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STATE OF THE STRUGGLE

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STATE OF THE NATION

COVID-19 – Economy – Insecurity – Energy Crisis – Violations of Human and Trade Union Rights



From the President's Desk:
Comrade Ayuba Wabba, mni



International Window: Role of
Trade Unions in US Election



Veterans Corner: Interview
Comr Adams Oshiomhole

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Owen Tudor

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Confederation, Brussels Global Headquarters

Mrs. Ene Obi

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Joel Odigie

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Confederation – Africa, Lome Regional Headquarters

Fagbamigbe Tolulope

Chairperson, Nigeria Labour Congress, Youth Committee

From the President's Desk



DEMANDING ANSWERS AT VERY UNUSUAL TIMES...

There is no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria has never been torn apart by multifarious crises as we experience right now. From concerns on the prevalence of the second wave of the novel corona virus disease in the country to challenges of the economy to the searing siege of insecurity to the violation of human and trade union rights and to escalating tension all over the country, there is no doubt that these are really trying times for our country. It appears that the peace of our country has been torn apart by a combination of both human and non-human factors.

The NEC considered that the impact of the novel corona virus in the World of Work continues to bite. From a January 2021 Report, the International Labour Organization (ILO) posited that in 2020, COVID-19 wiped off 225 million Full Time Equivalent working hours from the labour market. In Nigeria, the impact of COVID-19 is no less daunting as the Nigeria's GDP shrunk by 34.1%. The pandemic also led to a 14% increase in poverty headcount rate in Nigeria. About 27 million Nigerians fell headlong into poverty as a result of COVID-19.

The Nigerian economy continues to go through the challenge imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic especially as a result of the recent global lockdown. It has been predicted that our economy would make a rebound as the production spaces all over the world open up and as demands for goods and services increase. For Nigeria, the story is a tale of mixed fortunes. While the increase in the demand for crude oil has occasioned higher prices in the international commodities market, the

swell in the coffers of government has translated to very piercing pain for citizens. The prices of crude oil in the international market which should be an advantage for Nigeria has become a major disadvantage as the failure of successive governments to revamp our domestic refineries have brought us to a cul-de-sac.

Recently the Government/Labour Technical Committee on Electricity Tariff released its Final Report. The committee's recommendations validate our position that the major factors behind incessant electricity tariff hike are combinations of pressure from neo-liberal global market forces, poor policy choices, dereliction of duties by the power sector regulator and investors and general inefficiencies in the system. We had canvassed these positions at previous engagements with government. Currently, the promise by government to force DISCOs to mass deploy meters to electricity consumers has been poorly pursued as these meters are still hoarded by DISCOs and sold at exorbitant rates to frustrated consumers. The implication of this for productivity, employment and stability are huge.

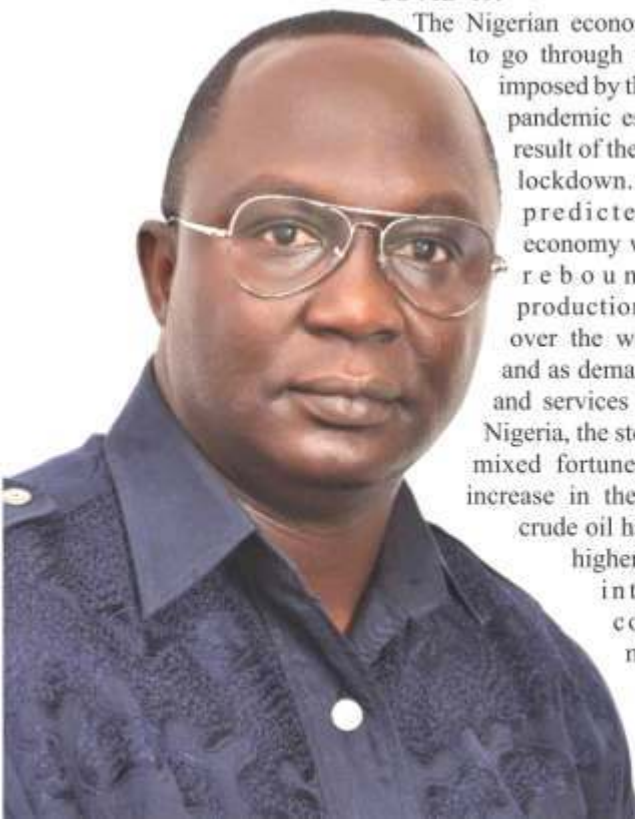
We have witnessed an intense resurgence of insurgency, terrorism, banditry, kidnap-for-ransom, militancy and resource conflicts all over Nigeria. There is also the challenge of criminals who hide under the camouflage of pastoralists to commit all sorts of crimes. The mindless bloodshed and misery that this state of insecurity presents points to a serious breakdown in governance. Even more worrisome is the cataclysmic path that the current state of insecurity in Nigeria leads to. In response to the absence of a firm State response to the theatres of conflicts and crime all over the country, many Nigerians now resort to self-help. This too constitutes another grave security threat.

Since April 18, 2019 when President Buhari signed the new national minimum wage into law, the expectation is that all Nigerian employers both in the public and private sector must comply and even conclude negotiations on consequential salary increment. Unfortunately, there are still some states that are yet to implement the national minimum wage law. This is not acceptable. There is no begging anyone to comply with the provisions of the law.

Of recent we have witnessed an upsurge in attack against trade union rights by some organizations in Nigeria. Some of the serious cases are those involving the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), Turkish Air, Caverton Helicopters and some banks in Nigeria which have introduced draconian practices aimed at stifling workers and trade union rights.

In order to sustainably address these challenges, we must engage politics. We have the numbers to make a great dent on the political system in our country. The task of organizing politically is one we all must embrace. We must recover and reposition the Labour Party or form a new Workers Party that would serve as the political vehicle for the mass of Nigerian workers and millions of downtrodden Nigerians who are desperately in need of true change.

**Comrade
Ayuba Wabba, mni**
President, Nigeria Labour Congress





From the **EDITOR IN-CHIEF**

The major event for the Nigeria Labour Congress in the month of February 2021 was the convening of its National Executive Council (NEC) meeting on February 17, 2021 at the Nigeria Air Force (NAF), Conference Centre, Kado-Abuja. The NEC comprises all the Presidents, General Secretaries and Treasurers of NLC's affiliate unions; Chairpersons and Secretaries of State Councils and the FCT; and members of the National Administrative Council, and also the Chairperson of the NLC Youth Committee. The meeting received the Secretariat Report on the State of the Nation and other labour issues. Top on the issues discussed by NEC includes COVID-19, crisis of insecurity, attack on human and trade union rights, incessant increases in the pump price of petrol and hike in electricity tariff.

At the end of very robust discussions and debates, the NEC took decisions on all the issues before it. First, the NEC resolved that government at all levels should demonstrate genuine commitment to research by ensuring central coordination of all research funding and efforts in the country. The government should also put in place enabling legislation to promote research. Government should encourage research into the use of local herbs and other resources in managing COVID-19. The NEC also called on government to live up to its constitutional responsibility of protecting the lives and property of Nigerians. The NEC warned that Nigerian workers would no longer tolerate the escalation of insecurity in the country as it presents huge dangers to citizens, economic growth and national stability.

The NEC re-echoed that the fundamental rights to peaceful assembly and protests by citizens is a universal right that should never be breached. NEC, thus, condemned anti-union practices by some employers in Nigeria. In the case of the Corporate Affairs Commission, the NEC resolved to mobilize Nigerian workers to picket the national headquarters of the CAC for three days. The NEC also resolved to issue a 14-day ultimatum to the management of Turkish Airline and Caverton Helicopter to reinstate all sacked trade union executives and desist from further anti-union actions. The NEC implored banks in Nigeria to desist from imposing unrealistic revenue targets on their employees and called on the Central Bank of Nigeria to direct all banks in Nigeria to constitute the employers' representative body – **the Nigeria Employers Association of Banks and Allied Institutions** – to ensure seamless collective bargaining machinery in Nigeria's

banking industry. NEC also rejected concession of Nigeria's major airports.

The NEC resolved that government should immediately address the conditions within its control that are driving up electricity tariff in Nigeria. The NEC called for a review of the power sector privatization programme which is already overdue for review. The NEC also called for the reduction of the cost of gas to 1.5 cents and also the scrapping of the use of US and Nigeria inflation rates to determine the cost of gas to GENCOs. The NEC also called on government to step up on the mass distribution of meters to electricity consumers all over Nigeria. The NEC resolved to reject deregulation as long as it is import driven. NEC reiterated the traditional position of Congress that government should rehabilitate and revamp Nigeria's local refineries as a sustainable solution to incessant increases in the pump price of petrol. The NEC posited that Nigeria's refineries can be made to work in a short time once government asserts the political will to do so. The NEC urged the Nigerian government to find ways and means to shield Nigerians from the volatilities in the international crude oil market. NEC also demanded that the template used in determining the pump price of PMS which includes inbuilt charges and inflationary trend should be reviewed to the benefit of Nigerians.

The NEC-in-Session directed all states where the national minimum wage of N30000 is yet to be paid to immediately proceed on industrial action.

In this edition of the State of the Struggle, we bring you the concluding part of the interview with Comrade Governor Adams Oshiomhole. We also bring you through the International Window an article from Michael Leslie of the AFL-CIO on the contributions of American Trade Unions to the current political leadership in the United States of America. Also, on the political score we have a piece from Comrade Baba Aye on the struggle for a Working-Class Political Party. We also serve you the usual bouquet – News from Affiliate Unions and State Councils and few other articles.

Happy Reading!

Comrade Emmanuel Ugboaja, Esq

+234 8033015037

stateofthestruggle@gmail.com

COVER STORY



STATE OF THE NATION

COVID-19 – Economy – Insecurity – Energy Crisis – Violations of Human and Trade Union Rights

Cover Story by: Benson Upah, Esq :: Dr. Onoho'Ohmen Ebhohimhen :: Echezona Asuzu

STATE OF THE NATION

COVID-19 – Economy – Insecurity – Energy Crisis – Violations of Human and Trade Union Rights

From the challenge posed by the impact of the novel corona virus disease (COVID-19), in what is popularly referred to as the second wave of the pandemic, to the faltering of the national economy, to the searing siege of insecurity pervading the country like a dark cloud, to a sleuth of violations of workers and trade union rights especially the right to decent wages as benchmarked by the national minimum wage, these are clearly troubling times for the country.

COVID-19 continues to impact the world of work and Nigeria is not an exception to the pandemic's overreach. Between 2020 and now, about 114 million jobs were lost temporarily and a further 33 million jobs disappeared permanently due to COVID-19. In the 2021 New Year message of the President of Congress and ITUC, Comrade Ayuba Wabba, mni, he reiterated the need for workers in Nigeria and indeed all over the world to exercise caution and prioritize safety as the world engages a renewed onslaught of the novel corona virus. The Congress President while applauding the development of vaccines for the management of the novel corona cautioned that the development of vaccine is not enough. He stressed that there is need to make the vaccines affable, affordable, and available. He made a case for the production of pro-poor vaccines for developing and under developed economies of the world.

Already, there are campaigns spearheaded by the International Trade Union Confederation for the listing of COVID-19 as a notifiable and compensable occupational disease. At the last World Social Forum which took place in the last week of January 2021, and in which Congress President was one of the Guest Panelists, he made a case for this important health and safety right in addition to other workplace rights such as non-commodification of labour,

freedom of association, right to organize, respect for Collective Bargaining Agreements which are threatened by the pandemic.

On the Economy

As at the last quarter of 2020, the Nigerian economy continued to show signs of stress following the steep contraction of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the preceding second

quarter of the year under review. The stress in the economy was fueled by low crude oil output which was down by over twenty percent owing to the near total lockdown of the global economy in the second and third quarters of 2020. There was also the associated challenge of protracted perpetuation of low commodity prices especially carbon resources for most parts of 2020 spelling great economic discomfitures for economies that are primarily dependent on natural resources.

Furthermore, the last two quarters of 2020 were marked by very disconcerting double-digit inflation. This was amidst a very tight foreign exchange liquidity propelled by the factors already enumerated in the foregoing. The impact of these economic downturns includes stifled growth in production, reduced household purchasing power, a decline in general business activities in the country, worsened crime situation in the country which has in great ways exacerbated widespread discontentment and unrests in the



land.

The Central Bank of Nigeria (CNB) through its Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) conceded that the national economy is stuck in the murky waters of stagflation with simultaneously intensifying inflationary pressures and contracting economic output. Going forward, there are glimmers of hope. There are forecasts that the economy would witness some recovery in 2021 as both domestic and



international demands pick up. Yet, the possibilities of volatilities in the global commodities market especially the crude oil market remains very high. There are projections of a Gross Domestic Product growth of 1.9% in 2021 and with possibilities of continuous climb up to 2.9% in 2022.

Domestic Energy Crisis

Ironically, while the expectations of improvement in the price of crude oil elicits great hope for increased foreign exchange revenue to the coffers of Nigeria, there are well founded fears that the same would only exacerbate the domestic energy crisis in the country. This unfortunate and avoidable situation is a direct consequence of the mismanagement of the resources and wealth produced by workers by the ruling class.

The current comatose state of all the four public refineries in Nigeria and the continued neglect of same by successive Nigerian governments has brought us to this point of domestic energy crisis where higher receipts of oil revenue by government translates to astronomical hike in the pump price of refined petroleum products and electricity tariff. The attendant excruciating pains this leaves on workers, citizens and businesses are unimaginable. The stagflation status of the Nigerian economy especially as marked high inflationary trends takes a direct hit from the mismanagement of Nigeria's carbon resources. The combined effect of high inflation and escalating energy costs has pauperized the vast majority of workers in our country. This was the basis for Congress insistence during the negotiations that led to the September 28, 2020 agreement with government that further increases in the cost of energy must be shelved until the root causes of the volatilities and instability in Nigeria's energy sector are identified and discussed. This was what informed the setting up of the two technical committees on the downstream petroleum sub sector and the electricity sector. These committees which have some of our affiliate unions as members have met a number of times and engaged with different stakeholders on the way forward.

On the 1st of February 2021, the Technical Committee on the downstream petroleum sub sector with special mandate on considerations for the pricing of the Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) submitted its report. Key highlights of its submission include the position of government that the local pricing of the PMS and other refined petroleum products is tied to what is known as "Import Purchasing Parity". This simply means that the pump price of petrol in Nigeria is determined by the combination of the price of crude oil in the international market, foreign exchange realities and ancillary costs of conveying the refined petroleum products to Nigeria and on

to dispensing points.

The revelations from our engagement with the electricity sector reveals the same situation of the surrender of our economy to neo-liberal forces whose brief is simply the opening our borders to mass influx of finished goods, continuous devaluation of our currency and mass pauperization of our people. It was during our discussion with stakeholders in the electricity sector that it was established that the costing of the gas used to run our power stations is denominated in United States dollars. The gas we are talking about is richly available in Nigeria and produced in our country. When our representatives in the committee inquired on the reason for this strange practice, we were told that this was at the behest of the major global financial concerns. It was also established during the discussions that the inflation in the United States of America is computed as part of the cost element in electricity tariff in Nigeria.

