

Review Article

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Professional Relations, Trade Unionism, and Social Conflicts in Capitalism in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the dynamics of labor relations, trade unionism, and social conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) within the context of capitalism. Through a literature review and visual data, we analyze the challenges and opportunities faced by trade unions, the common types of social conflicts, and the impact of economic policies on labor relations. The results show that, despite a challenging environment, trade unions play a crucial role in defending workers' rights. However, legislative reforms and better enforcement of labor laws are necessary to improve working conditions and reduce social conflicts.

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Received: March 01, 2025; **Accepted:** March 06, 2025; **Published:** April 10, 2025

Keywords: Labor Relations, Trade Unionism, Social Conflicts, Capitalism, Democratic Republic of the Congo

JEL Code: J50, J52, J53, N37, O55

Introduction

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is a country rich in natural resources, particularly minerals such as copper, cobalt, and diamonds. This natural wealth could have made the DRC one of Africa's most prosperous economies, but the country has been marked by decades of conflict, corruption, and poor governance, which have hindered its economic and social development.

Labor relations in the DRC are heavily influenced by this complex historical and economic context. Since the DRC's independence in 1960, the country has undergone numerous political and economic crises. Successive regimes have frequently resorted to repression to maintain control and authority, which has also negatively impacted the development of trade union movements.

Trade unions have played a crucial role in defending workers' rights, but they have often faced significant obstacles such as repression, corruption, and lack of resources.

The mining sector, in particular, is an area where social conflicts are frequent. Working conditions in the mines are often precarious, with low wages, long working hours, and inadequate safety conditions. Miners are also often exposed to health risks due to exposure to toxic substances. These conditions have led to numerous strikes and protests, with workers seeking to improve their working conditions and obtain fair compensation.

Trade unions in the DRC are diverse and varied, with several large

organizations such as the Congolese Trade Union Confederation (CSC), the National Union of Workers of Congo (UNTC), and the General Federation of Workers of Kongo (FGTK). These unions have played an important role in defending workers' rights, but they have also faced significant challenges. Political repression, corruption, and lack of resources have often hindered their ability to effectively defend workers.

Labor legislation in the DRC exists, but its enforcement is often inadequate. Employers, particularly in the mining sector, often do not comply with labor laws, leading to frequent violations of workers' rights. Efforts to improve labor regulation have been supported by international organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), but much remains to be done to ensure decent working conditions for all workers in the DRC.

This paper explores the interactions between trade unionism, social conflicts, and capitalism in the DRC. Through a literature review and visualizations of relevant data, we analyze the challenges and opportunities for improving labor relations in this country. We also examine the common types of social conflicts, working conditions in various economic sectors, and the impact of economic policies on labor relations. Ultimately, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the dynamics of labor relations in the DRC and propose recommendations for improving working conditions and reducing social conflicts.

Literature Review

Historical and Contextual Background of Labor Relations in the DRC

The DRC, with its rich but tumultuous history, has seen its labor relations marked by major political and economic transitions. In the post-independence era, under the regime of Mobutu Sese Seko,

the country experienced a period of political centralization and repression of trade union movements. Mobutu often used trade unions as tools of control, limiting their independence and ability to defend workers' rights ?.

Evolution of Trade Unions in the DRC

Trade unions in the DRC have evolved over the decades, from organizations heavily controlled by the state to more autonomous entities after Mobutu's fall in 1997. However, the transition to greater autonomy has not been without challenges. Corruption, lack of resources, and political repression have continued to hinder the effectiveness of trade unions [1].

Dynamics of Social Conflicts

Social conflicts in the DRC are often linked to working conditions in key economic sectors, mainly the mining sector. The works of show that conflicts in this sector are exacerbated by exploitative practices, low wages, and dangerous working conditions [2]. Miners, in particular, are often exposed to high health and safety risks, leading to frequent strikes and other forms of protest.

Labor Legislation and Law Enforcement

Labor legislation in the DRC is complex, and its enforcement is often deficient. Labor laws exist on paper, but their implementation is often insufficient, leaving workers vulnerable to exploitation. Studies by and highlight that ineffective enforcement of labor laws is a key factor contributing to social conflicts and deteriorating working conditions [3,4].

