ They were apparently employed in the headquarters of CELU as professional experts, not appointed as trade unionists to lead the confederation. Even though they were employed to fill the professionals' gap in the confederation, they eventually transformed themselves as leaders of the labour unions in the country. They manipulated the low educational background of Beyene Solomon and dominated the leadership of CELU until the eve of the 1974 revolution. Since they were subordinate with the state, they did not face opposition from the emperor. Nevertheless, they were at the center of the trade unionists' strong and critical stand until the end of the imperial regime.

⁹³*Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1975 EC, p.7.

⁹⁴The First Constitution of CELU, April 9, 1963, p.4.

Figure 2.6. Labour Bureaucrats from 1965-1973



Source: Beyene Solomon, *Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Andenät Mahebär Wuldät, Edegät, Wudeqät* (Addis Ababa: Image Enterprise PLC, 2004 E.C), p.167.

A year after the election, GäbräSelassè Gäbrä Mariam and Mäsfen Gäbrä Mikaèl returned from the USA with a Masters Degree in Economics and were appointed as legal and economic head and education and information head respectively. Accordingly, they became members of CELU's executive committee. Therefore, one can argue that, after 1965, CELU's leadership was virtually dominated by men who did not represent any local union. Even, the constituency of the president himself was not fully accepted by militant white collar workers. Nevertheless, his relationship with the emperor and his officials, and international trade unions helped him to defeat his opponents. Moreover, even though some members of the General Assembly opposed the election of the two university graduates who were not represented by any trade union, Beyene convinced the General Assembly to approve the position of university graduates by underscoring the indispensable role they played in the establishment of CELU. He also silenced some prominent critics by providing opponents a three month to one year training abroad. In 1965, for instance, 13 workers were sent to Kampala labour college, 10 to West Germany, 2 to Switzerland and 3 to

Egypt. He used international scholarship and training as important weapons to keep his opponents away from CELU.⁹⁵

Be that as it may, some militant white collar workers continued to raise question on the ethnic composition of CELU's leadership. They opposed the domination of CELU by Tegräna speakers (Eritreans and Tegreans). Since labour bureaucrats such as Fesseha Şeyon, Mäsfen and Gäbrä Selasè including the president were from Eritrea and Tegray their ethnic solidarity aroused suspicions among the other workers. For instance, the issue of ethnicity was at the center of the 3rd and 4th election of CELU conducted in 1967 and 1971 respectively. Thus, internal power struggle characterized CELU for a decade after 1963.⁹⁶

To balance the ethnic struggle in the General Council and General Assembly, Beyene organized the Eritrean workers and brought them into CELU in September 1966. In fact, trade unions' activities in Eritrea had been temporarily stopped by the imperial government for fear of the upsurge of instability in the region following the termination of the Federal Act on 14 November 1962. But, when he organized the Eritrean workers, Beyene promised Gètahun Tässäma, minister of MNCD, that he would organize them only in line with the interest of the government and it would also be a plus for the government's effort to pacify the region. Besides the minister of MNCD, Lt. Mikaèl Amädè, Director General of the Labour Department in the MNCD and Emeru Zäläqä who was then working for a Bulgarian Company in Eritrea helped Beyene in convincing *Leul Ras Asrätä Kassa*, the Emperor's *Endärasè* in Eritrea. Accordingly, Beyene was allowed to organize the Eritrean workers in accordance with the 1962 labour relations decree.

⁹⁵*Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1975, p.7.

⁹⁶Thoms C. Killion, "Workers, Capital and the State...", p. 475; Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p .71.

Thus, he was able to convince the Eritrean workers to drop the 1958 Labour Relations Act and get organized under 29 unions. The confederation also organized a seminar for the newly elected local union leaders together with other leaders from the rest of Ethiopia in Asmara on 26 November 1966.⁹⁷ Following the seminar, a CELU branch office was opened in Eritrea under the leadership of Amanuèl Kahsay who was the leader of Qañāw workers' union. CELU also helped it in developing bylaws. Within a year the branch office boasted a total of 46 affiliated unions with a membership of 15,000.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, I argue that though many of the Eritrean workers were in favor of Beyene until he left CELU in 1974, there were also individual Eritreans who opposed his sycophantic relationship with government officials. Yet, apart from helping him to control power, Eritrean workers' organizations could not stop the internal power struggle in the confederation.