Unfortunately, while Labour was discussing the challenges in our downstream petroleum sub sector and the electricity sector, the government in November 2020 yet again increased the pump price of petrol. Organized Labour immediately kicked against this and reminded government that its action was in violation of the spirit and letters of our agreement of September 28, 2020. We warned that if the hike in the pump price of petrol was not reversed, Organized Labour would be left with no other option than to resort to industrial actions. The government was then forced to reduce the initial increase in the pump price of petrol. Yet again, at the beginning of this year, there was a fresh attempt to hike electricity tariff. Again, Organized Labour warned that such would open a floodgate of very serious industrial response from workers. In its reaction, government announced the reversal of the increase in electricity tariff.

Nigerians might be enjoying some momentary respite from a rash of insensitive utilities price increases by government but there are very strong indications that if the government refuses to fix our public refineries and continues to use the Import Purchasing Parity model as its petrol pricing template, there would be no end to increases in the price of petrol. There is no gainsaying the fact that as the price of crude oil gravitates towards 60US\$ in the international commodities market, there are chances that very soon government would announce petrol price increases. Some projections say the increases may be up to N221 per litre of petrol. The same situation would apply to electricity tariff since the price of gas used in running our power generation stations are calculated in foreign currency. This scenario in addition to expected shocks from the second wave of the

corona virus pandemic would sound the death knell on many household subsistence and the ability of many local manufacturing concerns to survive.

In light of this grim and gloomy outlook in our domestic energy sector, Nigerians must be prepared for a long-drawn struggle. We had implored successive governments to focus on internal capacitation for economic recovery and sustainable development. The knee jerk short fix approach has clearly failed. The chicken has come home to roost. It would be unfair and unjust to transfer this humungous burden of governance failure on the Nigerian workers and people. Enough is Enough!

A political economy insight into electricity supply and pricing crisis in Nigeria

Nigeria is in the vortex of a crisis of underproduction. It is a disconcertingly unabating crisis that dates back in historicity. The trite explication of the crisis tended to be arrayed against the backdrop argument that the natural resources and products of our country are commodified and geared toward export-orientation. For instance, Nigeria produces foodstuff but citizens go to bed hungry; our country produces crude oil but imports refined products and so on. Indeed, the latter illustration underpins the central argument about commodification. The scholarly tendency in the discussion of commodification appears to consider it as important and simultaneously a consequence. This angle veers the analytical trajectory towards the binary disputations. In other words, the question could legitimately arise, whether removing products from their natural use and instead, transforming them into commodities of international trade could result in underdevelopment. The received knowledge in the area inclines towards the categorical and replete with dire implications. In sum, the outcomes are exemplified in the discourse of underdevelopment. Although often misunderstood, underdevelopment is *not* the visible absence of social and economic infrastructure of lack of treated water supply, inadequate electricity or poor road, rail and air transportation infrastructure. These are results, *not* the causative factor. On the contrary, a theoretical clarification of underdevelopment renders it in non-binary conceptual themes to evince the non-optimal utilisation of available resources to expand social and economic possibilities.

Thus, in historicizing the recent economic crisis of underproduction in our country attention should turn to 1981 precisely, the *annus horibilis*, of the disarticulated trajectory of the national economy. A respected political interlocutor at

the time likened the problems of the economy to a rudderless ship heading for a rock. And so, he suggested that unless the ship of the Nigerian nation-state was steered in a different and satisfactory direction, it would hit the rock and sink every Nigerian on board. Unfortunately, the partisan political brickbats of the time did not allow a sober examination of the point albeit, genuine but predicated on the crisis of balance of payment as an illustration of the dominant argument.

It should be understood, therefore, that the enervating economic crisis has endured in our country for too long and that it resonates in diverse sore social pathological manifestations. Among others is the prevailing energy crisis in our country, especially the problem of electricity supply, pricing and collection. These concerns currently bedevil the prospects of national development and conscious human efforts to transform the society.

This brief contribution would attempt to analyse not chiefly the relevance of electric energy in its causal interconnection as a primary use-value. That angle of the treatise is too often framed simplistically and ensconced in the contextual habiliment of domestic science of food preparation, preservation and cooling of homes. Rather, our interest revolves around co-optation of electric energy to exert a greater import, that is, powering job creation and retention, propelling transportation networks for the necessary social and economic interface, and enabling industry to run rhythmically for productive value creation. In other words, the availability of electric energy feeds into the utilitarian demands of economic growth. Hence, it could be safely stated that the economic development of our country, including social and human capital accumulation would inescapably interrelate with the quantum and spread of electric energy to transform our socio-economy, celebrate human live-in experience and master our immediate environment.

Comparative literature on electric energy as a use-value and source of surplus-value creation suggest a clarification since the performance and prospects of a balanced power typify one of the fundamental problems of developing countries. On the one hand, the quantum of energy to drive economic growth intertwines and this is evidenced in numerous long-run analyses. In Latin American economies, for example, electricity consumption is recognised as a measure of economic growth. In some southeast Asian countries, the





electricity crisis that surfaced in 2006 was interlinked to root causes traceable to the policy decisions of the 1990s. On the other, scholars like Zaman K, et al. reasoned that the determinants of electricity consumption in Pakistan, as another example, tantamount to a functional attempt at placing old wine in a new bottle. Jamil and Ahmad in examining the relationship between electricity consumption and electricity prices argued that there is an implication for GDP growth. In all, most scholars are agreed that mitigation of the electric energy crises is not only feasible but necessary by leveraging the internal potentials.

A report in the *Nigerian Economist* in October 1987 traced the genesis of power generation in Nigeria. The data indicated that the history of electricity generation in Nigeria dates back to 1886 with the use of generators to provide 60 kilowatts. Subsequent efforts by the private businesses and public authorities resulted in less than 1000 megawatts of electricity supply at Nigeria's independence in 1960. It was no wonder that the first post-independence Nigeria's development plan (1962-1968) assumes the practical and empowering logic of harnessing inherently abundant but untapped domestic electric energy resources to drive rapid economic development. In effect, the future development prospects of Nigeria were justifiably interrogated against the reasoning that they were inevitably dependent to a good degree on the availability of an abundant energy supply. In historicity, therefore, the elaborate planning for a dam on the River Niger was one of the results of the futuristic empowerment outcome.

The consociating of national electricity networks reportedly began in 1950, when the Legislative Council of Nigeria enacted a law to establish the Electricity Corporation of Nigeria (ECN). Its essential duties were to develop and supply electricity on a national platform. This, inter alia, led ECN to take over the electricity sectoral activities of the Public Works Department (PWD) and the generating sets of Native Authorities. In 1951, the ECN managed 46 megawatts of electricity; between 1952 and 1960, established coal-powered turbines at Oji River and **Ijora**, Lagos. Subsequently, preliminary plans for a transmission network linked the power generating sites with urban, commercial centres. In 1961, ECN had the 132 KV transmission line between Lagos and Ibadan through Shagamu and in 1965, the line was extended to Oshogbo, Benin and Ughelli, which

represented the Western System.

It should surprise though that after 136 years of electricity supply in Nigeria, making electric energy resource a fundamental factor in development remains the major challenge for the development in our country.

At the point of the unbundling of the PHCN, the installed electricity capacity of Nigeria stood at 12,746.2 megawatts, out of which 1,930 megawatts or 11.78 per cent are generated from hydro resources and the rest 10,813.2 or 88.22 per cent, from thermal stations. While the extant installed capacity was less than a third of the 40,000 megawatts needed in the economy, the maximum distribution hovered around 4,000 megawatts. This is despite the addition of close to 3,000 megawatts from other power generation plants under the auspices of State Governments. In brief, despite the insufficiency of available electric energy vis-à-vis the requirement of the economy, many of the generating plants are either idle or working at less than fifty per cent of installed capacity.

Table I: Installed Electricity Generation Capacity in Nigeria (2013)

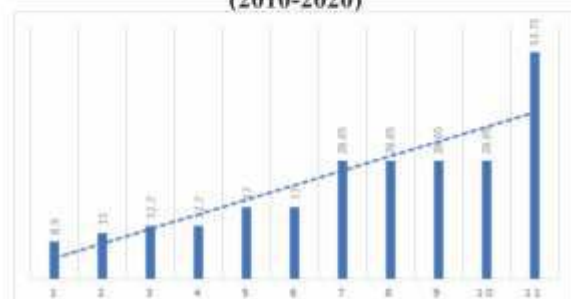
Company	Type	Capacity
Kainji Jebba Power Plc	Hydro	1,330MW
Ughelli Power Plc	Gas	942MW
Sapele Power Plc	Gas	1,020MW
Shiroro Power Plc	Hydro	600MW
Afam Power Plc	Gas	987.2MW
Niger Delta Power Holding Company	Gas	5,455MW
Independent Power Plants	Gas	1,392MW
Egbin Power Plc	Gas	1,020MW

Sources: NERC. (n.d.) *Power Generation in Nigeria*. www.nercng.org. Accessed 22 Feb. 2021.

KPMG. (September 2016). *A Guide to the Nigerian Power Sector*.

The lagged supply of electricity has not deterred the Nigerian electric sector industry (NESI) regulator, the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC) from raising tariff payable since the onset of the privatisation of the NESI. A case reported to Congress in January 2021 by a customer in Kaduna revealed an exponential increase in bills payable, ranging from N8.90 per kW/h in 2010 to N53.71 per kW/h in 2020.

Figure I: Electricity Tariff Increase in Kaduna (2010-2020)



The commonplace explanation for the exponential tariff rates had been poor energy flow within the national grid and the need to reduce losses in the network. This information was derived from the review of the tariff model that shows that there are significant provisions for the technical and commercial losses as a result of the dilapidated state of the infrastructure.

However, it is also plausible that wrong indices feature in the billing of electricity in Nigeria. For example, the Multi-Year Tariff Order (MYTO) assumptions for electricity pricing in Nigeria of 2020 contain strange economic variables which are not sustainable in fact or logic and unlikely to be countenanced elsewhere as they were simply insupportable.

TABLE 2: MYTO Assumption 2020 Extraordinary Review

S/No.	PARAMETER /COST ELEMENT	INPUT COST
1.	Nigerian inflation rate	12.82%
2.	Exchange rate (₦/US\$)	383.8
3.	US inflation rate	1%
4.	Gas price	US\$2.50/mmBtu
5.	Sent out generation (MWh/h)	4.646
6.	Weighted generation price	₦25.6
7.	TCN and Admin Charge (₦/KWh)	7.80
8.	Delivered to Discos (MWh/h)	varies
9.	Aggregate Technical Commercial and Collection (ATC&C) Losses	~ 11.94

*Source: NERC (2020). MULTI YEAR TARIFF ORDER (ORDER/ NERC/ 199/ 2020).
Abuja: Nigeria Electricity Regulatory Commission, pp.4-5. These are comparative key indices considered in the evaluation of the application for tariff increase.*

The challenge of electricity supply in Nigeria merits more than the cursory interest taken by the elite segment Peter Ekeh characterised as the two publics in Nigeria.

State of Insecurity

In the early hours of Sunday, 8th February 2021, the Chairperson of the Taraba State Council of the Nigeria Labour Congress, Comrade Peter Jediel was kidnapped in his house at Sunkani, Ardo Kola Local Government Area of Taraba State. The incident happened exactly two weeks after the Chairman of

The foregoing real time live experiences demonstrate the level of audacity and impunity that the perpetration of crime has assumed in Nigeria. The reprehensible and barbaric act of kidnap for ransom has blossomed into a flourishing crime enterprise in Nigeria as hundreds of Nigerians lose their freedom on daily basis to criminal masterminds operating in the bushes, highways and now residential communities of our country. The war on terror keeps suffering a lot of setbacks as we continue to lose swathes of territories to terrorists. And the government appears completely helpless. The continued resort by government to plea

bargains with criminal elements among us does very little to assuage the foreboding feeling of the helplessness of our government. In the absence of clear plans by government to salvage the crisis, citizens now resort to self-help. The method of such self-help sometimes exacerbates already existing tension.

The grand deterioration of the security situation in

our country continues to indicate that we are almost losing the very soul of nationhood. All over the country there are security crises. The prevailing strains of insecurity are already tugging at very sensitive joints in our ethno-religious diversity with the attendant possibilities of the escalation of underlying ethno-religious tensions into major conflagrations.

These times are really dire and dreary. There is no



Ardo Kola local government council, Honourable Salihu Dovo was also kidnapped and murdered. Not long ago in Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, a journalist with the Punch newspapers, Comrade Okechukwu Nnodim was kidnapped, not on the highway, but right inside his house on the popular Arab Road, Kubwa, Abuja. Not long ago, the Nigeria Union of Teachers protested against the kidnap of teachers and increasing vulnerability of our schools.

gainsaying the fact that at the root of the current security challenge in the country is the mass pauperization of our people, erosion of values and the decay of public institutions including our revered security establishments. These are only flames of a low burning class war within a frail and frigid ruling class and the criminal reaction of some members of deprived segments of our society to the intense heat generated by the enveloping anomaly. Part of the challenge is the mindless de-industrialization of our economy and the disengagement of the masses of our people from productive activities. This has come with costly consequences. Even the elites who felt the scourge of insecurity would always be far away from their abode no longer feel safe.

As part of the resolutions of the 12th National Delegates Conference of Congress, there were plans early last year to convene a National Security Summit. The aim was to bring stakeholders in Nigeria's security architecture to provide honest feedback to the crisis of insecurity we all face. Plans for the summit were already being perfected and even the former Head of State, General Abdulsalam Abubakar had indicated his willingness to chair the Summit before the nationwide lockdown occasioned by the first wave of COVID-19 forced us to shelve the convocation of the Security Summit. This year, God willing, we would prioritize the convocation of this very important Security Summit. We hope to use the summit's outcome to engage government and relevant stakeholders on the need for an immediate arrest of the drift of our dear country to the precipice.

During the last meeting of the National Executive Council of Congress held on 17th February 2021, NEC asked government to take drastic steps to address the rising trend of unemployment in Nigeria especially youth unemployment as it posited that there is a direct correlation between unemployment and insecurity. The NEC-in-Session urged government to promote industrialization and mass employment. The NEC also demanded that our security agencies work in harmony and in silos and with the best of equipment.

National Minimum Wage

Since the signing into law of the national minimum wage of N30,000 on April 18, 2019 by President Muhammadu Buhari, there has been very desperate attempts by some state and local governments to circumvent the law. While some states till now are yet to commence payment of the national minimum wage of N30,000 to their workers, some others are yet to conclude negotiations on the consequential

salary increases owing to the new national minimum wage. In addition, a few states that had concluded negotiations on consequential salary adjustment went ahead to reverse such agreements reached with workers citing the economic downturn occasioned by COVID-19.