Role of International Organizations

International organizations, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), have played a crucial role in supporting trade unions and labor regulation in the DRC. These organizations have helped promote legislative reforms and strengthen the capacities of local trade unions. However, challenges remain significant, and the impact of international interventions varies depending on the local context and national authorities' commitment [5].

Case Studies and Empirical Analyses

Several case studies have been conducted to analyze the specific dynamics of social conflicts and labor relations in various economic sectors in the DRC. For example, a study by on the mining sector shows how multinational companies often exploit local regulatory weaknesses to maximize their profits at the expense of workers. Similarly, an analysis by reveals that corruption and lack of transparency in the extractive industries worsen working conditions and fuel social conflicts [6,7].

A study by on strikes in the mining sector in Kolwezi shows that workers primarily demand wage increases, better working conditions, and enhanced security [8]. Additionally, an analysis by on the manufacturing sector reveals that conflicts are often related to non-compliance with labor standards and the absence of effective conflict resolution mechanisms [9].

Results and Discussion

The graphs below illustrate trends in social conflicts, strikes, and unionization rates by sector in the DRC.

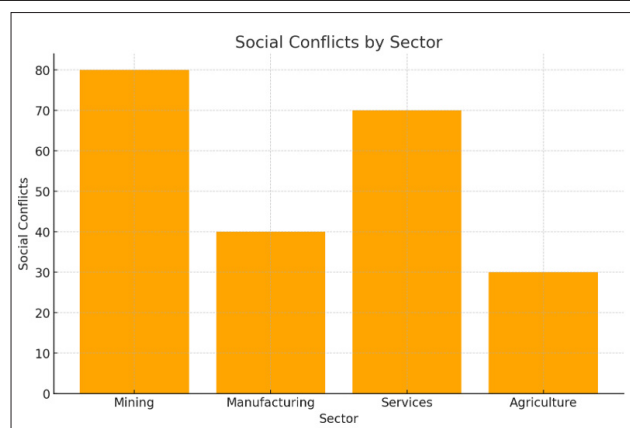


Figure 1: Social Conflicts by Sector.
Source: ILO & The Global Economy.

The figure 1 shows that the mining sector experiences the highest number of social conflicts, followed by the services sector, the manufacturing sector, and finally the agricultural sector. This could be explained by the nature of working conditions in these sectors and the level of unionization.

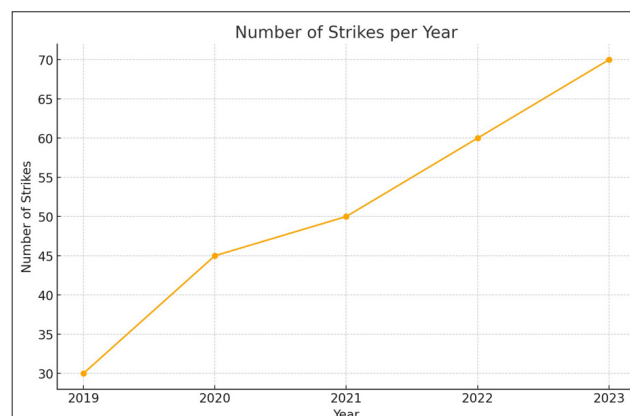


Figure 2: Number of Strikes Per Year.
Source: ILO & The Global Economy.

The figure 2 indicates an upward trend in the number of strikes per year from 2019 to 2023. This increase reflects rising worker dissatisfaction and increased trade union mobilization to defend their rights.