On the other hand, the opening of a branch office of CELU in Asmara also sparked opposition from union leaders in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. Even though it was opened in accordance with Article 13 of the constitution of CELU, it created grievances among the local unions in the rest of Ethiopia who did not have such a CELU branch. Consequently, a similar branch was opened in Dire Dawa nearly a year after. But, the demand for a branch office by local unions in and around Addis Ababa was not met until 1971. This aggravated the relationship between the leaders of CELU and local unions in Addis Ababa and its environs. During the 3rd and 4th election, representatives of local unions in and around Addis Ababa raised the question of a branch to the General Assembly. Some militant white collar workers even pushed their demand

⁹⁷Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, pp. 94-95; *Voice of Labour*, A special Brochure prepared on the occasion of the 5th CELU annual conference and Anniversary, *Mägabit* 28, 1960 EC (April 6, 1968), p.19.

⁹⁸CETU, Box No. 26, File No. 02, the bylaws of CELU's branch in Eritrea.

further into establishing a separate confederation in the country. When the challenge increased from time to time, CELU opened another branch in Addis Ababa in 1971.⁹⁹

Meanwhile, Beyene and his colleagues tried to attract local unions/ enterprise based unions by raising the major pressing demands of workers to the government. For instance, they requested the MNCD on 10 March 1966 to amend some of the major provisions of the existing labour laws of the country. Among other things, Articles related to the right to strike, freedom of association, health insurance, pension, collective bargaining, warning and termination, severance pay, and minimum wage needed to be amended.¹⁰⁰ But, the ministry failed to amend any of the articles requested by the leaders of CELU. Consequently, the General Council which met from 6 to 9 April 1968 proposed basic modifications to the existing laws. More importantly, it decided to point out major articles of the Civil Code and Proclamation No. 210/1963 that needed urgent amendment. Nevertheless, this attempt also proved fruitless because the government did not take any action to improve the labour proclamation.¹⁰¹

On the other hand, Beyene and the four were reelected in 1967. Moreover, the Vice-President position was also taken by Wäldätänsay Täklä Haymanot, the leader of A. Bèsse Company Workers' Union. This election further strengthened the domination of CELU by Tegräñña speakers. The disproportionate ethnic composition of the leadership of CELU continued to create rift among member unions in the rest of Ethiopia. As a result, it affected the unity and strength of the confederation. Apart from this, the leaders of CELU were criticized in the General Assembly

⁹⁹*Voice of Labour*, Vol. VIII, No. 3, *Hämlè*, 1963 EC, p. 6.

¹⁰⁰*Voice of Labour*, A Special Broacher prepared on the occasion of the 5th CELU annual conference and Anniversary, *Mägabit* 28, 1960 EC (6 April 1968), pp .6-8; Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 73.

¹⁰¹Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 73.

for their failure to solve the persistent demands of workers. For instance, in its annual labour conference held at the Chamber of Commerce building on 1 May 1969, several delegates referred to CELU as "a bridge between the government and the labour force" which failed to carry out its responsibilities properly. The leaders of the confederation were also rebuked for their poor communication between labour and the state.¹⁰²

The leaders of member unions and workers continued to express their grievances against the leaders of CELU for their failure to communicate their demands to the state and improve their living conditions. This continuous opposition forced the leaders to call a General Council meeting from November 22 to 24, 1969, to discuss the possible action to be taken against the government. They proposed three actions: to stage a demonstration on the following Sunday; to carry out a national work stoppage for 5 minutes; or to undertake a national work stoppage for 24 hours. After they discussed the three options, the participants agreed to go on strike on 7 January 1970, Ethiopian Christmas day. Accordingly, they sent a letter on 24 November 1969 indicating their decision to the MNCD and to the Ministry of Interior. Moreover, the General Council decided to withdraw labour representatives from the various committees organized in the MNCD including the Labour Relations Board.¹⁰³

In the meantime, the emperor set up an imperial enquiry committee composed of Zäwdè Gäbrähiwät, Minister of Interior; Yelema Därëssa, Minister of Finance; Gètahun Tässäma, Minister of National Community Development, and Dr. Seyum Harägot, State minister in the

¹⁰²Ethiopian Herald, 2 May 1969 (*Miyazeya* 24, 1961); Thoms C. Killion, "Workers, Capital and the State....," p. 476.