Comrades, these situations are completely unacceptable to Congress. The secretariat under the mandate of the leadership of Congress have required from state councils update on the implementation of the national minimum wage and the consequential adjustment in salaries by state governments. We are already acting on the information provided by our state councils. A couple of days ago, the intervention of Congress and the pressure from the NLC Kano State Council forced the Kano State Government to reverse its earlier decision to suspend the implementation of the new national minimum wage and the consequential adjustment in salaries. In Imo State, the state government not only refused to pay the national minimum wage and conclude negotiations for salary adjustment but went ahead to attack the elected leadership of Congress in Imo State. This affront on workers is being taken engaged headlong by Congress leadership.

At the last meeting of the National Executive Council, it was resolved that all states where the state governments have refused to abide by the provisions of the law to implement the new national minimum wage should embark on statewide industrial actions.

Already, NLC State Councils where the national minimum wage is yet to be implemented have started mobilizing workers in the state for very robust industrial actions to pass the message clearly to government and other employers of labour that the quest by Nigerian workers for decent wages can never be compromised.

While the leadership of Congress tackled the obstinacy by some state governors in implementing the new national minimum wage, some reactionary politicians in the House of Representatives took the battle against the national minimum wage to the lower chambers of the National Assembly. In a bill sponsored by Honourable Garba Datti Muhammad representing Sabon Gari Federal Constituency in Kaduna State, the lawmaker and four other co-sponsors want the National Minimum Wage moved from the Exclusive List to the Concurrent List. The names of the other four co-sponsors include Honourable Mzondu Benjamin Bem representing Guma Makurdi Federal Constituency in Benue State, Honourable Uzoma Nkem-Abonta representing Ukwa East/West, Honourable Sada



Soli representing Jibia/Kaita Federal Constituency in Katsina State and Honourable Benson Babajimi Adegoke representing Ikorodu Federal Constituency of Lagos State.

Rejecting the position of the lawmakers, the President of the NLC, Comrade Ayuba Wabba wrote the leadership of the House of Representatives warning of the dire implications of passing the bill he described as toxic to the interests of Nigerian workers. Congress President posited that the National Minimum Wage has a global standard as determined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) Minimum Wage Fixing Machinery Convention (Convention 026 of 1928) adopted by Nigeria under a democratic government on 16th June 1961. He argued that a successive democratically elected government in 1981 paid a national minimum wage whose dollar value or equivalent is more than twice the dollar equivalent of the present N30,000 national minimum wage.

According to Congress President, each ILO member State that adopts the Minimum Wage Convention undertakes to establish a system of minimum wage which covers all the sectors of the economy including the Organized Private Sector. Comrade Wabba averred that minimum wage laws are in force in approximately 90% of the countries of the world today including the United States where state minimums are higher than the national minimum. Minimum wage laws prohibit employers from hiring employees or workers for less than a given wage which is set hourly, daily or monthly. He said that closer home, Ghana, Kenya and South Africa (countries with which Nigeria is regularly peer-reviewed) are among countries with national minimum wage laws. Ghana reviews its law every two years while some countries peg payment of national minimum wage on inflation rate.

In furtherance of its obligation to ILO Convention 026 (by virtue of its ratification by Nigeria) and appreciation of best global best practices, the national minimum wage is domiciled in the Legislative Exclusive List Section 34 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended). He expressed utmost dismay that the issue of the national minimum wage could be discussed by the honourable House without invitation to or input by organised Labour, yet the House, which he described as its historical formidable ally.

Congress President went on to submit that quite often, for critics of the national minimum wage on Exclusive Legislative List, the major reason for wanting the minimum wage on the Concurrent Legislative List, is to enable states negotiate and fix their minimum wage, yet the concept, rationale and logic for a national minimum wage are to ensure that employees in government and organised private sector, but particularly, the unorganised, the unskilled and the vulnerable in the highly un-governed space known as the informal sector, are protected. By protection, he said that such entails that the vulnerable are

not overly exposed or exploited by their employers who pay wages so miserable they create a community of the working poor. According to him, the implications of creating communities of the working poor are obvious and range from the socio-economic to the political in collateral circumstances.

Congress President went on to make the point that the national minimum wage does not preclude states from fixing their own minimums, except that they should not be lower than the national minimum which is the benchmark. He said that in most countries, the state minimums are much higher than the national minimum. Here in Nigeria, he cited examples of states paying higher than the national minimum. He also averred that it is pertinent that a national minimum wage is not synonymous with various salary structures adopted by the 36 states of the federation as each state adopts and pays what it can afford.

Comrade Ayuba Wabba also stressed the point that the national minimum wage is a product of negotiations between Labour, the Organized Private Sector and Government (represented by state governments, federal government and relevant departments, agencies and parastatals), and paying it is not a favour to workers.

He said that a number of issues are taken into consideration during negotiations with data provided are by appropriate government agencies. At the end of negotiations, the final outcome or national minimum wage is reasonable, realistic and implementable. Precedence shows that ability to pay is not dependent on surplus resources but on prudence, financial discipline, and the will to pay. The President said that the logic of a national minimum wage has a calming effect on the entire nation including enhanced productivity, capacity and standard of living and should not be confused with the issue of fiscal federalism. He went on to submit that a country-by-country analysis of minimum wage laws in the 26 federal nations of the world renders hollow the argument of those who want the national

minimum wage removed from the Exclusive Legislative List. This analysis reveals that jurisdictional arrangement is not an issue of federalism. Rather, it reflects the historical path and efficiency considerations of individual nations.

Comrade Wabba also averred that moving the minimum wage to the Concurrent Legislative List has its grave implications including the following:

a) It could lead to the exclusion of the private sector (both organised and unorganised) from the concept, rationale and logic of a national minimum wage, yet, it is in this informal sector, as we pointed out earlier, that horrendously unfair labour practices take place;



b) Introduction of politics into wage determination, with dire consequences as was the case during the First Republic;

c) Negation of the principle of collective bargaining with an inevitable destination, a hostile industrial space with diminished productivity and national security implications;

d) It will create over time an undesirable situation whereby state minimum variations across states become a "beggar-thy-neighbour" instrument in seeking to attract economic establishments to locate in states. It is in order to avoid this type of injurious competition that income tax, personal or company, is legislated on exclusively by the Centre;

Moreover, he said that a multiplicity of minimum wages will serve to create a segmentation of the Labour market, which could weaken national economic growth and cohesion.

In light of the foregoing, the NLC President urged the House of Representatives to most kindly retain on the Exclusive Legislative List the minimum wage in line with national precedent and international best practices. Furthermore, as an aside, he said that workers find it curious that those seeking the removal of the minimum wage from the Exclusive Legislative List do not seem to see the parallel between centrally-determining the remunerations of political office holders from local government councillors to all other public political offices. Finally, Comrade Ayuba Wabba stressed that at the point we are today in our national life, and given the plethora of security threats across the country, there is need to strengthen protection around wages rather than weaken them.

Political Situation/Good Governance

As the countdown to the 2023 general elections, there have been a number of initiatives towards citizens mobilization for free and fair elections and the enthronement of popular and progressive leadership in Nigeria. Owing to Congress understanding of the place of credible elections in good governance and given the historical role of Congress in shaping the electoral

landscape of Nigeria particularly with regards to activism for free and fair elections, Congress has engaged the current efforts to improve the quality of the 2023 general elections and also subsequent elections in the country. The Congress in continuation of its leadership of the civil society agenda for the rejigging of the electoral space during the 2007-2011 campaign for electoral reform has developed a position paper on critical electoral reforms for the 2023 elections and beyond. This is in response to the continued pervasive influence of money in our politics and also the heavy deployment of violence during elections by unscrupulous politicians.

The position paper of Congress was submitted at the Public Hearing on Electoral Reform which took place at the National Assembly on the 9th of December 2020. Some of the key submissions of Congress include the revisiting and full implementation of the Justice Uwais led Electoral Reform Committee which recommendations include the democratization of the appointment process into INEC leadership, establishment of Election Offences Commission, unbundling of INEC, Rejig of Nigeria's Electoral System through the institutionalization of Proportional Representation (PR) and incremental substitution of First-Pass-the-Post (FPTP) Electoral System with Proportional Representation starting from thirty percent PR representation with Women, Youth, Labour, Persons with Disabilities as beneficiaries. Other submissions include the use of electronic voting and the permission of diaspora voting.

In furtherance of the bold efforts of Congress to rescue the country from a succession of a misruling political class, there has been some progress in the initiatives to recover the Labour Party. The NLC Political Commission is engaging with stakeholders within and without the labour movement for the birthing of a political vehicle for the Nigerian working class. Recently, the secretariat engaged the former President of Congress, former Governor of Edo State and the immediate past National Chairman of the ruling political party, Comrade Adams Oshiomhole on this and other matters.

Cover Story by:

Benson Upah, Esq

Dr. Onoho'Ohmen Ebhohimhen

Echezona Asuzu





MEDICAL & HEALTH WORKERS' UNION OF NIGERIA



HAPPY NEW YEAR 2021

The year 2020 will go down in history as a year in which Nigeria and the whole world was laid low by the COVID-19 Pandemic which not only claimed millions of lives but also brought the global economy to its knees.

Our experience in Nigeria has not been any different although we were fortunate to have recorded relatively fewer fatalities from the pandemic. But the economic impact has been devastating following the prolonged but necessary lockdown instituted by the authorities to curb the spread. The ever vibrant and productive economic relations Nigeria is known for was terribly hit as millions of livelihoods shrunk or were shut down completely.

The challenge of insecurity ravaging the land also proved to be huda-headed in different forms and in various parts of the country; terrorism, kidnapping, banditry, armed robbery, sectarian crises and the like.

Beyond all these, government has continued to add to the pains of Nigerians with the implementation of retrogressive policies like the increase in the tariff of electricity and fuel.

While appreciating efforts of government in mitigating the effect through the adoption of protocols that restricted all manners of physical contact and interaction and cushioning the effect of the lockdown by instituting a regime of palliatives, we are heavily dismayed at the segregative treatment being meted out to our members who are at the frontline of the battle to prevent the spread of the pandemic.

Address: Ayuba Wabba House,
Durumi, Area 1, Garki
Tel: + 234-801-603-80582

HEALTH WORKERS' UNION OF NIGERIA

At the last count, over 3,000 of our members have been infected with the disease with 346 paying the supreme sacrifice. Paradoxically, however, a clear segregative policy was introduced to deny our members their rightful percentage of the COVID-19 hazard allowance meant for health workers.

In all, notwithstanding the prevailing atmosphere of gloom, the Nigerian Worker has continued to give his best and also remaining hopeful that the future would bring forth better atmosphere.

As we welcome the year 2021, we at the Medical and Health Workers' Union of Nigeria are proud to identify with our versatile and indefatigable leader, **Comrade Ayuba Wabba, mni** for providing purposeful leadership to Global Workers and Nigerian Workers in particular. We congratulate also the entirety of Nigerian Workers for effectively portraying the Nigerian spirit of resilience and Health Workers all over the country for standing up to be counted in the treatment and battle against the spread of COVID-19.

We are optimistic that despite our prevailing circumstances, tomorrow will be better. **"Forward for Ever"**

Long Live Medical & Health Workers' Union of Nigeria!
Long Live Nigeria Labour Congress!!
Long Live Federal Republic of Nigeria!!!

Signed:

Com. (Dr.) Biobelemye Joy Josiah
National President, MHWUN

Com. (Dr.) Silas G. Adamu
Secretary General, MHWUN



Com. (Dr.) Silas G. Adamu
Secretary General, MHWUN

use, Plot 803 Cadastral Zone,
rki, Abuja – Nigeria.

| E-mail: info@mhwun.org



VETERANS CORNER

COMR. ADAMS
OSHIOMHOLE

FORMER NLC PRESIDENT
FORMER EDO STATE GOVERNOR



SOS: What is your legacy as APC National Chairman?

Comrade Adams: Nigeria's political parties are remarkably different. What I tried to achieve when I was the Chairman was to try and change the narrative. First, was to return the party back to party members. This is because in trade unions, it is the workers not anyone else that determine who becomes the President or General Secretary of the NLC or Presidents/General Secretaries of industrial unions or who becomes the branch Chairman/branch Secretaries. They were elected by the members. When I was at Arewa textiles, the workers, about four thousand of them, on a given date would meet and vote for the Chairman and the Secretary and even those going for the delegates would be elected from your constituents.

You may have heard of the debate in the APC when we tried to hold primaries where if you want to contest party primaries, let the party members select the candidates. That was a major battle. I was fortunate I had the full support of President Buhari that direct primaries should be preferred because it is difficult to corrupt the process. It is difficult to procure the support of every member because they will be voting in their thousands. But with indirect primaries, you will have money bags with money to pay delegates. You must have read in the papers how delegates are warehoused, sometimes in another state so that your opponent cannot access them. So, you ferry them from where you have warehoused them to the venue of the primaries and you pay them one hundred thousand or two hundred thousand or sometimes one hundred and fifty thousand.

So, I tried as Chairman to bring popular participation into the APC. Those were tough decisions and some Governors never forgave me for that. In taking that decision, in our NEC meeting, we explained the beauty of popular participation in terms of ownership that it confers on people and the transparency. The

President supported that. Very few Governors supported that. That was how they came out with this policy of we may have direct or indirect primaries depending on what state chapters decided. That was a compromise position. So, those were the kind of things I tried to bring in.

The second one is on party financing. When NLC sponsors someone to go and contest an election somewhere we don't say go and borrow money because you are not going there to represent yourself. So, I think for the first time in the history of political parties, I said if people win the primary tickets on our platform then the party should provide some support. So, we provided support to the three hundred and sixty candidates for House of Reps. We also provided support for the one hundred and nine senatorial candidates.

Every senatorial candidate of the APC got twenty million Naira and every House of Reps candidate got ten million Naira. Now, that is the first time that any political party candidate was getting support from their political party treasury. And for the period I was there only one Governor contributed something to the APC treasury. This is because many of them believed that if they were not controlling the party, they will not fund the party. My view is you do not elect me as the Chairman of the Party and you mortgage the powers given to me and the powers given to the National Working Committee. That is how we operate in the Labour movement. I was going there to change the office not for the office to change me. The issues are also affected by some political calculations. Those were the kind of changes we brought on board. There were other issues which I don't think one needs to explain.

You remember the situation in 2015 when the APC



won the general election but could not manage the victory. We ended up having an APC Senate President and a PDP Deputy Senate President. I mean it is unheard of. You have the Democrats in the US Congress with the numbers and then Pelosi is Democrat and they go and bring a minority party as the Deputy. That is how they could not assert or manage the victory of 2015. But this time we asserted that if you emerge on our platform, we will debate and will discuss with the Parliamentarians and we agree to ensure that even while the people go to vote, the norms had to be observed including the fact that the leadership of the chambers of the Assembly lies with the party with the majority of members.

Now, there are core values even in the NLC that has helped keep the NLC together. Even with all the internal contestations, there are some elements of shared values. This is so strong that even when President Obasanjo wanted to factionalize and weaken the NLC, he failed.