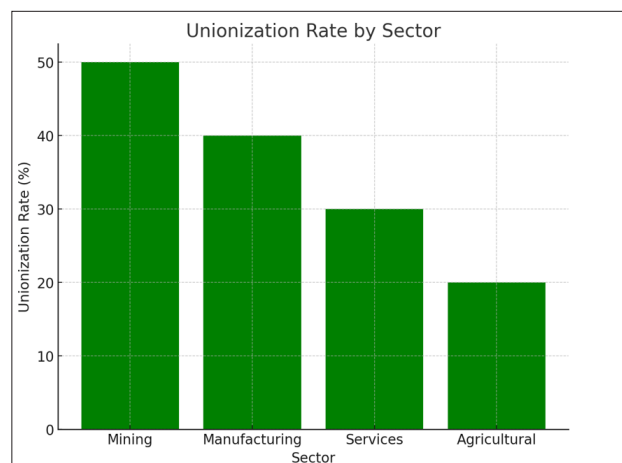


Figure 3: Unionization Rates by Sector.
Source: ILO & The Global Economy.

The figure 3 presents the unionization rate by sector. The mining sector has the highest unionization rate, followed by the manufacturing, services, and agricultural sectors. A high unionization rate can contribute to better worker organization and more effective defense of their rights.

Map of Conflict Zones in the DRC

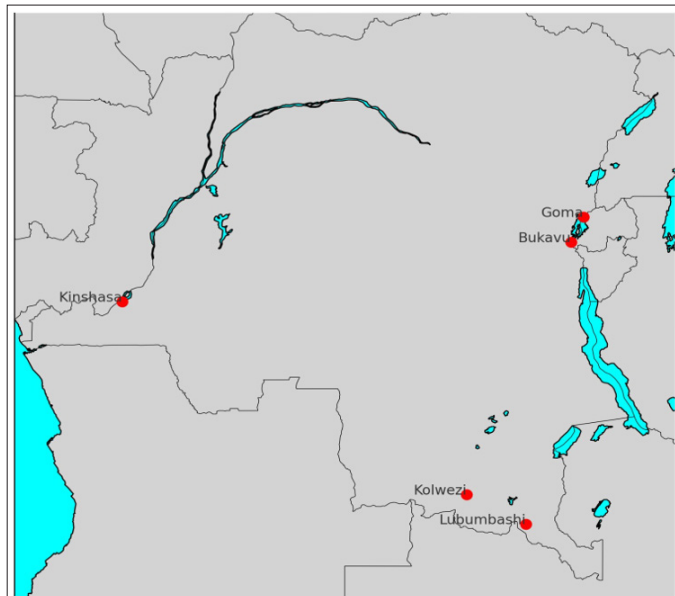


Figure 4: The main conflict zones in the DRC Source: Map created by the author.

Interpretation of the Map

The figure 4 shows the main conflict zones in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The red points indicate the locations of major conflicts, and the city names are annotated for better geographical understanding.

Kolwezi

- **Location:** Located in the Lualaba province, southeastern DRC.
- **Conflict Context:** This area is primarily affected by conflicts related to the mining industry. Miners, particularly of copper and cobalt, have often protested for better working conditions and higher wages. Conflicts are often exacerbated by the presence of multi-national mining companies.

Lubumbashi

- **Location:** Capital of the Haut-Katanga province, southeastern DRC.
- **Conflict Context:** Lubumbashi is another major mining center. Conflicts here are similar to those in Kolwezi, involving strikes and protests by miners. Competition for resource control and tensions between companies and local communities are frequent.

Kinshasa

- **Location:** Capital of the DRC, located in the west of the country.
- **Conflict Context:** As the political and economic center of the country, Kinshasa has been the scene of numerous social and political conflicts. Public sector workers, particularly teachers and healthcare workers, have often gone on strike to protest low wages and poor working conditions. Additionally, political tensions and anti-government protests are frequent here.

Goma

- **Location:** Capital of the North Kivu province, located in the east of the country, near the border with Rwanda.
- **Conflict Context:** Goma is a particularly unstable area due to the presence of armed groups and ethnic conflicts. Humanitarian workers and civilians are often caught in the violence. Conflicts over natural resource control are also common.

Bukavu

- **Location:** Capital of the South Kivu province, also located in the east of the country.
- **Conflict Context:** Similar to Goma, Bukavu is affected by armed group violence and ethnic conflicts. Natural resources, such as coltan, are a major source of conflict. Civilians and humanitarian workers face significant risks here.

