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***Plus ça change: trade unions, the military, and politics in Burkina Faso, 1966 and 2014***

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**Biography**

Craig Phelan is Professor of Modern History at Kingston University London and editor of *Labor History*.

**Abstract:** This article examines the first and the most recent coups d'état in Burkina Faso, focusing on the pivotal role played by trade unions in both January 1966 and October 2014. Both events reveal the potency of trade unionism in the country, and both illustrate the political bind in which the country finds itself. The political history of Burkina Faso represents an ever-shifting, intractable passion play between a political elite with a strong tendency toward authoritarian rule, a military that sees itself as the bulwark of political stability, and a powerful trade union movement capable of toppling governments but incapable of redeeming the nation's political life. The similarities between the two coups d'état are remarkable and demonstrate the extent to which the politics of the country are locked in a cycle from which it apparently cannot escape. Through its role as the vanguard of civil society, trade unionism has rid the country of political ogres, but it has failed to fundamentally alter the nature of political power. As a result, Burkina Faso remains mired in crushing poverty, riven by high levels of corruption and economic inequality, and under the thrall of neo-liberal structural adjustment that has proven unable to promote meaningful growth. Both coups therefore reveal the surprising strength of trade unionism as well as its limitations.

**Key words:** Burkina Faso, trade unions, coup d'état, Maurice Yaméogo, Blaise Compaoré, Confédération Générale du Travail du Burkina (CGT-B), Unité d'Action Syndicale (UAS)

**Introduction**

Burkina Faso – the “land of honourable people”, a name imposed in 1984 by its most charismatic leader, Thomas Sankara – has always been a troubled country. Claimed by the French in 1896 and eventually absorbed into its massive West African colony, *Afrique occidentale française* (AOF), the country gained its formal independence on 5 August 1960 as Upper Volta (*Haute Volta*). Landlocked, with a lack of viable crops or resources for profitable export,<sup>1</sup> riven by ethnic division (some 48 per

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<sup>1</sup> Until recently, cotton has been the principal export, accounting for 60 per cent of total exports. Dependence on cotton long stymied economic diversification (Kaminski, “Cotton dependence”). Since 2008 gold has replaced cotton as the principal source of export revenue. Burkina Faso is now the fourth biggest producer of gold in Africa, although foreign multinational ownership of the mines has meant that

cent of its inhabitants are Mossi, the dominant ethnic group),<sup>2</sup> and firmly under the neo-colonial control of France, the country seemed destined from its inception to be poor and politically unstable. Of the eight countries that emerged from the collapse of the AOF, only Côte d'Ivoire and, to a lesser extent, Senegal, developed viable neo-colonial economies. The others, in particular the landlocked Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, were regarded as backwaters during the colonial era; they received far less investment and political tutelage and, as a consequence, were economically and politically ill-equipped at independence. Coups, military governments, and semi-authoritarian civilian regimes have comprised its political history since 1960, and poverty has always been the reality in Burkina Faso.<sup>3</sup> The 2014 Human Development Index (HDI) ranks Burkina Faso 183 out of 188 countries.<sup>4</sup>

Other than a potent national pride, the one aspect of political life that sets Burkina Faso apart from other countries at the wrong end of the HDI Index is the vivacity of its trade union movement. Trade unionism in Burkina Faso was originally a transplant from the French, with the then-Communist CGT (*Confédération générale du travail*) taking the lead. Elsewhere in the former AOF countries, trade unionism upon independence was either co-opted or repressed by the one-party states that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>5</sup> Yet trade unionism in Burkina Faso proved more resilient. It fought tenaciously and successfully to retain its autonomy, to resist efforts to neutralise it through absorption into a single, state-controlled confederation, and to de-fang it through anti-strike and anti-union legislation. Through its vigilance, trade unionism has remained not only defiant, but it has comprised the most influential element of civil society in the country since independence. Ideologically and organisationally divided, and numerically weak, the movement has time and again proven itself capable of uniting, if only temporarily, to confront economic and political dangers.<sup>6</sup>

Trade unionism in Burkina Faso has always wielded power sufficient to topple or destabilise governments. On 3 January 1966 trade union-inspired strikes and protests led to the dramatic end of the regime of the first president, Maurice Yaméogo, marking the first coup d'état in the country's history. In 1980 trade union disturbances paved the way for a bloodless coup that unseated Lieutenant Colonel Sangoulé Lamizana, and a similar drama was replayed two years later when trade union upheaval ended the rule of Colonel Saye Zabo and his Military Committee of Recovery for National Progress (*Comité militaire de redressement pour le progrès national*). Trade union strikes and protests also form the background to the military coup d'état of 4 August 1983 that brought Captain Thomas Sankara to power. Sankara's Marxism, and above all his determination to revolutionise all aspects of burkinabè society, initially earned him the support of some of the country's radical trade unions. Sankara's environmentalism, his commitment to equality and agricultural self-sufficiency, his support for the rights of women, and his determination to rid the country of corruption and all vestiges of the former ruling elite – all these earned him an enduring legacy among those committed to change, not just in Burkina Faso but throughout French-speaking Africa, where he is often referred to as the Che Guevara of Africa.<sup>7</sup> Yet Sankara's authoritarianism, his hostility to strikes and trade unionism, and his creation of the Committees for the Defence of the

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Burkina Faso has profited very little from the gold boom (Chouli, "Les mouvements sociaux", pp. 246-8).

<sup>2</sup> Ethnic divisions and their political implications are examined in Savonnet-Guyot, *État et sociétés au Burkina*.

<sup>3</sup> Good general histories of Burkina Faso include Englebert, *Unsteady statehood* and Lejeal, *Le Burkina Faso*.

<sup>4</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2015*. The Human Development Index measures and ranks countries by levels of social and economic development. There are four criteria: life expectancy at birth, mean years of schooling, expected years of schooling and gross national income per capita.

<sup>5</sup> See Martens, "French-speaking Africa" and Phelan, "Responsible participation."

<sup>6</sup> See the useful general history of trade unions in Burkina Faso: Kabeya Muase, *Syndcalisme et démocratie en Afrique noir*.

<sup>7</sup> Harsch, "The legacies of Thomas Sankara."

Revolution (*Comités de défense de la révolution*) in all workplaces to ensure the implementation of the revolution – these prompted increasingly strident trade union opposition to the regime and made possible the 15 October 1987 coup d'état organized by Blaise Compaoré, Sankara's erstwhile friend and military colleague, and Compaoré's "rectification" of the revolution.<sup>8</sup> Compaoré's twenty-seven years in power were rocked by repeated trade union-led upheavals, most notably in 1999 and 2011, and on 28 October 2014 Compaoré was finally forced to relinquish the presidency in the midst of widespread political unrest, spearheaded by trade unions and other civil society actors.