¹⁰³Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 80.

Prime Minister's office to study the problem and propose possible solutions. The imperial inquiry committee met with the executive committee of CELU on 1 January 1970 and discussed the outstanding problems of workers. After the meeting, the imperial inquiry committee agreed to study the problem and propose appropriate solutions for all the problems raised by the executive committee of CELU. It also promised to amend Proclamation No. 210/1963. On their part, the leaders of CELU retracted the intended strike. Nevertheless, despite workers' persistent call for the improvement of labour laws, the government continued to give very little attention to the demands of workers.¹⁰⁴ Thus, one can argue that the threat to call a general strike by the leaders of CELU was apparently a bluff intentionally made to cool down the workers' grievances against them. But, the government's indifference to workers' demands and the failure of the leadership to undertake the Christmas strike further aggravated the workers' grievances against the leadership and the state.

In the meantime, many high school and university graduates began to join the work force and this in turn enhanced the number of militant white collar workers who had been struggling to make CELU strong and independent. The newly recruited white collar workers brought to the labour unions the combination of nationalist and socialist ideals from the student movement. They opposed the subservient leaders of CELU and the conservative management and state machinery forthright. Despite the growing of opposition forces against the leaders of CELU, Beyene and the four university graduates were also reelected for the fourth term election of CELU in April 1971, and continued to dominate the confederation. Since they were not trade unionist, they did not feel the pain as much as the workers did. Consequently, the momentum of

¹⁰⁴Yä Mälaw Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Mahebär, "Yä Iteyopiya Säratäñoč Eneqeseqasè," *Kefel 1*, 1976 EC, p. 83; Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, pp.116-117.

the opposition grew to the extent of floating the idea of creating a new confederation. This was orchestrated by some 30 trade unions in and around Addis Ababa and Eritrea. But, they were denied permission by the MNCD.¹⁰⁵

The leaders of CELU tried to cool down the opposition in and around Addis Ababa by opening a branch office in May 1971. It was the third branch office of CELU, besides the branch offices formerly established in Asmara and Dire Dawa. It was opened to serve the workers in and around Addis Ababa and encourage the unorganized workers to organize and join the national confederation. It was also responsible for collecting monthly dues and submitting them to the confederation and studying the problems of workers in and around Addis Ababa. A committee of five workers led by Gètačāw Asmarä was set up to run the office.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, since it was not organized in timely manner, it could not address the grievances of workers to the satisfaction of the leaders of CELU.

On the other hand, the problems of workers in Eritrea were also aggravated by power struggle between the supporters of Beyene and his opponent, Mäsfen Abräha. Their difference was more personal and to some extent ideological. Beyene often tried to appoint his favorite man to lead the Eritrean branch office against the will of the majority of the workers. For instance, he supported Amanuèl Kahsay to continue as president of the Eritrean branch office in the fourth term election. But, the majority of workers elected Mäsfen instead of Amanuèl in April 1971. The election of Mäsfen was not accepted by Beyene, who convinced the executive committee of CELU to remove him from office. However, because of his popular support he was reinstated by

¹⁰⁵Thoms C. Killion, "Workers, Capital and the State...", pp. 478-479.

¹⁰⁶*Voice of Labour*, Vol. VIII, No. 3, *Hämlè* 1963, p. 6.

the CELU general assembly in April 1972.¹⁰⁷ Beyene opposed the election of Mäsfen apparently because he was suspected of having strong link with the armed struggle in Eritrea.