Discussion

The results show that the mining sector is particularly vulnerable to social conflicts due to difficult working conditions and strong trade union mobilization. The increase in strikes over the years highlights the growing importance of workers' demands for better working conditions and fairer wages.

Labor legislation in the DRC needs to be strengthened and more rigorously enforced to protect workers and reduce social conflicts. Trade unions play a crucial role in this process, but they need support, both nationally and internationally, to overcome the challenges they face.

Trade Unionism in the DRC

The trade union movement in the DRC is marked by a diversity of trade union organizations. Among the most important are the Congolese Trade Union Confederation (CSC), the National Union of Workers of Congo (UNTC), and the General Federation of Workers of Kongo (FGTK). These unions play a crucial role in defending workers' rights, but they face significant challenges such as repression, lack of resources, and sometimes corruption [10].

Trade union diversity also reflects sectoral and regional divisions. Trade unions often operate in environments where ethnic and regional tensions exacerbate social conflicts. The CSC, for example, is more present in industrial and mining sectors, while the UNTC has a strong presence in public services and administration sectors [11].

Trade unions in the DRC have also had to face internal institutional challenges. Fragmentation and power struggles within the unions themselves have sometimes weakened their ability to mobilize workers and negotiate effectively with employers and the government. Additionally, state repression and threats against trade union leaders have often discouraged trade union activism [12].

Social Conflicts and Labor Regulation

Social conflicts in the DRC are frequent and manifest in various forms, including strikes, protests, and legal actions. These conflicts are often triggered by issues such as unpaid wages, dangerous working conditions, and unfair dismissals. In the mining sector, working conditions are particularly precarious, with high health and safety risks for workers [13].

Data shows an increase in strikes in recent years, reflecting growing dissatisfaction among workers (figure 2). Strikes are often the only option for workers to voice their demands due to

the weakness of formal conflict resolution mechanisms and lax enforcement of labor laws.

Working conditions in the DRC vary considerably across sectors. The mining sector is characterized by particularly difficult conditions, with long working hours, low wages, and exposure to toxic substances. Other sectors, such as agriculture and services, also face similar challenges. Workers in these sectors often lack social protection, formal contracts, and face exploitative practices [14].

Examples of social conflicts

- **Mining Sector in Kolwezi:** In 2019, a series of strikes broke out in the mines of Kolwezi, mainly due to dangerous working conditions and unpaid wages. Workers protested against employers' and the government's inaction to improve their living conditions.
- **Education Sector:** Teachers in the DRC have often organized strikes to demand better wages and working conditions. In 2021, a national teachers' strike paralyzed the education system for several weeks.

Economic policies in the DRC have often favored foreign investments, particularly in the mining sector. However, these policies have not always taken workers' rights into account. The absence of strict regulation and lax enforcement of labor laws have led to frequent abuses.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) and other international bodies have attempted to promote reforms to improve labor regulation in the DRC. These efforts include training labor inspectors, raising employer and worker awareness of labor rights, and supporting trade unions. However, the impact of these initiatives is often limited by corruption and lack of political will [15].

Conclusion and Recommendations

The analysis of labor relations, trade unionism, and social conflicts in the DRC reveals a complex landscape marked by numerous challenges. Trade unions play a crucial role in defending workers' rights, but they face significant obstacles, including political repression, corruption, and lack of resources. Working conditions in many sectors are precarious, and social conflicts are frequent.

To Improve Labor Relations in the DRC, Several Measures are Necessary

- **Strengthening Trade Unions:** Provide financial and logistical support to trade unions to enhance their capacity to defend workers' rights.
- **Strict Enforcement of Labor Laws:** Strengthen labor regulation mechanisms and ensure rigorous enforcement of labor laws.
- **Improvement of Working Conditions:** Implement programs to improve working conditions, especially in high-risk sectors such as mining.
- **Awareness and Training:** Raise awareness among employers and workers about labor rights and provide continuous training to labor inspectors.

By implementing these recommendations, it is possible to create a more equitable working environment and reduce social conflicts in the DRC, thereby contributing to more sustainable economic and social development.

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