How has trade unionism come to wield such influence in a country that remains poor and overwhelmingly agriculture? That question addresses the nature of trade union power in developing countries where the traditional working class is miniscule. Only five per cent of the burkinabè population works for wages in the formal sector, either public or private.<sup>9</sup> Trade unionism, therefore, has always been the bastion of the "privileged" minority of salaried workers, the civil servants (*fonctionnaires*), including state office workers and those in the fields of health, sanitation, transport, communication and education. Trade unions of state office workers, teachers, nurses, railroad workers, telephone operators and sanitation workers have all played their part in sustaining the movement. In the past generation significant deposits of gold have been discovered and exploited, and trade unions have organised the gold miners.<sup>10</sup> A 2011 study estimates that 60 per cent of public sector workers and 25 per cent of private sector workers belong to unions.<sup>11</sup> When looking at the trade union "movement", one must also include the powerful student unions, which at various times played pivotal roles in national politics. The two principal student organisations are the UGEB (*Union générale des étudiants burkinabè*) and the AGEB (*Association nationale des étudiants burkinabè*), both of which appeared in the early years after independence. Virtually all trade union leaders started out as members of student unions, as did the majority of trade union members.<sup>12</sup> Trade unionism has thus far made little headway in organising peasant farmers or workers in the informal sector, who comprise about eighty-five per cent of the population.<sup>13</sup> Rather, trade unionism is a largely urban movement of formal sector workers. Its constituency is bound together by a relatively high level of formal education, which includes fluency in French, the official language of formal politics. Its members have therefore always been those with expectations of securing and keeping a state job after school. Their salaries, which historically have consumed the lion's share of the national budget, are expected to sustain extended families. Thus any challenge to access to state employment, and any attack on the size or remuneration of the civil service through austerity programmes is met with ferocious resistance.

Despite its small membership base, trade unionism has always been a potent force. It controls strategic sites of the economic and political life of the nation, including the railroads and media, government offices and schools. Through its close ties with the student unions, it has influence with the politicised youth. That is a vital consideration, given the youthful population of the country (46 per cent of the people are under 15).<sup>14</sup> Because it represents the comparatively well-educated, there is an impressive overlap between trade unionism and the intelligentsia, including the small but vocal radical community. When trade unions coordinate strike activity, they are able to shut down the two

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<sup>8</sup> Sandwidi, "Syndicalisme et pouvoir politique."

<sup>9</sup> Dayo, Sylla and Saba, *Burkina Faso 2015*, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> The principal trade union organisation among gold miners is SYNTRAGMIH (*Syndicat des travailleurs de la géologie, des mines et hydrocarbures*), affiliated with the radical confederation CGT-B.

<sup>11</sup> US Department of State, *2011 Human Rights Reports: Burkina Faso*, p. 24.

<sup>12</sup> Loada, "Réflexion sur la société civile", pp. 149-50. For excellent discussions of how students perceive themselves to be trade unionists, see Sory, "L'Université de Ouagadougou" and Mazzocchetti, "Entre espoirs et désillusions."

<sup>13</sup> Dayo, Sylla and Saba, *Burkina Faso 2015*, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> World Bank. *World Development Indicators*. Washington DC: World Bank, 2011.

principal urban areas (Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso), cause massive disruptions to the economy, and bring the government to a standstill. Equally important, as the best organised oppositional force, they can effectively reach out to non-members during crises. Since independence, trade unions in Burkina Faso have been the vanguard of civil society, able to foment discord well beyond their membership and organise massive resistance in the streets. Political leaders in other French-speaking West African countries, whatever their political persuasion, were always well aware of the potential threat to their regimes posed by trade unions, which is why they went to such lengths to co-opt or eliminate trade unions altogether.<sup>15</sup>

While trade unions in Burkina Faso have been remarkable not only for their ability to retain their autonomy but also their capacity to destabilise and topple regimes, there have always been limits to their power. Simply put, they are too ideologically fragmented to devise a coherent political alternative. There are overtly radical trade union confederations, such as the CGT-B (*Confédération Générale du Travail du Burkina*), which was formed in 1988 and which continues to play a leading role in assailing the old political elite and challenging the neo-liberal structural adjustment programmes of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. There are reformist confederations, such as the CNTB (*Confédération nationale des travailleurs du Burkina*), which finds common cause with the CGT-B over certain issues, such as ridding the country of all remnants of Compaoré's regime and ensuring greater transparency in government and the protection of trade unions rights, but which disagrees vociferously with its more radical agenda.<sup>16</sup> In all there are six confederations, each with its own ideological agenda, and 17 autonomous national trade unions that refuse to affiliate with any of the six confederations. In addition, there are numerous local unions suspicious of joining any national body. During most of its history trade unionism in Burkina Faso has been plagued by such proliferation. Trade union pluralism, by allowing workers to join trade unions of their own choosing, is a feature of liberal democracies and a right enshrined in the International Labour Organisation's convention 87. Trade union proliferation and fragmentation, on the other hand, suggests multiple trade unions competing for the allegiance of the same workers, a weakening of collective bargaining, a weakness that makes unity of action difficult. There are no less than nine trade unions represented teachers, for example, and a study by the African Workers' Participation Development Programme found that trade unionism in Burkina Faso was "characterised by pluralism and extreme fragmentation into small unions that sometimes oppose each other".<sup>17</sup>

Formal trade union unity occurs rarely, such as in 1966, in 1975 and again in 2014. And even when it occurs, it is temporary. Once the immediate objective is attained, unity is dissolved and ideological cleavage reappears. Aware of this weakness through division, trade unionists in 1999 created an umbrella organisation of all confederations and autonomous unions to act together in times of political crisis. The UAS (*Unité d'Action Syndicale*) was the major force behind the civil unrest leading to Compaoré's overthrow. While effective in ridding the country of a regime that had lost its legitimacy, the UAS has been unable to forge consensus on what the political future should be, and it remains to be seen whether this group will remain intact after the November 2015 elections.<sup>18</sup> Thus

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<sup>15</sup> Phelan, "West African trade unionism past and present."

<sup>16</sup> The ideological cleavage between the CGT-B and CNTB reflects that of their institutional forebears in the colonial period, that of the radical and militant French CGT and the moderate Christian CFTC (*Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens*). See Sandwidi, "Syndicalisme et pouvoir politique", pp. 326-34.

<sup>17</sup> Education International, *Study on the effects of structural adjustment policies*, pp. 7-8. On trade union pluralism in French-speaking West Africa, see Laurijssen, *Pluralisme syndical*.