The struggle of workers began to show momentum in 1972 and 1973. For instance, the General Council which met from 11 to 13 February 1972 decided that unless all the promises of the government implemented they would present the case to the General Assembly in the next meeting.¹⁰⁸ State employees in agriculture and essential services began to demand freedom of association. Accordingly, the government promised to amend Proclamation No.210/1963 to provide freedom of association for some government offices. Emboldened by the workers' struggle and the promises provided by the government, CELU also began to organize government employees at different offices. Nevertheless, this did not stop the internal power struggle in CELU. The state which was also in crisis because of the outbreak of devastating famine in the northern part of the country began to make concessions with labour to stop strikes. But, the leaders of CELU did not believe that the state was in the process of collapsing in late 1973 and continued their subordination to it. They were working to get concessions from the government; rather than to lead the workers' struggle for a dramatic change.¹⁰⁹ Thus, I argue that the strong subordination of the leaders of CELU to the state and the enduring internal power struggle contributed a lot to the failure of the Ethiopian labour movement to be an agent for the 1974 Ethiopian revolution.

6. The Role of the State in CELU's Foreign Relations

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, p.479.

¹⁰⁸ CETU, Box No. 48, File No. 1, A letter sent from CELU to the Prime Minister office, MNCD and Ministry of Interior on 17 February 1972. It requested for the amendment of the labour law.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, p. 481.

The imperial Ethiopian government supported CELU whenever it tried to establish relationship with international trade unions. One can even argue that it was the government in the name of the Ethiopian workers that began foreign relations with International Labour Organization (ILO) when Ethiopia became a member on 28 September 1923.¹¹⁰ The relationship was created simultaneously along with the imperial government's grand effort to gain international recognition for the country. To gain international recognition for his nation, *Ras Täfäri Mäkonän*, the then regent and heir to the throne applied to join the League of Nations in 1919, but the application was rejected on the pretext of the existence of slavery, slave trade and arms trade in the country. Nevertheless, following the introduction of some reforms addressing the concerns of member nations, Ethiopia was admitted to the League of Nations by unanimous vote on 28 September 1923.¹¹¹ Since ILO was one of the agencies of the League of Nations, Ethiopia also became a member of ILO automatically when it joined the League of Nations.

Following his diplomatic achievement, *Ras Täfäri* made his grand tour to Europe in 1924. In fact, he undertook an extensive foreign tour not only to Europe but also to other countries. En route, he also visited Palestine and Egypt. While he was in Switzerland, *Ras Täfäri* visited the League of Nations and nearby agencies including the ILO on 28 July 1924.¹¹² Perhaps, it was during this tour that the regent heard for the first time about the importance of labour unions for the socio-economic development of the country from the Director General of ILO.

¹¹⁰ <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11003:::NO::>

¹¹¹Theodore M. Vestal, *The Lion of Judah in the New World: Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia and the Shaping of American's Attitudes toward Africa* (Denver: Praeger, 2011) pp. 21-22.

¹¹²Richard Greenfield, *Ethiopia: A New Political History* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1965), p. 121; Haile Selassie I, *Hiwotè ena Yä Iteyopiya Ermeja, (Berhan ena Sälam Qädamawi Haile Selassie Matämiya Bèt,1965)*, p. 89.

Even though ILO persistently urged the imperial Ethiopian government to ratify fundamental conventions, recommendations and protocols of the organization, its contribution during the establishment of CELU on 9 April 1963 was insignificant. Nevertheless, the relationship between them came to be further strengthened following CELU's participation in the 47th General Conference of ILO in June 1963. CELU was represented by its leader, Abreham Mäkonän. After the conference, while the representatives of the government and employers' association came back home, Abreham stayed over in Europe for more than a month to strengthen CELU's relationship with ILO, international trade unions and national trade unions. He visited, for instance, Italy, France, Belgium, Austria and Yugoslavia and discussed with the leaders of national trade unions on how they could support CELU. Moreover, he also managed to talk to the leaders of international trade unions like ICFTU and AFL-CIO concerning the progress of CELU. This opened an opportunity for CELU to strengthen its foreign relations.¹¹³

The emperor also allowed ILO to convene the second African regional conference of the ILO in Addis Ababa on 30 November 1964. The conference was opened by Emperor Haile Selassie I and attended by a total of over 350 delegates from 33 African countries. In the conference, the government expressed its commitment to implement ILO's conventions and recommendations and improve the situation of labour in the country. The emperor also made extensive discussions with David A. Morse, Director General of ILO and with other African labour leaders and representative concerning the condition of labour in the country.¹¹⁴ In addition, an agreement was signed between the Imperial Ethiopian Government and the organization to establish an office for the ILO in Addis Ababa. The agreement was signed by Mamo Tadässä, State Minister

¹¹³IES/MS 38/18, p. 7; *Voice of Labour*, Vol. 1, No. 1, *Hämlè* 1, 1955EC, p. 2.