SOS: You have been a whiz-kid from the beginning. You built a union secretariat which was the envy of unions and you went on to become the first private sector person to head the Nigerian Labour Congress, you went on to become the first union person to become a Governor and also the Chairman of a national ruling party and counting. First, is it possible to have a second Adams. Two, what keeps driving you? What is the motivation behind this great energy?

Comrade Adams: I want to make this short. I think I have been too detailed in my responses. I think my unique life experiences. Well, they are not unique, my circumstances of birth and every other thing that followed prepared me for a tough life and I had very limited expectations of what I can be. All I wanted to be for example was to be a driver because I used to see in my village people wearing uniform and they used to drive Jeep and they write on it "Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources" and the one who used to allocate one or two or three hectares of

land to farmers in my community. I was like 'waooh!' I wished to be a driver like one of them. You know some of them used to carry yams for my father. I wanted them to teach me how to drive. Now, I know that that was not necessary because with government vehicle they could not teach how to drive.

So, my expectation was not much. So, out of my desperation to survive, after my secondary school, my father handed me over to a guy in my town who lived in Ibadan and owned a bakery. I worked in his bakery and carried bread to go and hawk. So, I thought "would hawking bread be all I would ever do". And I said, "this cannot be". So, I started asking questions and once the man heard that I had started asking questions, he promptly asked me to go home that he had set up another factory in Jato near my village. It was hard enough to do this job in Ibadan so I said to myself that I would not do this job in my village. That was how I ended up going to Kebbi which took us about three or four days journey.

We were sharing space with cows and we only had two benches reserved at the back for passengers. So, that was how I ended in Bakolori. Later, my first job was in Kaduna. This is not my complete story. Well, I am writing my memoir. So, I have had a very tough life. I got to Arewa Textile and I was deployed to the printing department. And the highest Nigerian there was a Supervisor, one Mr. Joshua. They insisted that I was too small – that I should not be employed. But thanks to the Personnel Manager, Mr. Shaaba from Niger State who said they could not teach him his job and that they should allow me to do the little I could do. So, I saw the raw abuse of capital – working twelve hours a day, 7am-7pm – always alternating like that.

I was told there was a union and that we paid ten kobo a month. But the unions were not fighting for some of our rights. So, I got very critical. That was how I joined union work. I believe that everybody has a story behind him and I am not ashamed to share my own.



The Nigerian people want a tough no nonsense leader in every aspect of life particularly when it comes to public policies and public good. They want leaders they can trust and can assert. They want to know where their leaders stood. There was no sitting on the fence. I think this was my first fights when I was sixteen-seventeen years. That was how I became Union Secretary later Chairman. At a point, they wanted to sack me, I resigned in principle because I didn't want to have it on my record that I had been sacked because we were then pursuing the proper implementation of a Collective Bargaining Agreement which was to our favour. Thereafter, I joined the services of trade unions because the Trade Union Act at that time allowed you to work for up to five unions. You can be Secretary for up to five unions. That is no longer so because the law has been amended.

With this I was more like a Consultant as I lead workers to organize one strike after another that were successful and they paid their wages. That was how I got to be quite popular. The French were very anti-union. That was how we got UMTL properly organized. I was making some money. At the end of the month, when they are paid, they will say "let us raise some money to take care of our General Secretary. Workers are very appreciative when you do something that really touch them. So, I was doing quite well and I had a car.

The point is that you cannot give what you don't have. After some time, I became more committed to defending workers' interest and that is what I intend to do for the rest of my life. I discovered I needed to have more knowledge because there were some things I did not understand during meetings with managers or management. You know, they talk of balance sheet, inflation, depreciation, working capital. Well, then my own was "if you cant pay by next week, we will be on strike – we are not interested in all these grammar" (laughter).

But the truth was that I could not handle all those sophisticated arguments. So, one day I decided to go back to school. Now, you have to believe in something. At an early age, I believed that I wanted to give my life to trade union work nothing more. Everything about me, I want to devote it to fighting for the right of workers because of what I experienced myself. At a point, I realized that I needed not just raw courage, I also needed some intellectual capacity in order to engage and that was how I sold my personal effects including a Peugeot 504 (Benson, I have shared this story with you before). I had to look for a school that was closer to the left.

That was how I ended up at Oxford, at Ruskin College which had a history of being a left-wing College. People asked me, "why did you sell car to go to College to get knowledge, they work and they buy a car – you already have a car and you are selling it." And I said yes that education is not just a means to an end but it is an end in itself. The fact that you know gives you courage, gives you a level of self-confidence. I did not want to feel inferior to anyone. If I said "yes, sir", it

is because I wanted to say "yes, sir" – not that I feel inferior. I think people have to understand that if you want to become a trade union leader, it is a conscious choice that you are making.

Number two, the minimum qualification to be a trade union leader is that you must have the courage to bear all kinds of indignities and all that the oppressor can do to dehumanize, to persecute, and do all of that to make you begin to doubt yourself. I feel the trade union movement can produce more of such leaders by first encouraging individuals to recognize that they need to go to school. And also, to know that unionism is not only driven by raw courage – that there is space for intellectualism, for research and for development.

You must encourage people to go beyond just basic education. You know when we engage government on those policies of Naira and Kobo, the price of PMS and so on, we win the argument easily which was why we had huge public support because they could not fault the arguments that we were pushing. So, I believe we could have more of that. And if you look at it – what is it that I invested in politics? It is our collective struggles. You remember we used to say, let us do the thinking before we make the decision because once we make the decision, we carry it out so that we retain public trust. Once public trust is lost, the union man is in trouble. That is why even if we have to do that strike for two weeks, we had to do it.

I read this literature and I believe in it that the strike weapon is like any other weapon and this writer said that if you don't use it once in a while, it goes rusty. And the day you decide to use it, it may not be in operational shape. Once in a while, you have to test it. It reminds me of a hunter who brings out his gun in front of the house to clean. He is doing that on purpose to let the neighbours know that it is still there. Even when he is not using it, he services it. Once in a while he fires it to send signal that the weapon is there and that it is potent. That is the rationale behind the mass actions that we had to take.

The issues that unions engage are too many. Some are issues of rights at work such as hours of work, compensation issues, maternity issues, health and safety issues – those are purely workplace issues. But when it comes to general society – cost of living issues, employment and unemployment, industrial policies, those are central and at the heart of working-class concerns. I say this because once



these issues are not tackled, the first casualties are workers who lose their jobs. A case in hand is in Kaduna textiles industry where we lost more than twenty seven thousand workers in one fell swoop.

The thing is that the combined effect of our incoherent industrial policies and our trade policies has meant the disappearance of the textile industry, the disappearance of the tyres industry. Just look at the number of cars on Nigerian roads. And just ask yourself "who manufactured all these tyres?" And then you ask yourself "has it always been so?" The answer is no. Dunlop was functioning in Ikeja. I went there a couple of times to organize strikes and do a number of things for workers. Micheline was functioning. I remembered I was there to battle with the military and the police because we were under the military regime that time but we kept insisting that they obey basic labour laws and pay competitive wages. Those firms are gone and we are importing more tyres – no questions asked.

And now is going to be worse with this African Free Trade Agreement because these companies did not relocate to Europe, they simply relocated to neighbouring African countries. Under ECOWAS protocol, they know they can bring those products to Nigeria even though they relocated them out of Nigeria. I think that in order to keep that cycle we need to have people who are educated and also committed. I think there are a couple of things that we can do to make it worthwhile for people to feel that their little sacrifices are appreciated. You should know that before you guys were recruited the general attitude of the old trade union leaders is that you don't need graduates for union work, all you need are people to organize strikes. It was okay during their time because they were suspicious of graduates. To them every graduate was a manager in making. They always invariably end up as managers. So, the suspicion of the Michael Imoudu era of the highly educated people was justified because they always end up as General Managers but that was because they were few and they were easily replacing the white people in the Nigerian business class. But as the population grows and there are not many jobs available, it is no longer every graduate that can end up as a supervisor. So, there is no need to be suspicious. So, I think happily under Sunmonu leadership or was it Chiroma, the idea of bringing in some radical student union leaders as trade unionists was

mooted. That was the beginning. I expect unions to do a little more of that. The challenge is that there are no incubators anymore. The left is almost gone.

The challenge is that everybody especially in our universities are now bread and butter scholars. It is a free-market economy and there is no more ideological perspectives of how society should be organized. So, I think labour should organize better. In the world of work today, there is no longer a situation where you are awarded long service awards. You have to be prepared to move from one place to another and that means being multi-skilled. When one sector is going down, you migrate to another sector. That requires sound educational background. The

trade unions should invest more in giving people training. And by training, I do not mean one-week seminars, two weeks seminars. Seminars are like refresher courses. You must be grounded in both theory and practice. If you lack the theoretical base, it will be difficult to construct some reality.

How you do that I do not know but you have more graduates to recruit. When you look at NANS, the outlook is not encouraging. You have to employ people of good conscience because you cannot employ just because you want to give people jobs. It must be because they share the core values of the labour movement.

There are a lot of Adams and Oshiomholes in the world of work that can be mentored.



SOS: In conclusion, I would want to ask a double barrel question. What would you consider the role of Labour in fixing our broken politics, providing conscientious leadership and engendering sustainable development in Nigeria? Then the last for me would be if you had an opportunity to correct one mistake made during your political sojourn, what would that be?

In the real world, there are mistakes you come to realize. There are mistakes you never come to terms with. You believe that what you did was right even though other people may feel otherwise. There are mistakes you will never know about. Well, I am not pretending that I am perfect? What is it that I would have done differently? There are a few things I did deliberately. I am happy that with time the country is adjusting to them now. I abolished



thirty-five years as retirement age. That is derived from my own experience. I started working at the age of 17. So, if you add 35 years to 17, I would have retired at the age of fifty-two. This means I should have retired about 18 years ago. Why would you want to retire someone at the age of fifty-two? If you are not doing blue collar work that is so stressful and your health is okay, there are no medical complications, why would you want to retire at fifty-two?

Now if you add fifty-two to thirty-five, that is eighty-seven years. So, if you live longer than eighty-seven, you would have spent more years in retirement than you did working. Now, there are clear implications for that. Where would you get a reasonable amount of pension that you can live on at old age. You know the problem of ageing like an old vehicle – maintaining an old car cost more. Your healthcare bill goes up and you now choose what to eat so that you don't commit suicide. All of that requires that you need a comfortable pension plan. So, given the logic of market because in a socialist environment, this should be no question because the calculations are not based on market logic.

Now, you have your pension package under the PFAs. You can only get at the level you contributed and matching contribution of your employer. The longer you live, it is your burden. The state has no obligation to you beyond your pension. So, how do you survive? The assumption that our pension depends on our children that when they grow up they will look after us – in a world where people are struggling to survive, graduate children are no longer able to look after themselves comfortably not to talk of having surplus to look after their parents.

So, I abolished the thirty-five years of service retirement age. I said at the minimum, you have to be at least sixty. There are instances of people changing their birth days. But we have to be honest, not many Nigerians even till today know when they were born. This is because in a typical rural Nigeria where there are no health care centres, there are still communities where nobody can read or write. So, who write down the birthdays? They still use iconic landmark events to match people's birth days. So, what happens in the year that there is no landmark event? So, affidavit is still the best way of dealing with most birth days. So, one can make a fair estimation of when you most likely enrolled into school but do not make such an estimation that suggests that you were enrolled into

primary school even before you were born (laughter).

That was what I discovered in Edo. So, we granted pardon to those who swore to fake affidavit – that is perjury. But the Governor has the power to grant pardon and we set the record at sixty years. My successor reversed it but recently President Buhari posited that people should not retire at sixty if they are teachers. So, I felt vindicated that this was what I did as Governor five years ago. Because we are just wasting our human manpower. I did a bit of labour economics. The graph for productivity outcome for white collar jobs goes up and stabilizes at a particular point. Then at about sixty or so it begins to drop. For the blue-collar job, the graph shows that stability between forty and sixty, depending on the health situation. None of these graphs shows that sixty is too old.

So, in the country we are retiring many young people. We have young Generals, Permanent Secretaries retiring at a very young age. This obtains mainly in the public sector. In the private sector, you are still working at sixty once your health is okay subject to company rules and regulations. But do you know that this issue of sixty years is not in the law but a military circular which was a simple solution to cure general mischief – finding simplistic solutions to complex matters. Because people were altering their birth records, they now said if we do not know when you were born, at least we know when you entered service.

The other thing I did was to give teachers a sense of belonging. I made a primary school headmaster a Permanent Secretary. There was no evidence that he was less productive and less efficient than others. Why would people go to teaching if they are terminated at certain grade level? I also made a secondary school principal a Permanent Secretary. Now, these are direct things I did to say that those who are below are below not because their brain is inferior, it is just a matter of opportunities. And none of them were disgraced out of office because they could not perform the role of a Permanent Secretary.

I also removed this barrier that says that state civil servant can only terminate at grade level 16 and federal civil servants at grade level 17. Nothing suggests that federal civil servants are more intelligent than state civil servants. So, why? These were general assumptions that were made with the effect that people were struggling to jump to federal civil service and be able to get to grade level 17 and pension there.

There must have been some mistakes but I do not readily recall. There must be some unfinished agenda that I had wished I had more time. But life is like that. Even in a match, you wish you had more minutes to reverse the match outcome. It is for good reason that tenure is limited.

But I will wish to return to the NLC as an honorary something. I feel more at home with labour. The truth is that to discuss labour is to discuss society. Now, you know that I was the least political. Pascal was the real political person. I voted against the formation of the Labour Party when Amah was the Chairman of the Electoral Body. I argued that they would just co-opt us and use us against the workers. I argued that we should rather develop militant collective bargaining and militant organizing than to form a political party where we could become used.

Pascal Bafyau and Peter Ejiofor were clearer. When Pascal

left and I became the President of the NLC, that pressure was renewed at Bauchi. There, majority voted that we should form the Labour party and I was presiding and in line with labour tradition, I had to sign it. We subsequently applied to form the Labour Party with Ejiofor as the Chairman and late Abdulsalam as the Secretary.

From what I have subsequently come to realize, the first thing to ask yourself is "can you fundamentally change society through normal trade union activities?" The answer is no. There are a number of things that you cannot achieve through protests. It is important that you have active citizenry that can protest on anything peacefully – to wake up those in power to do things for majority of citizens. That is a very important role. So, do not diminish it. However, no one will govern according to your values. Those in government will govern according to their values. This for me is the foundation upon which you can approach the question "should labour be political or apolitical". Based on the foregoing, I believe that labour should be very very political.