<sup>18</sup> On the UAS, see UAS, *L'Unité d'action syndicale au Burkina*. See also "Burkina Faso: le mouvement syndical en première ligne!", *Le Bulletin International* (Solidaires International) 87 (October 2015); "Meilleures conditions de vie et de travail: l'Unité d'action syndicale fait le point de sa rencontre avec le gouvernement", 12 November 2015, *Lefaso.net*, available at <http://lefaso.net/spip.php?article67967>.

trade unions possess the power to overthrow semi-authoritarian governments and destabilise military regimes, but it has never demonstrated a capacity to create a new government capable of redirecting politics in a new, more egalitarian, more democratic direction. After overthrowing Maurice Yaméogo in January 1966, for example, the trade union movement, at a loss what to do, encouraged the military to take power. And after finally ridding the country of Blaise Compaoré in October 2014, trade unions were once again divided as to the best course of action, leading to an attempted military takeover before democratic elections could be held in November 2015, which saw the election of a new president who had for years been Compaoré's heir apparent.

This article examines the first and the most recent coups d'état in Burkina Faso, focusing on the pivotal role played by trade unions in both January 1966 and October 2014. Both events reveal the potency of trade unionism in the country, and both illustrate the political bind in which the country finds itself. The political history of Burkina Faso represents an ever-shifting, intractable passion play between a political elite with a strong tendency toward authoritarian rule, a military that sees itself as the bulwark of political stability, and a powerful trade union movement capable of toppling governments but incapable of redeeming the nation's political life. The similarities between the two coups d'état are remarkable and demonstrate the extent to which the politics of the country are locked in a cycle from which it apparently cannot escape. Through its role as the vanguard of civil society, trade unionism has rid the country of political ogres, but it has failed to fundamentally alter the nature of political power. As a result, Burkina Faso remains mired in crushing poverty, riven by high levels of corruption and economic inequality, and under the thrall of neo-liberal structural adjustment that has proven unable to promote meaningful growth. Both coups therefore reveal the surprising strength of trade unionism as well as its limitations.

### **The overthrow of the Yaméogo regime, January 1966**

Had he not fallen ill and died in a Paris hospital in September 1958, Daniel Ouezzin Coulibaly undoubtedly would have been the first president of independent Upper Volta. Leader of the dominant political party at a time when France was devolving political power to its colonies, a close friend of the unquestioned leader in the far more favoured neighbouring colony of Côte d'Ivoire, and the first politician to have united Mossi and other ethnic groups into a single party, Ouezzin Coulibaly seemed destined to lead the country when it achieved independence. His death paved the way for his Minister for Agriculture, Maurice Yaméogo, to become president of the Council of Ministers of the Territorial Assembly in October. Opposition came in the form of a Mossi revolt, in which the traditional chief of that dominant group (Mogho Naba Kougri) sent 3000 warriors to take over the assembly in an effort to establish a constitutional monarchy with himself as king. The revolt failed, and Yaméogo became president of Upper Volta when that country gained independence from France on 5 August 1960. This made Upper Volta unique among all the former colonies of the AOF. In the seven other newly-independent states, political power at independence was exercised by men at the forefront of post-war colonial politics who had already taken great strides toward establishing one-party rule.<sup>19</sup> Yaméogo was a newcomer, a second-generation politician, and the country over which he presided had a multi-party constitution. Yet Yaméogo was not enamoured by democracy, and he intended to follow the lead of his neighbours by eliminating political opposition and establishing the pre-eminence of his own party, the RDA (*Rassemblement démocratique africain*).<sup>20</sup>

Yaméogo's drive toward one-party authoritarian rule was clumsy and arrogant. Other leaders in the former AOF had forged their parties in the struggle against France; their parties were born as opposition movements, as was the case with Sékou Touré in Guinea, who argued that the struggle

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<sup>19</sup> Berins Collier, *Regimes in Tropical Africa*, p. 155.

<sup>20</sup> Bassolet, *Evolution de la Haute-Volta*, pp. 71-8; Lejeal, *Le Burkina Faso*, pp. 65-73; Englebert, *Unsteady statehood*, pp. 32-3.

against imperial domination did not permit the luxury of internal dissent.<sup>21</sup> Yaméogo sought the same ends but lacked the rationale, and thus his attempts to impose one-party rule were deemed illegitimate and open to challenge. “The only party that legislates in Upper Volta is the RDA”, Yaméogo declared soon after he engineered his first election as president in December 1960. “Everybody knows it.” The new president did not feel the need to modify the constitution’s provisions for multi-party democracy. He preferred the simpler method of arresting and intimidating political opponents who challenged his rule. By this method he established executive authority over the legislature. The role of the National Assembly, according to its speaker, was merely “to allow the executive power to take, in complete calm and serenity, the measures needed for Upper Volta’s progress, prosperity, and grandeur”.<sup>22</sup> As did Sékou Touré, Yaméogo pursued a course of democratic centralism, in which all political and social institutions, from the local to the national, were controlled by the party, and in which the party was controlled by its national leader.

With all political parties other than the RDA marginalised, political opponents found refuge in the trade union movement. Upon independence, Upper Volta had a diverse trade union movement that reflected French colonialism and African engagement with it. The most significant confederation was the USTV (*Union syndicale des travailleurs voltaïques*), affiliated with UGTAN (*Union générale des travailleurs d’Afrique noire*). During the late 1950s UGTAN had been a pan-African trade union movement that had sought to organise all workers in the AOF. It was a breakaway from the transplanted radical French confederation CGT, although the CGT continued to play a role in its affairs. Led at its peak by Sékou Touré, UGTAN was a highly successful movement that was undercut when the French decentralised administrative authority to the territorial units that comprised the AOF.<sup>23</sup> In most newly-independent states UGTAN was repressed since its rhetoric of class struggle and its internationalism conflicted with one-party nationalism. It persisted in Upper Volta, however, and the USTV came to serve as the bastion of radical trade unionism.<sup>24</sup> It joined the Soviet-dominated World Federation of Trade Unions, and its rhetoric often revealed its radical pretensions. In its official statutes the USTV declared itself committed to “revolutionary trade unionism”. It claimed that its affiliates were “schools of democracy. They struggle for social justice and the liquidation of all reactionary, imperialist, feudal and neo-colonial forces”.<sup>25</sup> One of Yaméogo’s most vocal opponents, Joseph ki-Zerbo, a teacher who had earlier founded a party based on his version of African socialism, the MLN (*Mouvement de libération nationale*), became a leading figure in the USTV.<sup>26</sup>

The other significant trade union confederation was the CATC (*Confédération africaine des travailleurs croyants*). The offspring of the French CFTC (*Confédération française des travailleurs chrétiens*), this was another AOF-wide trade union movement that had achieved some organisational success in the 1950s. Composed principally of civil servants, the CATC was Christian in orientation and opposed the radicalism of the USTV. Having been educated at a Catholic mission and remaining a practising Christian ever since, Yaméogo himself had once been a member of the CATC. The CATC’s leading figure was Joseph Ouédraogo, the former mayor of the capital Ouagadougou, and like ki-Zerbo, he used his trade union connections to sustain his political opposition.<sup>27</sup> In total there were three confederations and perhaps 44 trade unions in Upper Volta, many of which were unaffiliated. At the time of independence there were altogether approximately 6500 dues-paying trade union

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<sup>21</sup> On Sékou Touré, see Camara, “Trade Unions and Politics in Guinea since Independence”.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Englebert, *Unsteady statehood*, pp. 44-5.