¹¹⁴Ethiopian Herald, November 29, 1964 (*Hedar*, 20, 1957EC); December 3, 1964 (*Hedar* 24, 1957)

in the Prime Minister's office and Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Ethiopian Government and by Mr. David A. Morse, Director General of the ILO on 10 December 1964.¹¹⁵

Figure 2.7. The Imperial Ethiopian Government and International Labour Organization Signing an Agreement.



Source: *Addis Zämän*, Vol. 24, No. 294, *Tahasas 2*, 1957EC (December 11, 1964)

¹¹⁵Ethiopian Herald, 11 December 1964; *Addis Zämän*, *Tahasas 2*, 1957 EC.

The Imperial Ethiopian Government also contributed its part to strengthen CELU's relations with international trade unions. Even though the government had pro-west inclination, it was not driven by ideology of any sort. Thus, it created a platform for CELU to strengthen its relationship with both pro-west and pro-east international trade unions. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), African-American Labour Center, inter alia, were pro-west trade unions. CELU also had relationship with pro-east trade unions like, World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Pro- labour union foundation established by the German Social Democratic Party), and Bulgaria trade unions though it was not as strong as the pro-west.¹¹⁶

As stated earlier, ICFTU played an important role in the establishment of CELU in 1963. Even though the Ethiopian workers had begun contact with ICFTU with the help of a few 'liberal' scholars, it was with the intervention of the government that ICFTU came to support CELU in training, material and finance. Even before the workers began to have contact with ICFTU, the emperor and his officials had already met Tom Mboya, the representative of ICFTU in Eastern, Southern and Central Africa, and discussed the importance of organized labour for the socio-economic development of the country on 3 October 1958. It was during that time that the ICFTU promised to support the Ethiopian workers, if the emperor allowed them to get organized.¹¹⁷

Thus, the actual relationship between the Ethiopian workers and ICFTU was started when ICFTU sent two labour experts, Howard T. Robinson and D. Ramanujam to Ethiopia and

¹¹⁶Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, pp. 84-85.

¹¹⁷Ethiopian Herald, October 4, 1958; October 11, 1958.

organized a seminar for Ethiopian workers on various issues of labour. The seminar was organized for forty workers' representatives who came from 33 different enterprises. It was officially opened by Gètahun Täsäma, Minister of MNCD and lasted from March 4-16, 1962 (*Yäkatit* 25 to *Mägabit* 7, 1954 EC). It was also after this seminar that CELU was organized and also automatically affiliated to ICFTU.¹¹⁸ In his speech during the opening of the seminar, D. Ramanujam praised the readiness of the government to work with ICFTU and improve the condition of labour in the country. On behalf of the ICFTU, he expressed his sincere indebtedness to the imperial Ethiopian government for creating conducive environment for ICFTU which came to support the Ethiopian workers. D. Ramanujam also mentioned that ICFTU was ready to help the development of Ethiopian labour unions in accordance with their request and in compliance with the laws of the imperial government.¹¹⁹ Accordingly, the government allowed ICFTU's labour experts to come to Ethiopia and support CELU mainly in the labour education department. They provided a series of seminars not only to the leaders of CELU but also to the leaders and members of local unions of various plants.¹²⁰

The emperor continued to strengthen the relationship between ICFTU and CELU by allowing ICFTU to organize its 4th African Regional Conference in Africa Hall, Addis Ababa, from April 8-12, 1964 (*Mägabit* 30-*Miyazeya* 4, 1956 EC). Around 100 workers' representatives from 33 different African countries attended the conference. In his welcoming speech, the emperor expressed that his government was committed to work with ICFTU and other sister African trade unions. He also stressed that: "...ስለተሰባሰባችሁበት ጉዳይ ስትነጋገሩ የአፍሪካ መንግስታት መሪዎች በዚህ

¹¹⁸*Addis Zämän, Yäkatit*, 26, 1955 EC; *Mägabit* 9, 1955 EC; *Voice of Labour*, Special Issue, 9 April 1970 (*Miyaziya* 1, 1962 EC), p. 17.

