

Patrick Obeng-Fosu, *Industrial Relations in Ghana: The Law and Practice*, The Ghana Universities Press, Accra, Ghana, 1991, pp.152

This book is evaluated in terms of the extent to which it enlightens readers about Ghana's industrial relations laws and practices. Other criteria used in this review are the new insights the author, Patrick Obeng-Fosu, brings to the literature as a result of his 35 years experience as an officer of the Ghana Labour Department. He has been at the department since 1957 and is currently the Chief Labour Officer.

This publication has six sections. The first, third and fourth are the most valuable and deal with the history of Ghanaian trade unionism, labour statutes currently in force in Ghana and industrial relations practices respectively. The first chapter on "Early Trade Unionism" and the "Establishment of Ghana's Labour Department" furnishes important historical and background information on the country's labour movement and Labour Department. Some of the issues addressed are the teething problems Ghanaian workers had to overcome in their efforts to create trade unions. The author also correctly points out that early trade unionism emerged mostly in the government sector which today remains the unions' stronghold. For the reader interested in the origins of Ghana's labour federation, the Ghana Trade Union Congress (TUC), this book provides additional historical information, unavailable in other publications.

On the contemporary Ghanaian labour, the author provides useful information on the organizational structure of the TUC and its national union affiliates. The author, for example, indicates clearly the TUC and national union leadership positions which are elected and those appointed. As it were, this and other similar illustrations in the book permit the author to describe to readers, especially those not familiar with Ghana's labour organizations, how they are structured and how they operate in practice. The author also explains the exact relationship between the Ghana TUC and three other worker associations - the Ghana National Association of Teachers, the Civil Servant's Association and the State Registered Nurses' Association. These labour groups together with the TUC have sought to protect workers through the Consultative Forum of Ghana Labour which was established in 1986.

In addition to the detailed description of Ghana's trade unions, there is a brief section on the Ghana Employers' Association. This section, however, is too brief and marks a typical shortcoming in the literature on African labour - the neglect of the role of private employers' associations and their representatives in industrial relations.

As noted, the important contributions of this book are found in the sections on industrial relations laws and practices in Ghana. In these sections,

the author is successful in explaining how colonial labour laws have been merged with post-independence labour statutes in Ghana. In addition to indicating the relevant existing labour laws, the author explains effectively how these laws shape important trade union activities such as union certification, negotiating collective agreements and the conduct of strikes and lockouts. Unique features of this book are the several practical illustrations furnished by the author. One glaring example is how precisely the author distinguishes between industrial and craft unionism. The illustrations permit the untrained reader to grasp the full meanings of important industrial concepts and processes and how they apply in the Ghanaian context.

Focusing on actual industrial relations practices in Ghana, the author uses his professional experience to describe and explain important characteristics of the Ghanaian industrial relations scene. He draws attention to one important tripartite consultative body - the National Advisory Committee on Labour - which has received inadequate focus in the literature. The importance of this body is reflected in its role in Ghanaian labour affairs. Its responsibilities include advising the Ghana Government on national labour policies, laws and practices and other issues impacting on labour.

The author also refers to another important but often ignored issue - the status of women employees in Africa. Since independence, Ghanaian women (especially in the public and other formal economic sectors) have enjoyed fairly liberal benefits, including fully paid maternity leave and time off to breast-feed new born infants. However, these aspects of women workers' rights have been left untouched by most authors. Obeng-Fosu is therefore one of the first authors to raise such an important aspect of the legal status of women in the work place.

Other recent important labour developments are also treated in this publication. Examples are occupational safety, health and workmen compensation laws passed by the Flt. Lt. Rawlings-led Provisional National Defence Council Government. With respect to the latter laws, the author cited several cases in which workers have successfully been compensated for work-related injuries. Similarly, in the area of industrial conflict, materials included in this book allow the reader to get updated about recent strikes and other conflicts between workers and management. Here too, specific cases depicted permit the reader to grasp fully, developments on the labour front from a practical standpoint.

In addition to the sections I have alluded to, other chapters briefly outline industrial relations practices in some English-speaking African countries including Kenya, Nigeria and Zambia. He also makes quick-references to industrial relations in the US and a few European nations. These sections provide the beginning of an introduction to comparative labour relations. These brief sketches, however, suffer the delimitations connected to broad comparative surveys. An example is that, crucial differences between

European and American trade unionism are glossed over. Another is that how worker participation, through Germany's co-determination system, enhances national economic efficiency is not analyzed, although the author refers to this critical dimension of the German economy.

This book also contains hazards inherent in survey types of studies. An important hazard is the need to be extra vigilant in furnishing not only correct, but also up-to-date data and information on several countries. A case in point is that although the International Labour Office (ILO) indicates that Kenya has ratified both ILO Convention Nos. 87 and 98¹ the author indicates that Kenya has ratified only the former. A similar observation could be made about the number of Conventions Ghana has ratified. The author shows in Appendix 11 that Ghana ratified four ILO Conventions in May 1986.² According to the records of the ILO, Ghana ratified five Conventions.³ Thus the total number of ratification of international labour conventions by both Ghana and Kenya may have been underestimated in this book.

A final note on some of the flaws in this book. The sections on future policies and the ILO need to be expanded to permit the reader to gain a more comprehensive appreciation of the role and influence of the ILO in Ghanaian/African industrial relations. With respect to the potentials of worker participation, the author focused almost exclusively on work place durbars without justifying his choice. But even more important, the emergence of new "revolutionary organs" of worker participation including the Workers' Defence Committees that occurred with the birth of the second Rawlings' government was virtually neglected. The high incidence of conflict between the TUC-led workers and the Rawlings regime is also not treated.

The few flaws I have described, however, cannot outweigh this book's practical utility. In spite of its small size (105 pages of text) it definitely contributes to a better understanding of Ghanaian industrial relations. It is an invaluable addition to the literature on especially union history, structure and organization and industrial relations practices such as union registration, collective bargaining, strikes, dispute resolution and unfair labour practices. The data and information provided in both the text and the several appendices are remarkable and make this book unique. They qualify this book to be designated as a *bona fide* reference manual on Ghana's labour. By collating information and data previously unpublished or scattered in several sources

1 ILO, Chart of Ratifications of International Labour Conventions, 1 January, 1990. See also Appendices 21 and 22 of Obeng-Fosu.

2 See pp.128-129 of Obeng-Fosu.

3 According to information obtained by this reviewer from the ILO, in May 1986 the Ghana Government ratified five Conventions.

ces, this book will facilitate future research on Ghana's industrial relations. Some of the relevant information supplied include, but are not limited to, the names and duration of tenure of TUC secretaries-general, Heads of Ghana's Labour Department and Employer's Association and strike, wage and other similar data. The depth and breadth of the data contained in this single publication depict the author's immense first hand experience in Ghana's labour matters which, beyond a doubt, make him deserving of the accolade, "a seasoned" labour officer.

In a continent in which high-ranking bureaucrats and most public figures rarely document their professional experiences and personal insights into affairs of state, this book is a welcome addition to the literature on Ghana's labour affairs. This book is therefore highly recommended to both new and experienced students of African and comparative industrial relations.

This reviewer fervently hopes that Obeng-Fosu has, through this book, beaten a path that more African technocrats will soon follow to disseminate their knowledge and experience to complement the work of academicians in the field of labour.

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