<sup>23</sup> Cooper, “UGTAN, the Loi-cadre and the breakup of l’AOF.”

<sup>24</sup> Kabeya Muase, *Syndicalisme et démocratie en Afrique noir*, pp. 55-6. UGTAN in Upper Volta did not adopt the name USTV until 1963.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Sandwidi, “Syndicalisme et pouvoir politique”, p. 330.

<sup>26</sup> Englebert, *La révolution burkinabè*, p. 35.

<sup>27</sup> Guirma, *Comment perdre le pouvoir?*, pp. 76-80, 129-30.

members.<sup>28</sup> Thus trade unionism was hardly a mass movement, but it did play a role far more important than its numbers would suggest due to its position as the sole civil society institution that remained beyond the pale of Yaméogo's control.

In February 1962 Yaméogo launched his campaign to bring trade unions to heel, and he did so in much the same way as other presidents in former AOF countries. He announced his intention to create a single, unified trade union confederation to which all locals would be affiliated, and which would be controlled directly by the party. The congress of the RDA "invites the trade unions ... to coordinate their action with the action of the Party with the aim of developing the national economy".<sup>29</sup> Transforming trade unions into transmission belts for the party propaganda and making them partners in production was a common goal in French-speaking West Africa.<sup>30</sup> The sole confederation to agree voluntarily to affiliate with the new state-created UNHTSV (*Union Nationale des Syndicats des Travailleurs de Haute-Volta*) was the Upper Volta affiliate of the French anti-communist CGT-FO (*Force ouvrière*).<sup>31</sup> All other trade unions refused, and Yaméogo used a variety of tactics to compel their obedience. He made use of an existing law for maintaining public order to arrest trade union leaders. He steered a new law through a pliant National Assembly on 24 April 1964 restricting the right to strike, and another law on 27 April ordering all trade unions to sever their international affiliations, including the World Federation of Trade Unions. This law had important implications for the USTV, which sought to maintain close ties with Sékou Touré in Guinea.<sup>32</sup> Admiration for the radical Sékou Touré enraged Yaméogo, who had allied himself with Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the conservative president of Côte d'Ivoire and a strong ally of France. Revealing the lack of tact for which he was well known, Yaméogo appeared on national radio in 1965, calling the Guinean president "a proud, lying, jealous, envious, cruel, hypocritical, thankless, intellectually dishonest man ... a bastard among bastards".<sup>33</sup>

Trade unions and radicals were not the only ones that the president provoked, however. Several days after his re-election in October 1965 (he received 99.98 per cent of the vote), he married for a second time. His new wife, Suzanne de Monaco, was a beauty queen from Côte d'Ivoire, and Houphouët-Boigny attended the ceremony. The newlyweds went on a honeymoon voyage to Paris and Copacabana. The Catholic Church, a potent force in Upper Volta, was appalled by the divorce that had preceded the marriage, and much of the public was incensed by a president who would not only abandon his wife and children, but take a lavish cruise when the country was in the midst of an economic crisis.<sup>34</sup> Others were disgusted by the president's nepotism; in November 1965 he made one of his brothers, Edouard, minister of defence, and another, Denis, minister of the interior.<sup>35</sup> Students were also piqued by Yaméogo's refusal to legally recognise their student unions. A great number of people in Upper Volta were alarmed by the economic malaise into which the country had begun its independence and the failure of the government to put forth a viable plan of action. The year 1965 proved particularly difficult, with drought in the north and a serious epidemic of measles that caused havoc throughout the country.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Martens, "Le syndicalisme en Afrique occidentale d'expression française", p. 63.

<sup>29</sup> "Résolution du Congrès RDA de février 1962", quoted in Lippens, *La République de Haute Volta*, p. 21. Author's translation.

<sup>30</sup> See Phelan, "Responsible Participation".

<sup>31</sup> Sandwidi, "Syndicalisme et pouvoir politique", p. 328, Guirma, *Comment perdre le pouvoir?*, pp. 132-4.

<sup>32</sup> Englebert, *Unsteady statehood*, p. 45; Kabeya Muase, *Syndicalisme et démocratie en Afrique noire*, pp. 68-70.

<sup>33</sup> Sennen Adriamirado, "Avec Houphouët et Senghor, difficile ménage à trois", *Jeune Afrique plus 8* (June 1984), p. 63.

<sup>34</sup> Guirma, *Comment perdre le pouvoir?*, pp. 137-8.

<sup>35</sup> Ammi-Oz, "L'installation des militaires voltaïque, I," p. 69.

<sup>36</sup> Englebert, *La révolution burkinabè*, pp. 36-7.

At the end of December, with the president in Côte d'Ivoire, the government announced an austerity budget for 1966. The budget included a 20 per cent salary cut for all civil servants and an equally deep cut in family allowances, the most important social welfare provision. On 27 December the USTV, in emergency congress, called for the establishment of a committee of trade union unity. By the time that Yaméogo returned on 30 December, trade unionists were demanding an audience with the government. The president's brother, Denis, officially met with trade union representatives on 31 December, but the meeting proved fruitless. That afternoon trade union leaders created the new inter-union committee (*Comité d'action intersyndicale*), and named as its spokesperson the CATC's Joseph Ouédraogo. The next day the committee issued an order for a general strike to begin on 3 January. As soon as the strike order was given, Yaméogo made a public statement declaring the strike illegal and accusing Ouédraogo of "communist subversion". Under cover of trade union activity, the president said, Ouédraogo had "indoctrinated some workers who seek to disturb the order established in the capital". He desires to "deliver our country to Ghana [where the radical pan-Africanist Kwame Nkrumah was in power] and therefore to China. The proof is in our possession."<sup>37</sup> On 2 January Yaméogo went on national radio to warn civil servants to appear at work the following day or face immediate dismissal.<sup>38</sup> He then stationed military troops at strategic points throughout Ouagadougou.<sup>39</sup>