Now, the second question is whether labour should be partisan. Yes, labour should be partisan and should not be apologetic in so doing. Partisan for what purpose? The same purpose as the average politician on the street? Partisan so that you can change the character of the state! So, you have to make a conscious choice. A conscious choice as Obasanjo said that he was

going to produce thirty billionaires. I think at the end of the day, he was able to get twenty-two through government and the PDP machineries. So, labour can say that we want to participate in politics so that we reinvent the middle class – to stabilize the society. Because you do not want a society where you are either absolutely poor or absolutely rich. That kind of society is not sustainable. You see the challenge we are facing with insecurity and people are focusing on military competence. The fundamental challenge is delivering a caring society, giving people skills for employment. All of that should be at the heart of a Labour Party which a section of the Nigerian political class does not necessarily believe in.

I was in NIPSS while in NLC when a Minister said that part of Nigeria's unemployment crisis was that we have too many graduates – that too many people are going to school that in their days they count the number of universities. Now, if he was talking of graduate unemployment, it was understandable but he was talking of general unemployment. So, if I am not educated and I am unemployed, am I not more of a burden to society? Am I not more of a danger to society? Who is more likely to be indoctrinated? Labour should not only be political, it should be partisan and it should think power and

consciously so.

Labour should offer its platform for those who wish to run. It should not be like the rest of the political parties. The Labour Party has been hijacked. I bear part of the blame for that. And I ask for forgiveness. When we were to hand over the party, we asked Ejiofor to resign as Chairman so that we can get a non-active union leader like Nwanyanwu and co to take over the place so that we don't have people think it is just a trade union affair. Ejiofor warned me that the party could be hijacked and could be turned to a general motor for all kinds of political opportunism. I told him no that such would not happen as the NLC can always reclaim the Labour Party if the leadership of the party goes out of its way to do certain things.

I never imagined that it could be so easy for the Labour Party to be hijacked from the NLC and the NLC is unable to take it back. Now, having administered a political party at the level of the APC, I can tell you what this mistake was. We could not put in a clause like you have in the

British Labour Party. In the British Labour Party, you could not be the Prime Minister without the vote of Labour. Labour has a certain bulk of guaranteed votes and once Labour cast that vote with the support of a few other votes, a leadership is put in place. So, we did not put a number of safety clause in the Labour Party Constitution to say that at any convention or NEC that anybody who is voting for NLC shall hold 51 per cent. With that kind

of safety valve, the Labour Party would always be in the control of the NLC. I just relied on myself – having not being a politician at the time and I had not been involved in political party organizing, I did not understand the dynamics.

But probably Ejiofor had always been clearer when it came to ideology and forecasting. And he said comrade "don't you think that this thing could be hijacked?" I said no. I said so because even when I would have left we would continue to share certain values, a lot of things would continue. More so, I knew that my successor would come from one of my deputies. So, Ejiofor was right. I accept my mistake. I have learnt my lesson. And with Abdulsalam passing away very recently I felt very bad. I prayed very quietly for the repose for the repose of his soul. But I ask myself "after all these things what legacy is there?"

I joined the NLC in their struggles. There was one we marched to the National Assembly and David Mark was there. And he asked me "are you not a Governor and I answered "yes, even if I was appointed Secretary General of the United Nations, I still consider myself as part of the NLC. People should not betray their background whatever happens. Without labour who am I? So, I made



those assumptions that nobody could come from labour and betray it but I was wrong. So, there are lessons to learn. It is not easy to give up. The thing is to moderate it. What people do in politics is not out of ignorance but conscious choice.

Unfortunately, you cannot organize a political strike to say that you don't like the way PDP is being run or APC is being run. These are independent political parties. The best you can do is to form your own. But let it not be a complete preserve of trade union leaders. Let it be about every progressive thinking Nigerian. Let it be about an economy that works for all. Let it be about a social system that delivers the greatest good to the greatest number – whoever subscribes to these laudable values becomes a member. Then, you put that clause. I think you can still reclaim the Labour Party because the records are there who formed the Labour Party. I signed it at the time as President of the NLC.

So, there is no controversy about who formed the Labour Party. The child ran away and you want to born another child. I think you have to try and see how you can reclaim the lost child from an orphanage home. And the earlier the better because as you are moving closer to the next general elections, the vultures would soon move in.

The other one for me is that you have a huge huge task. And this is the most difficult part. Like Ejiofor used to say that he was afraid for the future of labour because people are not being ideologically prepared – that leadership should be prepared. They should be mentored and guided. We have to do a level of indoctrination to understand the greater interest of workers and working families.

You know there are a number of things going on that labour leaders should not be associated with. Why would a union man go and take a chieftaincy title? Because the feudal class is not historically part of you. They are still part of the oppressive class. You know the ideological basis around which we fought against free market is no more. Right now, if you want to save, you save at one per cent but if you want to borrow, it is at double digits. Where on earth do you get that kind of exploitation?

So, you find banks posting profits in an economy that is constricting. Your economy is on recession but some critical sectors are posting unimaginable figures? How? So, if CBN can use its intervention to determine what interest rate would be why give little returns on savings and huge return on

lending. NLC should be interested in that.

And you should be interested in the African Free Trade Agreement. You see, yesterday a friend called me (you see I have all kinds of friends now). He said that he was at Seme Border that he wanted to import some goods. I asked him “why Seme Border?” And he said that Nigerian Ports are very expensive. He said that the Chinese are on holidays – the Chinese Holidays. When they resume they are going to increase production and when they produce they send to African countries so they pass through that border and other borders. He is concerned about Chinese holiday. So, where are our people going to work?

Now, you need a serious political engagement to be able to deal with that. Now, the Naira is just floating. That cannot continue with all the consequences on the real purchasing power. There are things I am really concerned about now. People are being paid with paper money. This is what we call money illusion. The minimum wage cannot buy you a bag of rice – the implication for everyone is clear.

So, let me suggest to you that the NLC has to organize serious talk-shops to discuss the Nigerian situation. We must discuss the monetary policy, the fiscal policy, the trade policy, everything and raise issues on them. And this pretension that you can use market tools to re-orient consumption. It is not possible. That if things are expensive, people will not buy. It has not prevailed. You have to prohibit. You know the President was showing some courage and we need to drive him more to sustain that prohibition of many items. Now, you are going to have more challenge with that with this African Free trade because if the West African Free was giving us all manner of problems, I don't know what the African Free Trade will become. This is because there are few Nigerian companies sending out goods to outside but many will have problems. They will just get to Ghana and put a label and bring it here.

There are a lot of things that we should be talking about because a lot of factories would be wiped off. We need to be talking with the Manufacturers Association, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Trade and even Ministry of Foreign Affairs because all of this impact on job opportunities. If you are not employed, can you talk of minimum wage?

So, in summary, no one should ever give up on themselves if God has not given up on them. Courage and Conviction matters.



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CONTACT

📍 Head Office, Plot 820/821, Labour House Area, Abuja, Nigeria

✉ P.M.B 254, Garki, Abuja, F.C.T Nigeria

☎ 0805 700 3000, 0806 977 8760, 094 628 400

❓ enquiries@trustfundpensions.com

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2021 CWC/NEC MEETINGS



NLC President, Comrade Ayuba Wabba, mini leading Kebbi State Governor to the venue for the NEC Meeting



Cross section of NEC Members at the Meeting



Comrade Emmanuel Ugboaja, Esq.
NLC General Secretary



Dr. O. Ebhohimhen presenting Electricity
Report to NEC



NLC President making his opening remarks at
the CWC/NEC Meeting



Comrade Emmanuel Ugboaja, Esq.
NLC General Secretary



L-R: NLC Deputy President, Comrade (Dr) Nasir Idris, Comrade Usman Najeem, NLC Deputy President, NLC President, Comrade Ayuba Wabba, mini and Comrade Joe Ajaero, NLC Deputy President arriving to the opening of the NEC Meeting



L-R: NLC Deputy President, Comrade (Dr) Nasir Idris, Comrade Usman Najeem, NLC Deputy President, NLC President, Comrade Ayuba Wabba, mini and Comrade Joe Ajaero, NLC Deputy President arriving to the opening of the NEC Meeting



Chairperson, NLC Youth Committee,
Comrade Tolulope Fagbamigbe representing
Young Workers at the NEC Meeting



Cross section of NEC Members at the Meeting

NEC ENGAGEMENT WITH NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY COUNCIL CBN



HE Atiku Abubakar Bagudu addressing NEC members during the interaction



NLC Leadership with the Kebbi State Governor, HE Atiku Abubakar Bagudu and the reps from CBN during the interaction



NEC Members at the meeting



NEC Members at the meeting

NLC AND TUC HARMONIZES HOUSE UNIONS IN CAC



President of Congress, Comrade Ayuba Wabba, mni and TUC AGS, Comrade Hassan Anka addressing the media after the Harmonization



A cross section of NLC and TUC Leaders at the Harmonization Meeting



NEWS FROM **THE AFFILIATE UNIONS**



NLC Pickets the Corporate Affairs Commission

In line with the decision taken at the recent National Executive Council meeting of the Nigeria Labour Congress, the NLC mobilized the Nigerian workforce to picket the national headquarters of the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) on Wednesday, February 24, 2021. The picketing action which was personally led by the President of Congress, Comrade Ayuba Wabba, mni and the President of AUPCTRE, Comrade Anthony Benjamin and a host of other members of the NLC National Administrative Council (NAC).

The picketing action was a protest against the anti-workers and anti-unions actions and practices of the management of the CAC. Some of the issues of concern for workers included the purported disbandment of AUPCTRE in CAC, the punitive transfer of trade union executives and other workers for participating in trade union activities, the withholding of workers' salaries and the directive for the stoppage and non-remittance of check off dues accruing to AUPCTRE.

While at the picketing grounds, the President of Congress decried the conduct of the management of CAC describing it as antiquated and barbaric. Congress President said that the attitude of the CAC management was in violation of Section 40 of Nigeria's Constitution which guarantees right of association and assembly and also many other

international conventions and protocols including Conventions 87 and 98 of the International Labour Organization (ILO). The President also lampooned the efforts of the CAC management to introduce divide and rule among the CAC workers by pretending to support another union in the place against AUPCTRE. The President submitted that Organized Labour would not allow the unity of workers in the CAC to be destroyed by management. In demonstration of the commitment of the NLC in consolidating the unity of workers in the CAC, a meeting of all the house unions in the CAC was convened by Congress President on Thursday, February 25, 2021 at the Labour House. At the meeting which had in attendance the representatives of the Trade Union Congress and representatives of AUPCTRE led by the President, Comrade Benjamin Anthony, the following positions were reached and communicated to the management of the CAC and the media:

It was Established:

1. That the two unions – AUPCTRE and SSASCOC – exist to pursue and fight for the protection and defense of workers' interests in line with the extant laws;
2. Both AUPCTRE and SSASCOC have the right to exist and operate in Corporate Affairs Commission; and



3. The two unions can only successfully defend the interest of workers in CAC in an ambience of understanding, shared purpose, unity, and solidarity.

It was Agreed:

1. That both AUPCTRE and SSASCOC are united in condemning and rejecting the punitive transfers of AUPCTRE executives in CAC;
2. That both AUPCTRE and SSASCOC unanimously oppose and reject the purported dissolution of AUPCTRE in the CAC; and
3. That both AUPCTRE and SSASCOC reject the decision of the management of the CAC to stop the deduction and remittance of check-off dues to AUPCTRE starting from February 2021.

It was Resolved:

1. That the management of the Corporate Affairs Commission should in the next three working days invite the leadership of the two-house unions and the two national labour centres – the NLC and TUC to a meeting to address all the issues of concern to workers at the CAC; and
2. That the leadership of Organized Labour – the Nigeria Labour Congress and the Trade Union Congress – would suspend further picketing actions against the Corporate Affairs Commission while awaiting the immediate convening of a meeting between the CAC management and Organized Labour.



NASU, SSANU SUSPEND STRIKE ON HUMANITARIAN GROUNDS



The three weeks old strike by the Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational and Associated Institutions (NASU) and the Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU) has been called off. The strike call off was on the premise of humanitarian conditions of the plight of Nigerian students and their parents who had already lost one year of academic work as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown and an earlier strike action embarked by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) which had battled government over a number of members and education improvement related demands. The call-off of the NASU/SSANU strike action was announced after a Joint Action Committee (JAC) meeting of the leadership of the two unions which took place on 25th February 2021. In a press statement signed by the General Secretary of NASU, Comrade Peters Adeyemi and Comrade Mohammed Ibrahim, National President of SSANU, the unions stated that though no concrete concession had been granted by government on their demands but that agreement had been reached with government on certain timelines. The unions expressed hope that the Federal Government would reciprocate their patriotic and humanitarian gesture by ensuring that previous agreements signed with the unions are judiciously and diligently implemented. The unions said that the onus lies on government to prevent further strike actions in the nation's education system. The leadership of NASU and SSANU went on to thank members of the union for their loyalty, solidarity and patience through an arduous struggle to protect and promote their rights.



PTECCSSAN Threatens to Ground Huawei Operations in Nigeria

The rising wave of anti-union conduct of employers in Nigeria has intensified in the telecommunications industry. In response to this, the Private Telecommunications and Communications Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PTECCSSAN) has threatened to disrupt the activities of Huawei Technologies over unfair labour practices. The union accordingly has issued Huawei a 14-day ultimatum to provide answers to the concerns of workers in the establishment or risk total shut down of its operations in Nigeria.

The General Secretary of PTECCSSAN, Comrade Abdullahi Okonu, in a press statement in Lagos said that the Huawei is in the habit of intimidating and harassing its employees for making efforts to organize themselves into a union. He alleged that the Huawei management went to the extent of issuing warning letters to staff who are making



efforts at unionization. The PTECCSSAN General Secretary said that right now, workers in the establishment are afraid to move a muscle on the issue of unionization given that Huawei had in the past fulfilled its threat of sacking workers who engage in unionization activities.

The union went on to call for the immediate withdrawal of warning letters issued to the leaders of the workers union in Huawei and called for the immediate commencement of discussion and negotiation of Procedural Agreement with the workers' union. Finally, the union called for the immediate provision of Personal Protective Equipment for the field engineers working at different Huawei sites in Nigeria.

AMALGAMATED UNION OF FOOD STUFF AND CATTLE DEALERS THREATEN WITHDRAWAL OF SERVICES



The Amalgamated Union of Food stuff and Cattle Dealers of Nigeria (AUFCDN) has threatened to withdraw their services all over the country in reaction to what the union described as sustained harassment and maltreatment of its members all over the country. In a press statement issued at the Labour House on Sunday, February 21, 2021, the national leadership of AUFCDN cited the assault and killing of its members in different parts of the country, the molestation of its members by security forces at different checkpoints, multiple taxation by different regulatory agencies and state governments, and the absence of the necessary infrastructural support to ease the business of its members and their services to the Nigerian public. The AUFCDN which demanded N475 billion as compensation for the losses suffered in the recent past by their members announced that the strike action would commence by midnight of 24th February 2021.