¹¹⁹Ethiopian Herald, 5 March 1963 (*Yäkatit* 26, 1955 EC), p. 3.

¹²⁰*Voice of Labour*, Vol. I, No. 4, 24 August 1963 (*Nähasè* 18, 1955 EC).

አዳራሽ ተሰብስቦን ስለ አፍሪካ አንድነት ባጸደቅነው ቃል ኪዳን ላይ በተመለከቱት ዓላማዎች እንደምትመሩ ጽኑ ተስፋ አለን።" Moreover, at the end of the conference, the emperor invited the participants to an official dinner at Giyon Hotel.¹²¹ The relationship between ICFTU and CELU reached its peak when Bāyānā Solomon was elected vice president of the former in 1965.¹²² Thus, I argue that the role of the government in the relationship between CELU and ICFTU was very significant.

Figure 2.8. Gètahun Tässäma opening the 4th ICFTU- African Regional Conference in Africa Hall.



Source: *Mänän Bulletin* Vol. 8, No. 7, *Miyazeya* 1956 EC (April 1964), p. 21.

¹²¹*Mänän Bulletin* Vol. 8, No. 7, *Miyazeya* 1956 EC (April 1964), p. 21.

¹²²"...We strongly hope that when you discuss the agenda of your conference, you will be guided by the objectives enshrined in the constitution of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) that the African Heads of State ratified in this same hall." See also Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, pp. 84-85.

The government also supported the relationship between CELU and the African American Labour Center (AALC), an auxiliary of the American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). After a thorough discussion between the emperor and Irving Brown, Director of AALC, it opened the AALC-East African Regional Office in Addis Ababa in April 1968; and Jerry Funk was appointed as its first director from 1968-73. True, before CELU established relationship with AALC, Maida Springer of the AALC visited Ethiopia and discussed with the leaders of CELU. Her visit created the basis for mutual understanding of the two organizations. Apart from this, the AALC rendered some financial support to CELU.¹²³

Figure 2.9. H.I.M. Emperor Haile Selassie I Talking to Mr. Irving Brown, Director of AALC.



Source: Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...* p. 145.

The AALC was formed in 1965 by AFL-CIO to support the development of African labour unions and contain the influence of international labour unions with communist orientation in

¹²³*Ibid.*, p.84.

Africa. Through AALC, besides working on matters of its own concern, the AFL-CIO reported that it rendered valuable assistance to Africa's economic development and the strengthening of its emerging democratic institutions. It also supported workers' struggle for the liberation of Africa along side the nationalist movements in Africa.¹²⁴

The relationship between CELU and AALC was further strengthened after AALC constructed a two story building office for CELU in Addis Ababa. The new headquarters was built with the aid of AALC and was designed to fit the needs of CELU. It was hoped to provide enough offices for the different departments and to avail services that would assure a proper work flow for the organization. It was also hoped to serve as a symbol of a united active labour force that worked to build a better future.¹²⁵

It was constructed near the former Mexico square on 2000 square meters of land graciously donated by the emperor. The corner stone of the building was laid down by the emperor on 9 April 1968. The AALC spent about E\$623, 885.88 birr to finish the building. The work was started after a year on 9 April 1969 and inaugurated in the presence of the Emperor, government officials and representatives of ICFTU and AALC on 9 April 1970.¹²⁶

Besides the building, AALC continued to provide material and financial assistance to CELU until 1974. A number of AALC labour experts also came to Ethiopia at different times and organized seminars for Ethiopian workers. More importantly, it contributed a lot in the

¹²⁴Collin Gonze, "American Labor and Africa," *Africa Today*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Spring, 1972, pp. 33-35; Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4185231>

¹²⁵*Voice of Labour*, Special Issue, April 9, 1970 (*Miyazeya* 1, 1962 EC), p.7.