On 3 January the capital was paralysed by the general strike. The national radio station was shut down. Telephone service was interrupted. A large crowd gathered from early in the morning, gaining in size as students, civil servants, workers from all sectors, housewives, and others joined the procession. The army remained neutral as the procession headed toward the presidential palace, itself a symbol of the sumptuous lifestyle of the men who governed a poor country. The crowd carried signs reading "Bread and Democracy" and "We are the 0.02 per cent", mocking the tally for Yaméogo during the presidential election. Others carried banners that read "the army to power" and "the army of the people and for the people". Significantly, the crowd was large and energised but not violent, and the troops guarding the presidential palace remained equally calm.<sup>40</sup> The megaphone that blared slogans from various trade union speakers was powered by the car battery of Joseph ki-Zerbo of the USTV. In the afternoon some 25,000 protestors moved toward a military camp in the city where Yaméogo had taken refuge. At the same time the inter-union committee began negotiations with the country's chief military officer, Lieutenant Colonel Sangoulé Lamizana. That evening Lamizana publicly announced that he had "taken his responsibilities" and assumed control of the government.<sup>41</sup> Several hours later, Yaméogo officially resigned, and the country began a new political life under a provisional military government that would last four years, during which time trade union rights were severely restricted. The first Republic of Upper Volta had ended, but it proved to be just the opening scene of a political drama in which trade unions, authoritarian politicians and the military take centre stage.

### **Trade union opposition to Compaoré**

The semi-authoritarian regime of Blaise Compaoré encountered severe but episodic trade union resistance from its beginning in 1987. Compaoré is considered by virtually all burkinabè to be responsible for the assassination of his friend and military colleague Thomas Sankara, and in December 2015 the new government of Burkina Faso has finally issued an international warrant for

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<sup>37</sup> *Le Monde*, 4 January 1966, p. 4. Author's translation.

<sup>38</sup> *Carrefour Africain*, 2-9 January, 1966.

<sup>39</sup> Ammi-Oz, "L'installation des militaires voltaïque, I," p. 61.

<sup>40</sup> Ammi-Oz, "L'installation des militaires voltaïque, I," pp. 61-62 ; Kabeya Muase, *Syndcalisme et démocratie en Afrique noir*, pp. 81-2.

<sup>41</sup> Bassolet, *Evolution de la Haute-Volta*, pp. 125-6 ; Ammi-Oz, "L'installation des militaires voltaïque, I," p. 62 ; Kabeya Muase, *Syndcalisme et démocratie en Afrique noir*, p. 82.



his suspected role in the killing.<sup>42</sup> Compaoré remained in power for twenty-seven years largely because he was a master at manipulation and co-optation, who resorted to violence and coercion only when persuasion and co-optation were ineffectual.<sup>43</sup> Moderate trade unions greeted the 1987 coup d'état with a measure of optimism, hoping the new president would be less hostile to their movement than Sankara had been. Radical trade unions, although in the end also at odds with Sankara, were determined to see the spirit of revolution carry on, and Compaoré's early rhetoric of setting the revolution on its proper course ("*la rectification de la révolution*") did nothing to appease them.<sup>44</sup> After the first year of Compaoré's presidency, radical trade unions, many of which were formerly affiliated to the USTV, formed a new confederation with an expansive agenda. Established on 29 October 1988, the CGT-B (*Confédération Générale du Travail du Burkina*) remains the largest and most influential trade union confederation. Its membership is less than 50,000 but its constituent unions are represented in every sector of the economy.<sup>45</sup>

An avowedly radical organisation with intellectual ties to the tiny Marxist-Leninist group PCRV (*Parti communiste révolutionnaire voltaïque*), the CGT-B declared its independence from the politics of both Sankara and Compaoré. While acknowledging the common perception of Sankara as a political progressive, CGT-B unionists had suffered greatly under the harsh authoritarian regime. Refusing to abdicate its workplace authority to the CDRs (*Comités de défense de la révolution*) meant imprisonment, torture and permanent exclusion from their professions. With the assumption of power by Compaoré, the CGT-B declared its intention to conduct an unceasing struggle for the rights of "combative" trade unionism that was "independent of [state] power".<sup>46</sup> It holds that its "revolutionary" stance encourages members to recognise the relationship between the "economic struggle and the political struggle." But the CGT-B is avowedly not a political party: "Revolutionary in the class struggle, the CGT-B remains an organisation of the masses who have neither the ambition nor the capacity to take the power of the state and manage it."<sup>47</sup>

Although its rhetoric was and remains revolutionary, the CGT-B has always been adept at maintaining close ties with important unaffiliated trade unions that do not necessarily share its ideological perspective. It presides over a group called the "Collectif CGT-B", which loosely brings together for common action the confederation and autonomous unions such as SATB (treasury workers), SYNATEL (telecommunications workers), SYNATEB (workers in primary education), SYNATIC (workers in media et culture). The Collectif CGT-B fights to redress workplace issues in the hopes of politicising the members of unaffiliated unions, and its efforts have won the CGT-B respect among non-revolutionary workers.<sup>48</sup> In addition, the CGT-B has made a great effort to reach out to those not traditionally involved in the trade union movement. Early on it created a "woman's committee" to encourage women in the male-dominated burkinabè society to take active roles in trade unions and social movements of every stripe. This is vital in a patriarchal country that ranks 181 out of 187 in the UNDP's Gendered Inequality Index.<sup>49</sup> The CGT-B takes seriously the issue of

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<sup>42</sup> "Affaire Sankara: mandat d'arrêt international contre Compaoré", *RFI Afrique*, 21 December 2015, available at: <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20151221-assassinat-sankara-mandat-arret-international-contre-compaore>.

<sup>43</sup> On the early years and political style of the Compaoré regime, see Lejeal, *Le Burkina Faso*, pp. 135-56.

<sup>44</sup> Sandwidi, "Syndicalisme et pouvoir politique", pp. 345-52.

<sup>45</sup> Coupé, "Les 20 ans de la CGT-B", pp. 20-1; Sandwidi, "Syndicalisme et pouvoir politique", pp. 345-6.

<sup>46</sup> Coupé, "Les 20 ans de la CGT-B", p. 20.

<sup>47</sup> CGT-B, "Résolution finale", Sixième congrès ordinaire de la CGT-B, November 2013, p. 2. Author's translation.

<sup>48</sup> "Situation sociopolitique au Burkina: le Collectif syndical CGT-B condamne les violations des libertés d'expression," *Ouaga.com*, 4 June 2014, available at: <http://news.aouaga.com/h/28189.html>.

