

Review of George Gona's *Andrew Mtagwaba Kailembo: The Life and Times of an African Trade Unionist* (Nairobi, Printpak, 2002, 226 pages. ISBN 9966-25-7)

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In spite of his life time dedicated service to the free trade union movement, the renowned Tanzanian labour movement leader, Andrew Mtagwaba Kailembo has received little serious attention from historians. Dr. George Gona has attempted to rescue him from this infamy. The author also sets out to add a new dimension and perspective to the history of the involvement and activities of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) in Africa, and in particular its regional organization ICFTU-AFRO.

The effort Dr Gona put into the writing of this book is a demonstration of his commitment to scholarship. The search for data meant making several trips to Tanzania and Brussels, which also meant being away from home (Kenya) and family for long periods. Yet in spite of these challenges, Dr. Gona spent only about one year in the research and writing of the book. The extensive collection of Kailembo's thoughts drawn from his speeches at seminars and conferences, and other materials from his contribution to journals, media reports and interviews with media houses made Dr. Gona's task easier.

Dr. Gona presents the portrait of a dynamic man, whose life as a trade unionist spans a period of thirty nine years. The theme of the book is the struggle against worker repression and exploitation, and the role of Kailembo in the process of emancipating the worker. The book is divided into three parts. In the first part titled “Preparation” (chapters one and two), the author dwells on Kailembo’s background, paying particular attention to the role of the Catholic Church, Kailembo’s parents and his education in shaping his character and thought as a defender of the worker. His first job appointment at the Buhaya Native Authority Council in 1952 provided him with the opportunity to put his ideas into practice. He launched the Buhaya Native Authority Employees Association (BNAEA) in 1954. Through the activities of this association, Kailembo was to have the first experience of the difficulties involved in leading a trade union movement, when council authorities suspected him of instigating workers against them and nearly dismissed him.

Kailembo’s subsequent studies abroad (Plater College), and the many contacts he made while there, only increased his passion and courage in the fight for workers rights, and influenced his formation of the Young Christian Workers (YCW). On his return home he initiated negotiations with the Buhaya Native Authority Council for better working conditions for the workers. When the negotiations failed he called a strike, and was dismissed. The confident Kailembo wasted no time pleading for reinstatement, and instead used the opportunity to go for further studies again, this time at Oxford. He chose politics and economics as his majors. However, the author does not explain the reason behind these subject choices, and leaves the reader guessing.

Part II of the book, titled “New Horizons and Challenges”, runs through chapters three to five. Chapter 3 opens with Kailembo’s engagement at the ICFTU, which represents his elevation from a Tanzanian trade unionist to an African one. However, the reader is left wondering about the location of Kailembo’s new job, which only becomes clear later in chapter 4. The main concern of this section is the impact of the ICFTU on Africa during Kailembo’s tenure. Dr Gona is consistent in his presentation of Kailembo’s role as a seeker of social justice. He shows that Kailembo personally “gave objective and creative solutions to worker’s problems and built a bridge between labour and management, and labour and governments”. He was also

instrumental in the advancement of education in trade union matters, and got the ICFTU to sponsor the short lived Kampala Labour College. Furthermore, Kailembo's job at the ICFTU enhanced his interest in worker welfare, and Dr. Gona emphasizes that Kailembo's involvement in the struggle for the liberation of Africa from the shackles of colonialism must be seen in this light.

Chapter 4 illustrates Kailembo's disappointment with the way the new post-colonial regimes handled trade union matters. Instead of the expected democracy and vibrance in trade unions, the regimes perpetuated the oppression of previous years. The author reveals a more mature and bolder Kailembo, who responded to the new governments' harassment of the trade union movement by intensifying his campaigns against oppression. He not only made representations, for example, for the release of the detained union leaders, but went further to obtain ICFTU assistance for their families and later on for the leaders themselves, after their release.

Chapter 5, the last in the second section, discusses a most challenging moment for Kailembo. The author shows Kailembo's attempt to direct the debate on whether or not African trade unions should be affiliated to international trade union bodies. In the process Kailembo distances himself from the radicals who stand for non-affiliation, and stays close to the conservatives who wanted options to be left open for the concerned unions to choose their own way forward. The author concludes that this stand was a miscalculation on Kailembo's part, and cost the ICFTU the loss of much ground in Africa. The force with which the radicals pursued their objectives allowed minimal space for Kailembo's conservative ideas in the formation of the Organization of Africa Trade Union unity (OATUU). It is therefore not surprising that the author concludes that "the relationship between the ICFTU and OATUU has remained ambivalent and characterized by suspicion and distrust particularly at the levels of leadership".