¹²⁶*Voice of Labour*, Vol. VII, No. 4, August 1969 (*Nähäsè* 1961 EC), p. 4. ; Beyene Solomon, *Yä Ityopiya...*, p.103; *Voice of Labour*, Vol.III, No. 49, *Tahasas* 5, 1999EC, p.16.

organization of a vocational training center for Ethiopian workers inside Täfäri Mäkonän secondary school in April 1968.¹²⁷ It also provided scholarship for CELU officers and workers. For instance, AALC granted a Masters Degree scholarship for two CELU officers, Gäbrä Selasè Gebremaiam and Mäsfen Gäbrä Mikaèl in September 1964.¹²⁸

Figure 2.10. Emperor Haile Selassie I and Beyene Solomon Inaugurating CELU's First Headquarters.



Source: *Voice of Labour*, Special Issue, 9 April 1970.

¹²⁷*Voice of Labour*, Vol. VII, No. 3, July 15, 1969 (*Hämlè* 8, 1961EC), pp. 5-6.

¹²⁸CETU, Box No. 48, File No. 04. A letter sent from Lt. Mikaèl Amdè, labour director in the MNCD to CELU on *Genbot* 19, 1956 EC (27 May 1964). It stated that the Ministry expressed its support to the scholarship provided to CELU by the AALC.

CELU also got state support to strengthen its relations with the Organization of African Trade Unions Unity (OATUU). It was following the establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on 25 May 1963 that the leaders of spontaneously organized African trade unions aspired to establish a continent wide confederation of trade unions. The Labour Commission of the OAU made significant effort in this regard, but it took a decade to see OATTU established. It, for instance, sponsored all African trade union organizations to meet under one roof and deliberate on the issue of Pan-African workers unity from April 6-14, 1973 for the first time in the continent's history.¹²⁹ The African Trade Unions Confederation (ATUC) with its head office in Dakar and the All African Trade Union Federation headquartered in Dar-es-Salaam also attended the meeting.¹³⁰

In his opening address, His Excellency Lt. Mikaël Amädè, state minister in the MNCD, praised the role that those trade unions played in the struggle for liberation and urged them to continue the fight as a united front. In addition, "...he wished that Africa Hall, the very birth-place of African Unity in 1963, will again witness the ceremonies for yet another solemn oath for a pan-African Trade Union organization." He also added that the Ethiopian workers were ready to work with the new organization. The meeting unanimously elected the secretary general of CELU, Fesseha Şeyon Täkiè, as chairman of the constituent congress in which all affiliates of the pro-west; ATUC and the pro-east; All-Africa Trades Union Federation (AATUF) and other independent unions were represented to discuss the draft constitution.¹³¹ The Emperor granted an audience to the participants of the All African Trade Unions conference on 13 April in 1973.

¹²⁹ Ethiopian Herald, 5 April 1973.

¹³⁰International Labour Organization, *Labour Education* (Geneva: International Labour Office, No. 43, 1980/82), p. 5.

¹³¹Ethiopian Herald, 7 April 1973.

Representing the participants, Dennis Akumu of Kenya and Lacine Sill of Guinea-Conakry praised him for his dedication to the cause of African unity and also for his determined efforts to bring peace and happiness for Africa. They also extended their gratitude to the Emperor for the wise counsel he gave them and the warm hospitality given by the government and people of Ethiopia for the participants of the conference. The emperor on his part praised African labour unions for their fortitude and unity of purpose in the fight against reactionary forces in the continent's struggle for total liberation and called upon African trade unions to intensify their efforts not only to protect the immediate interests of their members but also to go beyond that narrow path and work for the progress and welfare of the people of Africa as a whole.¹³²

Figure 2.11. Emperor Haile Selassie I, Posing with Participants of the African Trade Unions Conference.



Source: Ethiopian Herald, 14 April 1973 (*Miyazeya* 6, 1965 EC)

¹³²Ethiopian Herald, 14 April 1973 (*Miyazeya* 6, 1965 EC); *Addis Zämän*, *Miyazeya* 6, 1965 EC (14 April 1973)

At the end of the conference, delegates of 29 of the 33 African countries decided to establish the Organization of African Trade Union Unity. They also agreed that the headquarters of the new organization be in Accra, Ghana. On the other hand, trade union delegates from Senegal, Mauritania, Mali and Tunisia refused to sign the charter of the organization. But, the signatories of the charter of OATUU elected Lacine Silla of Guinea president of the new organization and Dennis Akumu of Kenya its Secretary General. The meeting also elected five vice presidents, including Beyene Solomon, president of CELU, from Ethiopia and other vice presidents from Niger, Togo, Morocco and Cameroun.¹³³ Like the OAU, OATUU aimed at liberating African people from the yoke of colonialism. The opening preamble of the Constitution urged trade unions to support governments. It stated that:

...The role of the African Trade Union Movement shall therefore be economic, political, cultural and social and undertake all economic actions in order to liberate Africa from the structures of exploitation that have been transplanted and established on the continent and especially encourage agrarian reform and industrialization. It is therefore, necessary that Africa trade unionists participate not only in the implementation but also at the conception stages and the control of work programs of the plans drawn up by African governments for the attainment of these objectives.¹³⁴

Though the imperial Ethiopian government had a pro-west policy in the 1960s, it was not driven by ideology. This helped the leaders of CELU to visit any countries in the world and seek assistance from them irrespective of their ideological orientation. True, CELU had stronger relationship with international trade unions based in the West than in the East. But, even though the relationship between CELU and international trade unions based in the East was not as strong as that of the West, it tried to accommodate both. For instance, CELU was also invited to attend

¹³³Ethiopian Herald, 14 April 1973 (*Miyazya* 6, 1965 EC) ; *Addis Zämän*, *Miyazeya* 6, 1965 EC; Vol. 32, No. 90, *Miyazeya* 7, 1965 EC)

¹³⁴Kwame Ocloo, "African Unions Time for a Rethink," *International Union Rights*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1998, pp. 6-7; Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41935633>.

the 1964 May Day celebrations of the Soviet Workers' Union in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and Beyene Solomon attended the event with no problem from the government side.¹³⁵ This was not, however, the case for many African trade unions. Their foreign relations were guided by the ideological lines which were advocated and adopted by their governments.¹³⁶

Conclusion

Most of the Ethiopian workers were not yet formally organized until 1962. The Franco-Ethiopian Railway workers who established their union under the good will of Emperor Haile Selassie I had not yet even received legal recognition. In 1962, however, both exogenous and endogenous factors induced the imperial Ethiopian government to issue a labour relations decree or Decree No.49/1962 and recognized employers' associations and labour unions for the first time in the history of Ethiopia on 5 September 1962. Once the right to form labour unions was legally recognized, a number of workers in several industrial plants began to establish their own local unions.

Thus, the years from 1962 to 1974 can be taken as the formative years in the history of the Ethiopian labour movement. It was the period in which labour relations in Ethiopia was legally instituted. This in turn resulted in the birth of the Confederation of Ethiopian Labour Union (CELU) on 9 April 1963 and the Ethiopian Employers' Federation (EEF) on 11 April 1964. Accordingly, Ethiopia was able to send a full tripartite delegation to the 47th International Labour

¹³⁵Beyene Solomon, *Fighters for Democracy: The Saga of...*, p. 85.

¹³⁶Roger Scott, "Are Trade Unions Still Necessary in Africa?" *Transition*, No. 33, October-November, 1967, pp. 27-31; .Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2934112>.

Organization's annual conference held in Geneva in June 1963. It was also the period during which CELU strengthened its foreign relations with the support of the state. On the other hand, the formative period of the Ethiopian labour movement was also characterized by the struggle between CELU, which was determined to be a vibrant and independent confederation, on the one hand and the state, which feared the growth of strong labour unions as a threat to its political power on the other.

The antagonistic relation between CELU and the state reached its climax at the end of July 1963 when Abreham Mäkonän, the first president of CELU sent an ultimatum of general strike to the MNCD. The attempted general strike, however, ended with the forceful resignation of the president. After his resignation, CELU was made to be very subordinate to the state under the leadership of the former General Secretary, Beyene Solomon and labour bureaucrats. The coming to power of labour bureaucrats who had no unions of their own created internal division among the leadership of CELU. The internal power struggle among the leaders of CELU continued unabated until the outbreak of the 1974 revolution.

In general, the strong subordination of CELU to the state and the enduring internal power struggle among its leaders contributed a lot to the failure of the Ethiopian labour movement to establish an independent national confederation and to be an agent for the 1974 Ethiopian revolution.

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