<sup>49</sup> UNDP, "Gender Inequality Index", available at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index>. The index measures gender inequality on the basis of reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market.

promoting women's participation; at its 2013 national congress, 73 of the 340 delegates were women.<sup>50</sup> It has established a free "popular democratic school" (*Ecole démocratique et populaire – EDP*) with branches in numerous regions to promote literacy and political awareness.<sup>51</sup> Equally important, the CGT-B has been enormously successful in establishing coalitions of civil society actors during various protest movements. Indeed, it was through its role as ever-vigilant protest organiser that the CGT-B and trade unionism in general came to undermine the regime of Compaoré.

One of the most significant protest coalitions of the Compaoré era is the CODMP (*Collectif des organisations démocratiques de masse et de partis politiques*). The CGT-B took the lead role in creating the Collectif in December 1998 in the wake of the "Norbert Zongo affair". Zongo was an ambitious journalist and civil rights advocate, the founder and editor-in-chief of the newspaper *L'indépendant* and president of the Association of Independent Newspaper Editors. Zongo began investigating the torture and death of David Ouédraogo, the driver for François Compaoré, the president's brother and advisor, when his badly burnt body (and those of his brother and two others) were found in a car 100 kilometres from Ouagadougou. Public outrage over Zongo's murder was immediate, and the CGT-B and the leading human rights group in the country, the MBDHP (*Mouvement burkinabè des droits de l'homme et des peuples*) established the Collectif to ensure that the murderers were brought to justice. They did so at great risk to their own lives. The government publicly denounced the Collectif as a threat to social order and threatened and intimidated its leadership. Six leaders, including the CGT-B Secretary-General Tolé Sagnon, were taken into custody and had their heads shaved before being released.<sup>52</sup> The Collectif exists today because those responsible for Zongo's death have never been arrested or tried, but the coalition has been enormously successful in focusing discontent over the issues of press freedom, political violence and bias in the criminal justice system. Zongo's murder and the efforts to secure justice helped to delegitimise the Compaoré regime.<sup>53</sup>

As happened in numerous African states during 2007 and 2008, rioting over the high cost of living entered the political landscape of Burkina Faso with telling effect. Sharp increases in global food prices occasioned by the rising price of oil exacerbated existing discontent over a variety of related economic issues, including unemployment, wage stagnation and cutbacks in education, and resulted in a prolonged burst of public disorder. By the end of February 2008 rioting took place in all urban centres of the country. Shops were looted, public buildings were ransacked, petrol stations set ablaze, with scores arrested in the aftermath. "*La vie chère*" (the high cost of living) had been on the trade union agenda for several years, and in the midst of the riots in Ouagadougou the CGT-B organised a meeting with other confederations, the student unions, human rights organisations and consumer groups. That meeting was held on 12 March 2008 and led to the founding of the CCVC (*Coalition nationale de lutte contre la vie chère, la corruption, la fraude, l'impunité et pour les libertés*), a wide-ranging coalition against the cost of living, corruption and political injustice. Three days later the CCVC held a major demonstration in the capital. This was followed up with a successful series of two- and three-day general strikes in April and May, and numerous other demonstrations.<sup>54</sup> "A handful of economic operators" with the support of the Compaoré regime "profits from the situation to accumulate riches", declared the CCVC on the first day of a general strike in May 2008. "The holders of power do not understand the distress into which they have

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<sup>50</sup> CGT-B, "Résolution finale", Sixième congrès ordinaire de la CGT-B, November 2013, p. 1.

<sup>51</sup> Coupé, "Les 20 ans de la CGT-B", p. 21.

<sup>52</sup> Amnesty International, *Burkina Faso: the long and dangerous fight for justice*; Loada, "Réflexion sur la société civile"; Harsch, "Trop, c'est trop!".

<sup>53</sup> Frère, "Enterrement de première classe".

<sup>54</sup> CCVC, *Plate forme d'action de la Coalition nationale Contre la Vie Chère*, 12 March 2008; CCVC, *Message a l'occasion de la marche-meeting du 14 Mai 2008*; Engels, "Contentious Politics of Scale", pp. 185-6.

plunged the popular masses.”<sup>55</sup> Even more than the Zongo affair, “*la vie chère*” has proven an immensely effective vehicle of protest that reveals the vanguard position of trade unionism in civil society. Since its inception, the president of the CCVC has been the secretary-general of the CGT-B, a position from which he has been able to reach out and influence a mass audience with little or no connection to formal trade unionism. This applies in particular to informal sector workers, who comprise 42.7 per cent of the urban labour force.<sup>56</sup>

Recognising the potency of the protest, the Compaoré regime moved quickly to subsidise the price of necessities and reduce taxes. But such measures did little assuage the protestors. The union-led CCVC called for another round of strikes in April 2009, and the student union ANEB joined them by calling a strike at the University of Ouagadougou. And the rhetoric of the CGT-B remained inflamed. “The recovery of purchasing power is vitally urgent in order to permit workers to live with dignity and without hunger”, said CGT-B General Secretary Tolé Sagnon. The situation “is going to change because we do not want to die”.<sup>57</sup> Economic grievances had fed political opposition in Burkina Faso since 1991, when Compaoré entered into that country’s first Structural Adjustment Programme. In return for promises to dramatically cut budgetary expenditures and liberalise the labour market, the country received sizeable loans from its new international financial partners, including the IMF and the World Bank.<sup>58</sup> While the IMF presents Burkina Faso as a success story, and while GDP growth rates have been encouraging, poverty reduction has been minimal, and wealth remains concentrated at the top. Fully half the country’s wealth is owned by ten per cent of the population, and a 2003 investigation found that the amount of money held in foreign banks by the burkinabè elite amounted to twice the national budget.<sup>59</sup> Another consequence of structural adjustment is job loss due to privatisation. Of the 44 state enterprises existing in 1991, 22 had been sold by 1999, seven were on offer, and 12 had been liquidated. Whilst the government claimed that only 120 jobs had been lost due to privatisation, trade unions put the figure at 1200.<sup>60</sup> The inequality of wealth distribution, the common perception of profiteering and fraud by the Compaoré regime and its allies, and the economic hardship experienced by the majority – these served to further undermine the legitimacy of the government and to popularise the rhetoric of Tolé Sagnon and the CGT-B.

### **The overthrow of the Compaoré regime, October 2014**

The intensity of civil unrest escalated dramatically in 2011, and for a moment it seemed Compaoré might abandon power. Cost-of-living strikes multiplied in the gold fields and among civil servants, student activism and protest reached new levels, and there were several mutinies in the army over pay and promotion. Protest turned violent after the 20 February death of Justin Zongo, a 24-year-old student. Zongo had been questioned by police several times before dying in a hospital at Koudougou. The government initially stated that death was due to meningitis, but an already enraged public believed the true cause was police brutality. Civil unrest quickly spread through the country, and for three feverish months there were attacks on state property and riots in the urban centres. Numerous civilians died as police sought to restore order by using live ammunition; the official death toll is 19.<sup>61</sup> The student union ANEB was at the forefront of the campus upheaval that followed, with the CGT-B in support, calling attention to the government’s disinvestment in education. Civil rights advocates condemned a criminal justice system marked by frequent resort to arbitrary arrest, cases of torture, and lack of fair trials. At the same time elements of the military

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<sup>55</sup> CCVC, *Message à l’occasion de la marche-meeting du 14 Mai 2008*. Author’s translation.