In the last part of Chapter 5, the author reflects on Kailembo's thoughts on socialism. According to Kailembo, the African personality could only fully take root through self sacrifice, self denial, self reliance and discipline. The author sees the practical considerations in this concept as distinct from the wild notions of men such as Kwame Nkrumah who dreamt of a continental unity including the Arabic northern part of

Africa. Kailembo sees African socialism as the application of the African cultural heritage in the fulfillment of the practical needs of the people. He differs with Julius K. Nyerere's African socialism, which the former Tanzanian president thought was opposed to capitalism. To Kailembo, Nyerere's *Ujamaa* (communalism) was a misguided economic policy. These ideas definitely have a place in a discussion of the formation of a Pan-African trade union unity. However, the author leaves them hanging rather loosely, without clearly showing their role on the road to Pan-African trade union unity.

Part III of the book is the most interesting and enlightening. Its title, "Mobilizer, Organizer and Human Rights Campaigner" aptly summarizes the major themes that concern the author. The author surveys Kailembo's achievements at the peak of his career, especially following his 1974 elevation to head the African desk at the ICFTU. He appropriately concludes that Kailembo had become a leading light in his profession.

The author's interrogation of Kailembo's life history also reveals a multi-task manager. Dr. Gona carefully classifies the tasks into two chapters. Chapter 6 focuses on the ICFTU fight against Apartheid. Through a passionate discussion of the struggle against the system, Dr. Gona demonstrates the lack of will by the industrial world to see an end to Apartheid. In the process he applauds Kailembo's courage and determination to confront the racist regime - a confrontation which meant going against many western nations, whose operations in South Africa hurt the indigenous Africans while sustaining the racist regime. This very well written and analyzed chapter is nothing less than Dr. Gona's tribute to Kailembo.

Chapter 7 examines the collapse of the initial AFRO office in Lagos, Nigeria, and gives credit to Kailembo for the re-establishment of a new office in Nairobi, Kenya. The successes achieved at the new AFRO office are also attributed to Kailembo's understanding, democratic and development oriented leadership. The author points out, for instance, that through seminars and conferences, Kailembo improved the skills of many members of the trade union fraternity. On human rights matters, he successfully defended the trade union movement and trade unionists against government harassment, not only in Africa, but in the world at large.

Chapter 7 also contains Kailembo's views on events such as Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPS), the democratization wave of the 1980's and 90's, the 1994 Rwanda genocide, and globalization and trade unions. The debt crisis, social security and HIV/AIDS issues also receive special attention. Dr. Gona's interaction with these ideas brings out the trade unionist in Kailembo - that to Kailembo the worker's interest is at the centre of any real solutions to socio-economic problems. The worker's interest must be taken into account for any meaningful development to take place in areas such as democratization, implementation of SAPs and controlling the spread of HIV/AIDS. The author ends Kailembo's story in style by stating that when Kailembo's service at the ICFTU came to an end in 1999, it was the end of an era.

Chapter 8, the final in the book, is an Epilogue, and a brilliant summary of the life and times of Andrew Mtagwaba Kailembo. Kailembo's motivation and inspiration in the trade union movement, the zeal with which he went about his work, and his social mobility at the ICFTU, are specifically addressed. The author leaves no doubt that Kailembo is a charismatic leader, yet a team player. He is a humble, but principled fighter. Dr. Gona finally considers Kailembo the social man, and sees in him a friend in need, and the village hero in Maruku. He also sees a man who in his personal life prefers to remain private, keeping his family away from the limelight. He is a husband and a father, but also a clansman. Kailembo is a man of the people.

However, the reader might wonder why Dr. Gona fondly refers to his subject by his baptismal name, as opposed to the conventional use of the sir name. Besides, the inclusion of relevant maps would have greatly added value to this important text, as it would have enabled the reader to quickly locate places that are mentioned in the study.

All in all, this is an admirable biography, well written, judicious, detailed and reliable. Dr. Gona has managed to stand clear of Kailembo's shadow without minimizing it. The book is well illustrated, with quotations from Kailembo himself, and from people who knew him well. The picture illustrations at the end of every chapter showing the events that dotted Kailembo's life bring the hero to life in the mind of the reader. The appendices of Kailembo's speeches add more flavour to the work. This is definitely a

major contribution to African biographical and labour history, and should be of interest to scholars in these fields.