The Parliamentary Staff Association of Nigeria (PASAN) Issues a 14 Days Ultimatum on Full Implementation of Financial Autonomy for State Legislature

Following the expiration of the 21 days ultimatum issued on 27th January 2021 as communicated by the Central Working Committee (CWC) of the Parliamentary Staff Association of Nigeria (PASAN), the union decided to issue another 14 Days ultimatum to government. The new ultimatum is based on the following grounds:

1. The failure of government to take any step to implement the full autonomy of State Legislatures as demanded by the Nigerian Constitution;
2. That the refusal to implement the said autonomy amounts to willful and deliberate attempt to stunt the growth of democracy in Nigeria; and
3. That as a nation, there cannot be meaningful progress, growth and development if the Legislature is not allowed to operate without encumbrance and interference by other arms of government.

The ultimatum which started from February 22, 2021 and would elapse on 7th March 2021.



The National Union of Posts and Telecommunication Employees (NUPTE)

The National Union of Posts and Telecommunication Employees (NUPTE) has picketed the premises of the God is Good Logistics over what the union termed as anti-union activities of the management. It would be recalled that there has been a long struggle by the unions in the sector to unionize workers working for logistic companies. The SOS would keep you updated as the outcome of the action by NUPTE.





Comr. (Dr.) Kabir Garba Tsanni
President



The President of RATTAWU Eulogizes Nigerian Media and Media Workers on the Commemoration of the 2021 World Radio Day

The National President of the Radio, Television, Theatre and Arts Workers Union (RATTAWU), Comrade (Dr) Kabir Garba Tsanni has eulogized Nigerian media and media workers for their sterling contributions to the advancement of democracy and development in Nigeria. In an address on the commemoration of the 2021 World Radio Day, the President said that it is in the recognition of the role played by radio that the member states of the UNESCO in 2011 proclaimed the 13th of every February as the World Radio Day. This proclamation has since 2012 been adopted by the United Nations General Assembly.

The President also stated the World Radio Day apart from honoring the role of radio broadcasters in information dissemination was also so designated in order to strengthen

networking among broadcasters. He said that radio broadcasting remains a powerful tool in celebrating the diversity of humanity especially as a platform for democratic discourse, education, entertainment and enlightenment.

On the theme of this year's World Radio Day – “New World, New Radio”, Comrade (Dr) Tsanni pointed out that the theme speaks to the relevance and resilience of radio communications in public enlightenment as the world grapples with the new variants of COVID-19. He urged radio stations all over the country to dedicate special air time to educating members of the public on the need to exercise precaution and health safety protocols in order to beat the impact of the new variants of the novel corona disease and the new normal it imposes in the work place particularly and the society in general.



NEWS FROM STATE COUNCILS

Labour Leaders in Kwara State Walk Out on State Government



The NLC Leaders in Kwara State has staged a walkout against the state government over its refusal to accede to workers demand on the payment of the new national minimum wage.

The Kwara State Government had argued that it could only pay the new national minimum wage to workers on Grade Level 1-6 without considerations for the automatic consequential increment for other salary grade levels. The proposition by the Kwara State Government was unanimously rejected by Organized Labour in Kwara State. A meeting between the representatives of the Kwara State Government and Labour on Friday February 26, 2021 ended in a stalemate as the representatives of workers walked out of the meeting in protest.

Meanwhile, in line with the directives of the National Executive Council meeting of the NLC, the Kwara State Council is mobilizing workers in the state for an industrial action.

Stop Press - Breaking: The Nigeria Labour Congress Convenes An Emergency Virtual Meeting

The national leadership of the Nigeria Labour Congress has convened an emergency virtual National Executive Council Meeting which will involve all the state councils of the NLC. The meeting which is scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 2nd March 2021, by 2pm through the Zoom portal is expected to deliberate on recent attempts by some legislators in the Green chambers of the National Assembly – the House of Representatives – to move a bill seeking to move the national minimum wage from the Exclusive List to the Concurrent List.

In a circular signed by Comrade Chris Uyot on behalf of the General Secretary, members of the NEC who are based in Abuja are expected to participate physically at the meeting while members outside the Federal Capital Territory are expected to join by zoom.



NIGERIA LABOUR CONGRESS MOTTO: LABOUR CREATES WEALTH

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS:

Presidential Labour House
Plot 820/821 Central Business District
Federal Capital Territory
P.O. Box 10871 P.M.B. 666 Garki, Abuja
Tel: 08022772294, 08073015037
E-mail: general@nlc.org, Website: www.nlc.org

LAGOS OFFICE:

25, Osoyele Street,
Off Osoyele Road,
P.O. Box 625, Fagala
Lagos - Nigeria

26th February 2021

To All NEC members
Nigeria Labour Congress

RE: Invitation to an Emergency (Virtual) Meeting of the National Executive Council (NEC)

We extend our warm compliments from the headquarters of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC).

Recall that the NEC invitation earlier sent informed that the ID and password for the Zoom meeting will be provided. Please find below the said details:

Topic: Emergency Virtual NEC Meeting
Date: Tuesday, 2nd March, 2021
Time: 02:00pm
Meeting ID: 845 7275 9313
Password: 619155

Please note that your attendance is of utmost importance.

Yours comradely,

Chris Uyot
For: General Secretary

AYUBA F. WABBA, MSc.

EDMUND UGOJIA

IBRAHIM KHALIL, MSc.



NEWS FROM STATE COUNCILS



Kano State Council of the NLC Asks the Kano State Government to Pay the Health Hazard Allowance of Medical and Health Workers in the State... Intervenes in the Dispute Between the Kano Road and Traffic Agency (KAROTA) and the Leadership of the Tricycle Owners Associations

The Chairman of the Nigeria Labour Congress, Kano State Council, Comrade Kabiru Ado Minjibir has called on the Kano State government to introduce hazard allowance to health workers and journalists in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Chairman made the appeal during the

inauguration of newly elected executives of the Nigeria Union of Journalists in Kano State.

In another development, the Kano State Council of the NLC has intervened in the impasse between the Kano Road and Traffic Agency (KAROTA) and the Leadership of the Tricycle Owners Associations. In a meeting convened on the 23rd of February 2021 at the KAROTA office, both parties agreed that the tricycle riders should pay a levy of one hundred naira daily in line with the provisions of the Kano State Inland Revenue law. It was agreed that the first payment should be done through REMITA to ensure adequate data capture of the tricycle riders. The meeting also agreed that all tricycle riders should write their numbers boldly at the back of their tricycle in order to enhance identification.

NLC National Women Commission and NLC Lagos State Council Embark on “Stop Gender Based Violence and Harassment”



The Nigeria Labour Congress National Women Commission (NWC) in conjunction with the NLC Lagos State Council has embarked on a “Stop Gender Based Violence and Harassment” Campaign at the popular Mile 12 International Market, Lagos State. The visit which was led by the NLC Chairperson in Lagos State, Comrade Sessi Agnes Funmilayo, the Chairperson of the NWC in Lagos State, Comrade Rashidat of NULGE and a host of other women leaders.

The campaign was for the purpose of increasing public awareness on the need for the Nigerian Government to ratify the latest Convention of the ILO which is Convention 190 on Elimination of Violence and Harassment in the Work Place involved a strategic meeting with the market leaders on enhancing gender mainstreaming especially with regards to giving women more presence and voice in the running and management of the Mile 12 International market and also in the home and broader society.





INTERNATIONAL WINDOW

NIGERIA LABOUR CONGRESS JOINS THE INTERNATIONAL WORKERS SOLIDARITY TO CONDEMN THE COUP IN MYANMAR



The Nigeria Labour Congress has joined the global workers solidarity movement in condemning the coup by military leaders in Myanmar. In separate letters to the Nigerian government through the Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and to the United Nations Resident Representative to Nigeria, and signed by NLC President, Comrade Ayuba Wabba, the Congress called on the military leaders in Myanmar to respect democratic tenets in Myanmar and release all political leaders detained in Myanmar. The

NLC also called for the full restoration of democratic leadership in Myanmar.

On the February 11, 2021, the NLC organized a solidarity action against the coup and presented the letters which called for the full application of international sanctions against the military junta in Myanmar. While calling for support for local workers protest and resistance against the coup, the NLC asked the Nigerian government to facilitate support to the efforts by progressive forces in Myanmar to restore democratic order.

The full text of the letter reads





NIGERIA LABOUR CONGRESS

MOTTO: LABOUR CREATES WEALTH

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS:

Paschal Bafyau Labour House
Plot 820/821 Central Business District
Federal Capital Territory,
P.O.Box 10971 PMB 566 Garki, Abuja
Tel: 08036556600, 08033084549
E-mail: gsec@nlcng.org, Website: www.nlcng.org

LAGOS OFFICE:

29, Olajuwon Street,
Off Ojuelegba Road,
P.O.Box 620, Yabba
Lagos - Nigeria

Mr. Edward Kallon
United Nations Resident
and Humanitarian Coordinator to Nigeria
United Nations Nigerian Office - Abuja

The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) Condemns Coup in Myanmar and Urges Respect for Democracy and Human Rights in Myanmar

I bring you fraternal greetings from the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC).

We write to express that we have followed in dismay the appalling seizure of power by the military in Myanmar and to inform you that the Nigeria Labour Congress in concert with the global working-class solidarity movement has pledged to do all within its power to stop the coup from succeeding, ensure the release of all those detained and bring an end to the violence and harassment of the people of Myanmar. We also demand that the perpetrators and masterminds of the coup in Myanmar must be isolated.

In line with the positions and demands of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) to international institutions, we have called on governments worldwide to stand together in support of the people in Myanmar to:

- Publicly condemn the coup d'état in Myanmar.
- Not recognise or appease the military.
- **Request the United Nations (UN) General Assembly to keep the Myanmar seat vacant until elected representatives can form a parliament/government.**
- **Support the adoption of an urgent resolution of the UN Security Council, including sanctions for the coup leaders.**
- **Call for a special session of the UN Human Rights Council to review the situation in Myanmar; to call for the release of everyone arrested pursuant to the coup; and to mandate the Special Rapporteur on Myanmar to monitor and issue a special report on the human rights situation, including arrests, compliance with freedom of association, protection of protestors, respect for the right to peaceful assembly and protests and the right to opinion, expression and speech, including reliance on information technology platforms.**
- Implement comprehensive economic sanctions to stop all revenue to the military.
- Immediately cease all military cooperation and arms trade with Myanmar.
- Expose and hold to account all lobby firms employed by Myanmar's military.
- Trace supply chains of military-run companies to ensure full application of economic sanctions.
- Support and assist all refugees from Myanmar's military persecution.
- Protect Myanmar's diplomatic staff in the country.

Pursuant to the foregoing, we have asked the Nigerian government to demand that Nigerian companies operating in or sourcing from Myanmar should provide support to workers where operations are curtailed and help protect workers protesting the coup.

We stand in solidarity with Myanmar's workers and with the people of Myanmar and pay tribute to those brave workers taking action to reject the military takeover.

After 30 years of military dictatorship in Myanmar, we stand united with the people of Myanmar to ensure that the people's vote is respected and that all those who have been democratically elected can form a legitimate government.

Yours sincerely,

Comrade Ayuba Wabba, mni
President

A Brief Look at the 2020 Presidential Election: Workers, Trade Unions and Covid

Monessen, Pennsylvania was, at one time, a teeming, vibrant steel town located at the north end of the state's Steel Valley. The Monongahela River runs through this valley that was once an industrial concentration of manufactures, mills, and blast furnaces. In Monessen, the Monongahela provided life to the region's cottonwoods, silver maples, and dogwood trees. These companies are silent now. Sections of the waterway have been labeled the second worst in the nation by the Environmental Protection Agency because of the dumping of zinc, styrene, and xylene. Monessen is now a part of the Rust Belt. In the 1930s the city population peaked at 20,268, but with the loss of its steel sector the population plunged to 7,625. A local in Monessen will shout "Welcome to Hiroshima" to visitors, referencing the downtown district with its hundreds of crumbling boarded up buildings.

On June 28, 2016 then-presidential candidate Donald Trump visited Monessen during a campaign stop. Staging was set-up at Alumisource, a metal recycling facility. Trump spoke in front of a gray wall of crushed metal, twisted cables, and aluminum scraps. He promised prosperity, hope, and new american jobs. He promised that, under his administration, workers will "finally have a President who will protect and fight for them." He would push back on globalization that moved jobs to China and Mexico. He promised a renewed use of American steel for frastructure. "We," pledged Trump, "are going to Make America Great Again For "We," pledged Trump, "are going to Make America Great Again For November 8, 2016, Republican candidate Donald Trump defeated the Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton.

Trump is an outlier to politics. In a 2017 issue of Vox, an online magazine, an article titled "Donald Trump is the only US president with no political or military experience." Past U.S. presidents, from George Washington to Barack Obama had served in some

capacity as soldier, state representative, senator, governor, secretary of state, or vice president. "Trump," wrote Vox reporter Zachary Crockett, "operates a chain of hotels and golf courses." These ventures failed. There were the two bankrupt Atlantic City casinos. A failed Trump Airlines. Courts shuttered his Trump University for swindling 7,000 students on the secrets of Trump's real estate empire. Then there was Trump Mortgage, Trump Style and Trump World publications-failures. Trump was not a successful businessman. Initially, he made his riches through tax avoidance schemes that were frauds.



In future campaign speeches, he promised a presidency that would push back on globalization that kills jobs, and moves factories overseas. Under Trump's administration the nation's industrial base deteriorated. Automotive giant General Motors closed three U.S. plants. Boeing and General Electric offshored thousands of jobs to low-wage ountries. In the government sector, nonprofit consumer advocate Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch, tracked ver four hundred billion dollars in federal contracts sourced to companies offshore. There were promises of a \$1 trillion dollar airports - there was

no funding. U.S. cities like Austin, Nashville, and New York were forced to generate local infrastructure funding.

With the Covid-19 pandemic, Trump's management of the crisis was both chaotic and incompetent. Public Citizen, a non-profit, consumer rights group documented his failing in their 2020 report: "Top 12 Things Trump Did to Speed the Pandemic." The report exposed a lack of preparation and planning. The administration openly iscouraged face masks. He ignored warnings from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that the virus was spreading globally, and, for in the early years of his administration, he muzzled medical experts. White

House briefings became a forum for false and misleading information. "This is not just ineptitude," said Jeffrey Shaman, an epidemiologist at Columbia University in New York, "it's sabotage." "He has sabotaged efforts to keep people safe."

The trump administration failed to protect workers during the pandemic. Infection rates were widespread and eadly. A 2020 examination of the administration's Covid-19 mishandling by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI). "The 50 Reasons the Trump Administration is Bad for Workers," found the administration's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) refused to allow the agency to issue measures or standards to protect workers from the virus. Throughout the four years of the Trump administration, there was this mantra that the nation now has an administration that would "protect and fight for them." The reality was different. The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), a federal agency responsible for enforcing U.S. labor law, would be dominated by anti-union appointees who undercut workers' organizing campaigns and bargaining efforts. His NLRB suspended all union elections (and mail-in ballots) during March 2020. Mail-in election ballots were only allowed if the employer agreed to that arrangement. Trump's NLRB gave employers the power to prevent union organizers from talking with other workers at the job during non-work time. Employer's workplace power dominated the union and allowed boss's to exercise anti-union messages on the job.