<sup>56</sup> Fox and Sekkel Gaal, *Working out of poverty*, p. 52.

<sup>57</sup> Paris, “Lutte des classes au Burkina Faso en 2008”. Author’s translation.

<sup>58</sup> Education International, *Study on the effects of structural adjustment policies*, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Chouli, “Les mouvements sociaux”, p. 241.

<sup>60</sup> Sawadogo, “Burkina: privatization’s rocky road”, p. 12.

<sup>61</sup> International Crisis Group, *Burkina Faso: avec ou sans Compaoré*, p. 33.

mutinied, leading the government to dismiss more than 500 soldiers by the end of the year. Disorder was sufficiently widespread to spark fears of civil war, and Compaoré, fearing for his life during the mutiny at Ouagadougou, reportedly fled the capital.<sup>62</sup>

The 2011 upheaval marked a watershed. For the first time in the country's history, trade unionism was not in charge of civil unrest. The disturbances of 2011 went far beyond the CGT-B and its allies in the student and labour movements. Much of the protest was localised and spontaneous. Much of it began in the provinces rather than the urban centres. No national coalition was created to channel the anger. Apart from the cost-of-living strikes, the trade unions had been either observers or participants, but not leaders.<sup>63</sup> Public anger over unemployment and economic malaise, over a regime that seemed intent on ignoring the suffering of the masses and using violence or imprisonment against them when they protested, a president who chose not to listen but rather to enrich himself and his circle of friends – all that the CGT-B had been telling them since the early 1990s – had exploded in the streets with an apparent lack of organisation and direction. Yet in a sense the radical trade unions had accomplished their purpose by rousing the public from its apathy and encouraging it to see the connection between economic and political issues. While the CGT-B was not at the forefront of events in 2011, it had mobilised the masses and could now focus attention on removing Compaoré from office.

Compaoré made it easy for his opponents to direct their wrath at him. According to the constitution (article 37), presidents were limited to four terms. Compaoré would thus have to amend the constitution in order to stand as a candidate in the elections of 2015. His first step in this direction was to create a new political entity, a Senate, which would afford him even greater influence over the legislative branch in part because 29 of the 89 senators would be appointed directly by the president. Despite widespread opposition the National Assembly created a Senate. On election day the CGT-B and other civil society groups held a massive rally in Ouagadougou, with the crowd carrying banners that read “No to the Senate, we want jobs”.<sup>64</sup> In the midst of the protest that following, a new civil society organisation emerged, the *Balai Citoyen* (citizen's broom). Employing the rhetoric and symbolism of Thomas Sankara, and fronted by popular musicians (the rapper Smockey and the reggae star Sams'K le Jah), the *Balai Citoyen* was a movement that appealed to both the youth of the country and to the foreign press. Its message was simple: the need to sweep Compaoré and his ruling elite from power.<sup>65</sup>

At its sixth annual congress in November 2013, the CGT-B already began pondering the future of country without Compaoré. It spoke of two opposing visions. On the one hand were those for whom “the sole preoccupation” was “Blaise dégage” (Blaise [Compaoré] get out). On the other hand were those who considered it necessary to “pose the question of the alternative”. The history of the country had shown that change for the sake of change was not a reasonable alternative. Popular struggles had brought new men to power before, and these men had “showed themselves to be worse than those whom they replaced”.<sup>66</sup> For the radical trade unionists, removing the president was insufficient. They were calling on citizens to replace him with a new regime that would uphold the rights of workers, withdraw from structural adjustment, nationalise the economy, and embark on a programme of wealth redistribution and job creation.

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<sup>62</sup> Chouli, *Burkina Faso 2011: Chronique d'un mouvement social*; International Crisis Group, *Burkina Faso: avec ou sans Compaoré*, pp. 33-39.

<sup>63</sup> International Crisis Group, *Burkina Faso: avec ou sans Compaoré*, pp. 33-4.

<sup>64</sup> Chouli, “Les mouvements sociaux”, p. 254.

<sup>65</sup> Touré, “Jeunesse, mobilisations sociales et citoyenneté en Afrique de l'Ouest”.

<sup>66</sup> CGT-B, “Résolution finale”, Sixième congrès ordinaire de la CGT-B, November 2013, p. 6. Author's translation.

Throughout 2013 and 2014 the CGT-B sought to promote its agenda and regain control of civil unrest through the CCVC. At the same time it sought pursue trade union unity through an organisation it called Trade-Union United Action (*Unité d'Action Syndicale – UAS*). On the surface, the UAS was little more than the Collectif CGT-B, which had been in existence since 1999. The name was changed around 2009. By 2013, in the midst of economic and political crisis, the entire movement rallied to the cause of labour unity, and, just as in 1966, the fragmentation that normally characterises burkinabè trade unionism was overcome. The UAS is today composed of all six confederations and all 17 autonomous national trade unions, and it is presided over by the current General Secretary of the CGT-B, Bassolma Bazie. The UAS encourages pride in the fact that, among all French-speaking African countries, Burkina Faso is the only one in which trade union unity had not been imposed by the state. Yet it also recognises that trade union pluralism represents a “weakening of the working class” in its struggle for justice.<sup>67</sup>

On 9 October 2014 the UAS notified the Minister of Labour, as required by law, that it was calling for three general strikes (24-hour strikes on 29 October and 11 November, and a 48-hour strike on 25-6 November).<sup>68</sup> But the strikes proved unnecessary. On 21 October Compaoré proposed an amendment to Article 37, effectively declaring his candidacy for a fifth term as president in the 2015 elections. This resulted in a wave of spontaneous unrest unprecedented in the country’s history, as students and workers took to the streets in anger. Repression was ferocious, and at least 30 died at the hands of police and the military. On the day the amendment was to be voted upon in the National Assembly, some 1500 enraged citizens broke through the police lines and set the parliament building ablaze. The following day Compaoré resigned and fled to Côte d'Ivoire, ceding power to Lieutenant Colonel Yacouba Isaac Zida, a commander of the presidential guard (*Régiment de Sécurité Présidentielle – RSP*). Two weeks later a transitional government was established, with Michel Kafando as president. Kafando thereupon named Lieutenant Colonel Zida prime minister.<sup>69</sup>

On 16 September 2015 the RSP under the direction of General Gilbert Diendéré captured and detained the members of the transition government. This was a desperate act by the presidential guard to restore the former president by force. Reaction to the putsch was immediate. The UAS launched a call for a general strike throughout the country. The call met with swift and strong support by workers in all economic sectors, and, coupled with the mobilisation of the youth in Ouagadougou and the provinces and the strong protest of the CCVC, it forced the RSP to back down.<sup>70</sup> The depth and intensity of the popular revulsion to the armed forces taking political control clearly differentiates the current crisis from that of 1966. On 25 September 2015 the transitional government finally dissolved the RSP.<sup>71</sup> This was a demand that trade unionists had been making for many years, one that the UAS had specifically requested from the transition government in November 2014. The UAS remains unified at the moment, and it has dedicated itself to make sure that the RSP be held legally accountable for the deaths of protesters during the coup d'état. The UAS remains today the dominant voice in Burkina Faso committed to a thoroughgoing democratisation of political life and to the amelioration of working and living conditions for all citizens.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> UAS. *L'Unité d'action syndicale au Burkina*, p. 4 ; UAS. *Lettre ouverte à Monsieur le Président*.

<sup>68</sup> UAS. *Notification de préavis de grève*.

<sup>69</sup> Engels, “Political transition in Burkina Faso”, p. 1; Amnesty International, *Just What Were They Thinking*, pp. 8-19; Chouli, “L'insurrection populaire”, pp. 148-51.

<sup>70</sup> “Burkina: La CCVC Ouaga pour la mise en place de Comités de défense des acquis de l'insurrection populaire”, *Burkina 24*, 8 October 2015, available at <http://www.burkina24.com/2015/10/08/burkina-la-ccvc-ouaga-pour-la-mise-en-place-de-comites-de-defense-des-acquis-de-linsurrection-populaire/>

<sup>71</sup> Jaffré, “Comment ce magnifique peuple du Burkina a mis en échec le coup d'Etat.”

<sup>72</sup> “Burkina Faso: le président et le premier ministre retenus par des militaires” *Le Monde Africain*, 17 September 2015; “Burkina Faso: le mouvement syndical en première ligne!”, *Le Bulletin International (Solidaires International)* 87 (October 2015), p. 1; UAS, *Lettre ouverte à Monsieur le Président*.

## Conclusion

Some commentators suggest that since the 2011 crisis, trade unions have no longer been at the forefront of civil society in Burkina Faso.<sup>73</sup> There is strong evidence to support this argument. In 1966 and in every upheaval until 2011, trade unions had dominated both the discourse and the protest of opposition. Their relatively peaceful toppling of the Yaméogo regime reflected the power of a well-organised minority to inspire sufficient protest to oust an inept president who had lost legitimacy in the eyes of many. That the 1966 coup d'état was principally confined to the capital was also significant, for it was here that the small trade union movement was concentrated. Opposition from 2011 until 2014 resistance was more dramatic, violent and spontaneous, convulsing all urban centres. There seemed to be no need of national leadership since there was no cohesive movement, just a burning anger and a desire to remove a very well-entrenched presidential regime. The appearance of the *Balai Citoyen* in particular has attracted attention as symbolic of the changing nature of protest. Trade union pronouncements do not capture headlines in the way celebrities can, and the *Balai Citoyen's* appeal to youth and the foreign press is undeniable.

Civil society had certainly become far more complex between the first and latest coups d'états, but has the burkinabè trade union movement in fact surrendered its dominance of civil society? To answer this question it is important to distinguish between bursts of collective rage and sustained opposition. Both proved necessary to unseat Compaoré, but the former is ephemeral. Having accomplished its sole task – the ouster of a semi-authoritarian regime – the *Balai Citoyen* has already started to fade from the scene. The mere fact that it launched a movement (“*Je vote et je reste*” – I vote and I remain) to sustain a sense of political vigilance among the youth even before the November 2015 presidential elections indicates how youthful political engagement has subsided. On the other hand, both the CCVC cost-of-living campaign and the UAS trade union unity remain in place and both are central to the dialogue about Burkina Faso's future in the aftermath twenty-seven years of Compaoré. Unsurprisingly, both the CCVC and the UAS are presided over by Bassolma Basie, the secretary-general of CGT-B. The fevered climate of 2014 has cooled, and dialogue has replaced rioting, and both the CCVC and the UAS are making their voices heard. “The UAS will pursue the ongoing struggle”, the UAS recently declared. It will use the tactics of trade unionism, including the general strike, to secure “respect, human dignity, and greater democracy, not only in Burkina Faso, but also in the service of our brothers around the world”.<sup>74</sup> The centrality of trade unionism to fomenting opposition to authoritarianism, to promoting democracy, and to a more equitable distribution of wealth has been a key feature of Burkina Faso's political history since the birth of the country, and the upheaval of 2014 has underscored rather than undermined its pre-eminence.

The limitations of trade union and civil society opposition also remain as obvious today as they did in 1966. Neither in 1966 nor in 2014 has the opposition proven capable of shifting the political landscape in a more progressive direction. Despite all the radical rhetoric of trade unionism and the Sankara-inspired rhetoric and symbolism of the *Balai Citoyen*, the majority of voters on 29 November elected Roch Marc Kaboré as their new president. Kaboré was a vital part of Compaoré's regime until 2012, and his father was a minister in the Yaméogo regime. While studying economics in France he dabbled in leftist politics and upon his return became a functionary in the Sankara government. When Compaoré overthrew Sankara, however, Kaboré made a dramatic political U-turn. He supported the “rectification of the revolution”, was named prime minister in 1994 and served as president of the National Assembly from 2002 until 2012. He was Compaoré's right-hand man, the “*dauphin de Blaise*” (Compaoré's heir apparent) during the years of structural adjustment,

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<sup>73</sup> Engels, Bettina. “Trade unionism in Burkina Faso”; International Crisis Group, *Burkina Faso: avec ou sans Compaoré*, pp. 33-4.

<sup>74</sup> UAS. *Lettre ouverte à Monsieur le Président*.

privatisation, the food riots and the Norbert Zongo affair.<sup>75</sup> It was only when the military found him too soft, and when Compaoré began his campaign to amend Article 37 that Kaboré bolted the regime to form a new opposition party. He now presents himself as a man of the people, and his rhetoric is often progressive, but he has spent his entire life as part of the semi-authoritarian political establishment. It remains to be seen what relations he will have with the army and the trade unions, the two other principal actors in the ongoing burkinabè political drama.

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<sup>75</sup> Mathieu Olivier, "Burkina: ce qu'il faut savoir sur Roch Marc Christian Kaboré", *Jeune Afrique*, 1 December 2015.

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