Building Power - The 2020 Presidential Election Breonna Taylor, was a 26-year-old Black woman employed as an emergency room technician. She was fatally shot in her Kentucky apartment in March 2020 when white police officers forced their way in as part of a drug investigation on her former boyfriend. Ms. Taylor, and her current boyfriend, Kenneth Walker, were inside when the officers knocked on the door, forced their way in, then fired 32 times. Taylor was shot six times and died. Walker was not injured. Months later, George Floyd, a 46-year-old black man, was arrested after a store worker in Minnesota called the police with allegations that Mr. Floyd had purchased cigarettes with a counterfeit \$20 bill. The police arrived, handcuffed Mr. Floyd, then wrestled him to the ground. As Floyd laid on the ground, Derek Chauvin, a White officer, kneeled, and dropped his knee (and his full body weight) on Floyd's neck. Handcuffed and struggling for air, Floyd told Chauvin "You're going to kill me, man." For the next eight minutes police body cameras recorded Floyd's plea, "please, please, please." At one point, Floyd

pleads for his mother over and over again, then dies. The incident sparked nationwide and global protests. The police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor ignited a wave of demonstrations across the U.S. Fifteen million people marched under the banner of Black Lives Matters (BLM) in the summer of 2020 and by election day, the killings became a rallying cry on the streets and the minds of voters. Nationally, BLM protests helped frame the results of the election as organizers mobilized thousands to vote against Trump. Patrisse Cullors, a co-founder of Black Lives Matter, worked with communities to form Black Lives Matters Political Actions Committees (PAC) that mobilized voters and endorsed local candidates.

Trade unions played a major role in the 2020 election. Unions like UNITE HERE, a hospitality workers' union, organized the nation's largest union-door-to-door campaign. Union members, mainly Black and Brown workers, and largely Black women, visited homes, knocking on three million doors for Democratic candidates Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. Organizers visited workers homes in Georgia, Nevada, Arizona, Pennsylvania, and Florida. In Florida, AFL-CIO-affiliate, the Communications Workers of America's (CWA) members coordinated a statewide Workers First car caravan to reach voters

"How do we live after Trump?" - is the question posed by Harper's Magazine in their February issue titled "Life After Trump - A Special Supplement."





Joe Biden defeated Trump in the 2020 Presidential Election - but by the slimmest of margins. Biden got 81 million votes. Trump pulled 74 million, and many of those votes were from White, working-class people who supported an administration that was anti-union, racist, and xenophobic. The U.S. trade union's challenge is 'how to win them back?' How do you reach out to White Trump voters and reactivate their progressive beliefs in a way that influences their voting behavior while simultaneously providing a powerful counter-narrative to an extreme, racist, and 3 ple who supported an administration that was anti-union, racist, and xenophobic. The U.S. trade union's challenge is 'how to win them back?' How do you reach out to White Trump voters and reactivate their progressive beliefs in a way that influences their voting behavior while simultaneously providing a powerful counter-narrative to an extreme, racist, and conservative landscape that's currently popular in U.S. Unions must embark on a far-reaching programs for their membership that won't shy away from tough questions around women's equality, immigration, racism, gender-based violence. "[Labor leaders] have to ... explain the construction of race and capitalism," says Bill Fletcher Jr., executive editor of The Global African Worker and former AFL-CIO staffer. "The absence of that, and the reliance on so-called diversity programs, at best teaches tolerance but does not get at the particular role that race plays as a division of the working class.

They need to embark on massive internal educational efforts."

Article by **Michael Leslie:**



Michael Leslie is a freelance writer, photographer, and union activist. He works for a Washington DC-based international NGO focused on workers rights. He is a labor educator and served as vice president of UAW Local 735. Michael is a member of OPEIU Local 2, and the United Automobile

Workers, UAW. He earned his M.A. from Wayne State University and holds a B.A. from Eastern Michigan University.



THE WORKING CLASS AND POLITICS IN THE CURRENT PERIOD

We are living through a period of general crisis. Economic, social, political, ideological, and ecological crises merge into one all-consuming crisis of the system. Those responsible for the situation are a handful of rich and powerful people; the 1% of the population who control the economy, profiting from the exploitation of the poor, and our natural resources. They have been able to defend and sustain the exploitative system they represent primarily because they wield political power. They also shape the dominant ideas in society, making their abhorrent rule of profit over people appear natural.

The burden of this systemic crisis is borne by poor masses, whose lives have become marked with sorrow, tears, and blood. The only way we can change the situation is to fight to liberate ourselves, and build a better, just, and equitable society. The most organised section of the working masses, which is also centrally integrated into the exploitative capitalist system, is the working-class. It is thus best placed to provide leadership for the entire exploited and oppressed masses in the political struggle for our self-emancipation and system change.

The above general introductory perspective definitely puts the situation in Nigeria in summary perspective. But a closer look will show that it speaks to the worldwide situation. This is because the capitalist system which we are fighting is an international system which moulds every country in its vampirish image; "sucking the blood of the sufferers" everywhere. Thus, for working-class people anywhere to win total liberation, we must defeat capitalism globally. The working-class movement is an international movement. Our struggle in Nigeria is thus part of the broader struggle and solidarity of our class for a better world.

In the following sections of this article, we shall first look at *why* we need (to deepen our) political struggle. This will be identified in the *specific* nature of the crises we face today. Then we will look at *what* such political struggle entails and make suggestions on *how* we go about waging it.

An era of crises and revolts

From Lagos to Maiduguri and Sokoto to Port Harcourt, Nigeria is entangled in a series of crises. Suffering has become the lot of millions of people, in a country which is now home to the largest number of the poorest people in the whole wide world.

The national unemployment rate increased from 12.1% in 2016 to 27.1% by 2020. Those with work are little better off. Real wages have sharply declined, and tens of thousands of workers and pensioners are still owed backlogs of salaries. Precarious work has become the order of the day for millions of people in the formal sector, while the tens of millions of workers in the informal economy find it increasingly difficult to survive.

While working-class people continue to wallow in poverty, the rich continue to get richer. Nigeria has witnessed the fastest growth in the wealth of millionaires

and billionaires on the African continent over the last five years. The country's legislators remain amongst the highest paid in the world. Corruption remains rife with a handful of persons stealing monies that could have been used to provide free and qualitative education, health, and housing for the poor masses.

The social crisis is about as terrible as the economic crisis. Insecurity has been on the rise, with many fearing to travel by land as they could be killed or kidnapped by bandits. But the poor cannot afford flight tickets. Robberies and wanton murders are not only on the highways. Criminal gangs of different sorts, such as the "1 million boys" and "badoo" in Lagos have become threats to working-class communities.

The gradual worsening of conditions of living for the poor over the decades have led to a spiral in religiosity. Prosperity gospel has powered the spread of new generation Churches and provision of welfare for members has also contributed to the growth of many Islamic groups (which was how Boko Haram grew exponentially and expanded its influence before its war with the Nigerian state started in 2009).

In the wake of the war in the northwest (which contributed to the availability of arms and ammunition to a wide array of people), and as the worsening climate crisis makes open grazing more challenging in the savannas of the north, herders and farmers conflicts have assumed more deadly dimensions. This, within the context of growing criminality as pointed out earlier, have been seized upon to define the problem in "tribal" terms, furthering ethnic polarization and the rise of "tribal" champions. The forces of thugs, unemployed and such like they are mobilising to the cheering of people from the same ethnic group could very well be turned against workers in the coming period, just as a benign Boko Haram of the past now kills indiscriminately.

The All Progressives Congress (APC) rose to power in 2015 because of widespread anger and frustration of the masses with the incapacity of the Peoples Democratic Party to resolve the generalised crisis sweeping throughout the country. This anger was clearly demonstrated in 2012 as the January Uprising. But the working-class which led that historic revolt did not provide a political alternative and politics, like nature, abhors a vacuum.

APC has shown itself to be no better than PDP. And the all-round crisis of capitalism, the system which both parties represent, has worsened, to the chagrin of the poor masses. The EndSARS rebellion of 2020 was yet another, and very graphically put, demonstration of mass anger against the system of oppression ranged against the immense majority of the population.

However, we cannot liberate ourselves with episodic revolts. Sustained political and ideological struggle that is needed for the education, mobilisation, and organisation of working-class people for transformative and emancipatory struggle requires a mass-based party with an

THE WORKING CLASS AND POLITICS IN THE CURRENT PERIOD

alternative vision for (re-)building society.

The working-class and a party of a new type

Quite often people say Nigeria is not working. But this is not wholly correct. Nigeria and indeed the capitalist world as a whole works, on the basis of a competitive logic which pits us against each other. The problem is that this same logic leads to crises that the primary beneficiaries of the system might not envisage and cannot control.

A genuinely working people's party must be one of struggle against the bosses' and their parties, and as well against the logic of the bosses' system. It must have an alternative vision of society based on solidarity, equity, and justice. It must be a party which fosters the *class* consciousness and independent (i.e., independent of the bosses' influence) organisation of working-class people for the purpose of, and in furtherance of this struggle.

While workers' parties could, and have been, formed outside the unions, trade unions best placed to establish, or at least play key roles in the formation of working-class parties. As the primary defensive organisations of workers, they represent a structural base on which mass-based working-class people's parties could be built.

There have been several workers parties formed outside the trade unions in Nigeria over the last seven decades. These include the United Working People's Party of 1953 and the Socialist Workers, Farmers and Youth Party of the early 1980s. But these had at best dozens or a few hundreds of members and had little impact on politics.

The workers parties that have had some level of significance have been those which trade unions played key roles in establishing, such as the Socialist Workers and Farmers Party (SWAFP) and Nigeria Labour Party (NLP) of the 1960s and the Socialist Working People's Party (SWPPP, even though it never contested electorally) of the 1980s. These were parties which were formed by some trade unions and not the trade union movement as a whole. But they were formed as central *offensive* instruments of the political and ideological *class* struggle of the working-class.

The nature and approach (of trade unions) to party-*"building"* has changed over the last three decades. There is one good element in these changes. The formation of these parties involved concerted efforts of the trade union movement. Thus, the two parties formed in this period (the short-lived Nigeria Labour Party in 1989 and the Labour Party formed in 2002), were able to draw hundreds of thousands of members into their ranks, unlike the earlier parties that could count their numbers only in the thousands. Unfortunately, these two projects did not start from the standpoint of class struggle. The trade unions saw them as electoral platforms, more or less like any other (i.e., the bosses') party. Thus, the influence of socialist left groups and ideas were curtailed in them. If a workers' party is not seen as a new type of party, with alternative politics to the mainstream, any future party-building project will equally be a futile effort at beating the bosses in their own game.

Building the needed workers' party as an alternative to the bosses' parties

What does a mass-based workers' party as a new type of party mean? How does such a party serve as the arrowhead of working-class politics?

First, a genuinely workers' party cannot be concerned only, or even primarily, with electoral contest to win government. Its fundamental concern must be to change the system and thus end the exploitation and oppression of working-class people.

So, it must be engaged in supporting and providing political leadership for all struggles of working-class people anywhere and everywhere. This should not simply be by issuing statements. It must be on the streets, organising mass protests. It must support the strikes and all other struggles of workers at local, state, and national levels.

It must stand with displaced people and organise fightback against demolitions. It must be the voice of poor farmers against land grabbing and the powers of corporations in agriculture. The workers' party of a new type will be the leading body wielding unity of the masses against ethnic polarization at a moment such as this. It must draw in the youth, including students demanding free and qualitative education for all. In short, it must be the *activist* "tribune of the oppressed".

To be able to do this, and do it successfully, the party must be a continuation – the arrowhead – of the broad body of working-class politics. This broad body includes the trade unions and also the radical, pro-labour civil society organisations, and other radical and revolutionary parties.

The workers' party of a new type will flourish in an environment where the Labour Civil Society Coalition (LASCO) is strengthened. This would entail an expansion of LASCO to include the Federation of Informal Workers' Organisations, along with NLC and TUC as trade union bodies and also the inclusion of other civil society coalitions such as the Coalition for Revolution (CORE) and the Alliance for Surviving COVID-19 and Beyond (ASCAB) along with the Joint Action Front (JAF) as civil society components of LASCO.

The party should also forge close collaboration with existing radical and revolutionary parties, particularly where these have some significant levels of followership, such as the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), African Action Congress (AAC) and National Conscience Party (NCP), as well as socialist left groups. Indeed, the formation process of the party should include efforts to harness these parties into one body.

If or not all or some of these parties coalesce into the emergence of a workers' party of a new type, such party must be one which fully upholds internal democracy. The internal life of the party must allow the flourishing of tendencies and comradely debate to reach decisions, while organisational discipline of unity in action, based on resolutions democratically reached, is maintained.

Education, mobilisation, and organisation of working-class people must be woven into the activities of the party, engaging with its broader environment of civil society and the trade unions. This requires dynamic routine. The branches of the party must be centres of lively growth and development of working-class cadres.

Meetings, which should be regularly held, must include political educational sessions on working-class history and theory as well as sessions for discussion current national and local situations. They should also include the planning of intervention in any local problem of concern to the people, on a regular basis.

THE WORKING CLASS AND POLITICS IN THE CURRENT PERIOD

The party must also have a party school for in-depth class education, training, and research. The NLC national and state-level schools should be integrated into this. The party's research unit should carry out regular research, including action-research that involves members and other workers, on all matters of concern to the working masses and regularly issue briefs to inform and educate members and the class. And the July 2010 NLC National Executive Council resolution that no one can contest for NLC state council elections without being a card-carrying member of the party of labour must be put into effect.

The party must creatively utilise all forms of traditional and new/social media. The earlier workers' parties had newspapers. SWAFP published *Advance* every two weeks for several years and SWPP published the *New Horizon* as a monthly newspaper. The need for a workers' party's newspaper cannot be overemphasized. And such a newspaper must not simply be a source of information. It must be a tool for organising.

Members of the party must be trained to use the paper for engagement in debates and recruitment in their workplaces and communities. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp etc must be well utilised as well. This should not be run on an amateurish basis with volunteers. While volunteers could play roles in the party's media strategy, it should be run by politically minded (in a working-class sense) professionals.

Internationalism must be a cornerstone of the party. The party should forge relations with radical and revolutionary workers' parties across the world and cultivate a grasp of the international dynamics of the capitalist system and working-class people's resistance in members. Doing this would entail full support for the struggles of workers, youths, women, and all oppressed peoples across the world.

The climate crisis which capitalist production has generated, and which puts the planet in peril, should be a matter of concern for the party. It must take up a leading role in the global movement for "system change, not climate change". Demands must be actively placed on the Nigerian state to act against practices such as gas flaring which contribute to global heating.

The party must stand against every ideology that promotes division within the ranks of working people. It should be unconditionally anti-sexist, anti-racist and anti-ethnicist. Full, and not just some mere tokenist involvement of women in all decision-making structures and processes of the party must be promoted. The party must also speak out against and mobilise actions to fight all forms of oppression of women and sexual minorities.

The youth are the future, and the future starts now. The party must mobilise students into its ranks as active members and not just as members of youth wings or youth committees. Branches must be set up on campuses as well as clubs (these could be as debating or history clubs) in post-primary schools.

Conclusion

Politics is about contestation for power. For the different bosses' parties, they each simply want *governmental* power, within the same state, because this state i.e., the capitalist state defends their collective interest *against* working-class people. Thus, for the working-class, our politics must be one which stands for changing the system and establishing a new form of state i.e., workers' power to defend our self-



emancipation, which the bosses' will resist, until there is no basis again for exploitation and oppression.

Trade unionism is the form of working-class struggle with which we fight for social-economic reforms *within* the existing capitalist system e.g., for improved wages and working conditions. But for as long as our struggle remains at the level of trade unionism, we will always be playing catch-up with the antics of the bosses. They will always try to take back whatever we win as concessions with the left hand, with their right hand.

We thus need to have a party of labour. And this can have meaning only when it is a party of a new type, with a new vision and political methods rooted in mass action with the aim of changing the system. It would have to contest elections but cannot change the system simply via the ballot box. Electoral victory that is not based on a system change politics could put us in government but not in power. We have seen how social-democratic parties in Europe and a few other places in the world have ended up pushing some of the most anti-workers neoliberal policies in those countries.

The basis of a mass-based workers' party of the type we need must be a socialist programme. This much was appreciated, in the *Labour and Politics* policy of the NLC adopted at the 8th NLC National Delegates Conference in February 2003. While the steps taken to "build" the Labour Party were in total disregard of this Congress resolution, it remains extant as a policy position of the NLC.

This is the time for this policy to be duly implemented and a socialist working people's party established to lead working-class people's struggle for total liberation and the building of a better society.



By Baba Aye

Baba Aye works as the Global Policy Officer for Health and Social Services for the Public Services International Global Headquarters in Switzerland. He was a former Deputy National Secretary of the Labour Party. He writes in a personal capacity



Occupational Safety and Health

INTRODUCTION

Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) has become a topic of increasing importance in the past three and half decades. Originally, the focus of OSH was on industrial hazards associated with mechanical injuries but the field has expanded to almost every workplace environment, from the office to the airplane, as well as to the laboratory and the entire health sector including health workers and patient's safety.

Many workers receive good wages and fringe benefits, but end up in a hospital bed or permanently disabled, if not dead, before or only a short time after retirement as a result of diseases or injuries sustained at the workplace? **The question then is "of what use is wealth without health?"**

Unfortunately, millions of workers all over the world suffer double or treble tragedies. They are not only lowly paid, their safety and health are in constant threat and danger as a result of very serious hazards at the workplace. Reports of work-related fatalities, injuries and loss of property as a result of workplace hazards, are common reading in the media. International Labour (ILO) statistics on fatalities and injuries and loss of property associated with hazards at the workplace, are alarming and still increasing.

Who is to blame? Is it the worker- the one (erroneously) accused of negligence, carelessness, ignorance or laziness to learn and follow instructions? Is it the employer whose responsibility it is to ensure that the workplace is safe, healthy and generally as hazard-free as possible? Is it the government – both as an employer as well as the authority whose responsibility includes ensuring that workers enjoy their rights – including safety and health, and that an enabling environment for wealth- creation by all social

partners is created and sustained? Is it the government whose responsibility it is to update Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) laws and regulations and ensure that they are strictly observed?

As the most affected, what can the workers and their unions do to ensure that safety and health delivery at work is maintained and sustained?

How can workers and their unions ensure that they are effectively and democratically involved in the formulation, adoption, and execution and monitoring of OSH policies, programmes and activities? Do workers have a role to play in such issues as hazard identification, prevention and control; accident prevention; the fight against HIV/AIDS, against discrimination / stigmatization of the people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and their care and most recently COVID 19 challenges on workers and the environment? Are OSH structures necessary? If so, how can such structures ensure that the social partners seriously and continuously play their role in promoting and sustaining the highest standards of OSH at all levels?

Workers and their organizations like trade unions should work together to bring a change to the unacceptable OSH situations prevailing at the workplace and beyond, for a safer and healthier life – at work and at home. There can never be decent work without consideration for OHS. This is one of the greatest challenges facing workers and their unions, employers and governments in the 21st Century.

THE CONCEPT OF OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH

Many workers sustain injuries diseases or even

die in the course of work every day. These incidents occur because workers work under unsafe conditions which include:

- poor design of machinery and work systems
- Inadequate safety measures
- Inadequate training and information
- Inadequate supervision

The problem is worsened in many cases because National Occupational Safety and Health - OSH - Laws are weak and not properly enforced. Occupational accidents and diseases remain the most serious human problems of modern industry and one of its most serious forms of economic waste. OSH has, as its main goal to create a working environment free from accidents. OSH deals with man's Safety and Health in relation to his work and working environment. It includes all factors of work and the working environment that may cause diseases and injuries.

In times past OSH was not a priority for many Unions. Job security and wage issues were of more immediate concern. Today occupational safety and health has become a major concern for Trade Unions. A healthy and safe workplace will help improve working relations, reduce costs and boost morale of workers. It is important that Unions pursue safe and healthy work environments for their members.

Let us look at the concepts of Occupational Health and Safety.

Occupation simply means **work** while **Safety** is a state in which hazards and conditions leading to physical, psychological or material harm are controlled in order to preserve the health and well-being of individuals and the community.

Occupational health is a field of **health** care made up of multiple disciplines dedicated to the well-being and safety of employees in the workplace. ... **Occupational health** services include employee wellness, pre-placement testing, ergonomics, **occupational** therapy, **occupational medicine**, and more

According to International Labour Organizations (ILO), **Occupational Health** is the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental and social well-being of workers in all **occupations (Work)** by preventing departures from **health**, controlling risks and the adaptation of work to people, and people to their jobs. (ILO / WHO 1950)

OSH PRINCIPLES protect the public from the health and safety risks of business activities; eliminate workplace risks at the source; and, involve employers, employees and the organizations that represent them in the formulation and implementation of health, safety and welfare standards

Occupational safety and health is aimed at securing the well-being of workers. It deals with the promotion and maintenance of safe and healthy working conditions. In general terms OSH seeks to:

- Promote and maintain the highest degree of physical, mental and social well-being of workers in all occupations;
- Prevent adverse effects of working conditions on the safety and health of workers;
- Place and maintain workers in work environment that is adapted to their physical and mental needs;
- Adapt work to the worker (not the worker to work).

THE MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM

Occupational safety and health at work are vital components of decent work. Decent living and working conditions are a basic right for workers, whereas occupational accidents and diseases can cause economic devastation to families, businesses and communities. The physical conditions and mental demands of the workplace determine to a great extent workers' condition. Occupational accidents have a significant human, social and economic cost, which we should strive to eliminate by ensuring that all workplaces are safe.

Every day, people die as a result of occupational accidents or work-related diseases – more than 2.78 million deaths per year. Additionally, there are some 374 million non-fatal work-related injuries each year, resulting in more than 4 days of absences from work. The human cost of this daily adversity is vast and the economic burden of poor occupational safety and health practices is estimated at 3.94 per cent of global Gross Domestic Product each year.

The ILO estimates that some 2.3 million women and men around the world succumb to work-related accidents or diseases every year; this corresponds to over 6000 deaths every single day. Worldwide, there are around 340 million occupational accidents and 160 million victims of work-related illnesses annually. The ILO updates these estimates at intervals, and the updates indicate an increase of accidents and ill health.

Some of the major findings in the ILO's latest statistical data on occupational accidents and diseases, and work-related deaths on a world-wide level include the following:

- Diseases related to work cause the most deaths among workers. Hazardous substances alone are estimated to cause 651,279 deaths a year.
- The construction industry has a disproportionately high rate of recorded accidents.
- Younger and older workers are particularly vulnerable. The ageing population in developed countries means that an increasing number of older persons are working and need special consideration.

Franklin K Muchiri, an OHS Specialist holds that despite the improved economic outlook for Africa, many challenges compromise real growth. Poor economies have poor working conditions and environment, which are also a symptom of poor occupational safety and health services. While many African countries have established OHS services, operational and organizational challenges remain and impede improvements in workplace safety and health. Declining formal employment and increasing informal and rural employment has led to expanding populations without service coverage.

Some Countries in Africa are faced with many other challenges, such as in the areas of economic growth and self-reliance, adequate public health services, nutrition and food security, infrastructure, conflicts, and literacy to mention a few. In addition to these competing and pressing factors, experience over the years has shown that poor economies are shrouded with poor working conditions and environment, which are also a symptom of poor OSH services. The challenge of enhancing the visibility of OSH services is therefore enormous and requires a systems approach based on continuous improvement in all countries, bearing in mind that they are at different stages of development.

Sound OSH services are central to national development, promotion of quality of working life and a vital component of any successful enterprise or business that recognizes the need for optimal performance and competitiveness. Only few governments, employers or workers and their organizations attach value and resources to the development and provision of OSH services. This is despite the fact that most African countries

established OSH services a few decades ago and continue to maintain the services, though weak and fragmented. In most cases they face enormous operational and organizational challenges.

WORK-RELATED INJURIES

The continent continues to experience high incidents of occupational injuries and fatalities. Globally, sub-Saharan Africa alone has one of the highest work-related mortality rates, yet most of the occupational injuries are never diagnosed or reported. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that of the 2.3 million annual global work-related fatalities, about 20% occur in sub-Saharan Africa with only about 12% of the global workforce. This is clearly an obstacle to development, to working out of poverty and to improving the quality of working life.

These fatalities represent a tip of an iceberg because data on those permanently disabled and incapacitated by accidents and diseases is not available. The injured may not even receive any compensation or adequate compensation and rehabilitation to adapt to other jobs or improve their employability status, since such systems where they exist, mainly cover only those in formal employment which accounts for less than 20% of those in employment.

Generally, Africa has the following problems that impede good working conditions

- Weak legislation and enforcement: in many instances legislation do not cover Agriculture, Forestry and Logging, sectors that are very prone to injuries;
- Lack of commitment on the part of employers to ensure safe and healthy practices at work;
- Lack of effective OSH programmes;
- Inadequate First Aid and medical facilities;
- Low worker participation in OSH decisions;
- Lack of requisite personal protective equipment;
- Lack of adequate education;
- Use of out-dated and dangerous technology;
- Use of unsafe machinery and tools;
- Lack of adequate resources for OSH programmes especially in the area of research.

The situation is worse in the case of occupational diseases. Whilst there has been some significant

decrease in cases of occupational injury, the incidence of occupational diseases continue to increase. This is so even in the case of developed nations. Many countries have no mechanisms for reporting occupational diseases. Occupational health facilities and personnel are very few.

Nigeria is no different to the problems in Africa. There is little or no data on Occupational Safety and Health accidents, near misses, diseases and more.

Workers and their organizations have the power to change some of these trends and must find new ways of organizing and engagements because of the changing world trends as posed by high technological developments and recently COVID 19.

WHY IS OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH A TRADE UNION ISSUE?

WHAT ARE THOSE HAZARDOUS CONDITIONS AT WORKPLACE

WHAT CAN TRADE UNIONS DO TO IMPROVE SAFETY AND HEALTH OF THEIR MEMBERS?

WHAT CAN TRADE UNIONS DO IN THE FACE OF COVID 19?

To be continued



Maureen Onyia-Ekwuazi – Head, NLC Occupational Safety and Health Unit

The largest umbrella body for workers in the broadcast media, arts and culture sector, RATTAWU wishes to appreciate all members for their great service and sacrifice especially in these troubled times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our efforts and struggles can never be in vain.

RATTAWU has been the image makers of the country since its inception in 1978 and we call on all members to continue in their support of the leadership and objectives of our great Union. Our strength lies in the unity and solidarity among members.

We use this opportunity to appreciate the Nigeria Labour Congress for its doggedness in the fight for the welfare of the working class. We know that the struggle for a new minimum wage was difficult and tiring, yet the Congress battled it out successfully.

Lastly, we also commend the Congress for sensitizing workers regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and we reaffirm our support for the Congress especially in this period when Nigerian workers are looking up to it for exemplary leadership.

Long live RATTAWU!

Long live the NLC!!

Long live Nigeria!!!



RADIO, TELEVISION, THEATRE AND ARTS WORKERS UNION OF NIGERIA (RATTAWU)

MOTTO: UNITY AND STRENGTH

**Sir, Kesington Adebute House,
Plot M408 Kubwa Extension III, Off
Army Post Service Housing Scheme,
P.O. Box 4818, Garki - Abuja.**



**Comr. (Dr.) Kabir Garba Tsanni
National President**



**Comr. Akpausoh A. Akpausoh
General Secretary**



Comr. Adeyanju Adewale Abdulwaheed, anli

IMPROVING MARITIME WORKERS UNION OF NIGERIA.

Our leadership has provided voice to the voiceless, we are providing ladder to bridge the inequalities that usually creep and abound in the work equation. We are constantly enlarging the grounds for participation for all our members striving towards the attainment of improvements in the conditions of the work environment and its ancillaries. We pursue our founding principles of commitment to social justices and obligations and of course all of these with the support of all principal social partners, our regulators and stakeholders in the maritime industry.

Comrades, for the period covering our NEC year, we have had to witness numerous occurrences which through your support we handled with dispatch, insight, planning, organizing, collaboration and above all God's guidance.

Our story has been one of upheavals and seemingly insurmountable odds. But, by sheer dint of determination, your fervent support and prayers we have cropped together a string of achievements amongst which are:

- ü RENOVATION OF NATIONAL SECRETARIAT AND ANNEX
- ü IMPROVEMENT IN WORKERS WELFARE
- ü CHAIRMAN SEAFARERS SECTION, ITF AFRICA
- ü ELECTED TRUSTEE NLC
- ü BOARD MEMBER, NSITF
- ü ITF, SEAFARERS CENTRE, LAGOS
- ü PAYMENT TO TALLY CLERK
- ü PAYMENT OF PENSION TO AGED SEAFARERS
- ü MEMBERSHIP GROWTH

One of the cardinal duties of a Union's administration is to grow its membership base. Comrades, it is my honour to announce to you that in the period of NEC year under consideration I and my Executives have had the privilege to inaugurate many new districts and units in all our ports and jetties. Statistically, our membership strength in last year has increased by 11% and growing.

TRIPARTITE SIGNING OF NSML & LNG AGREEMENTS (ITF, MWUN & COY) ON SEAFARER
CONDITION OF SERVICE.
IMPLEMENTING THE CABOTAGE LAW
IMPROVED RELATIONSHIP WITH STAKEHOLDERS
CONSISTENT INDUSTRIAL HARMONY
TRAINING OF UNION OFFICIALS
DECLARED STATE OF EMERGENCY IN SHIPPING INDUSTRY
WOMEN WING COMMISSION
IMPORT/EXPORT
ENFORCING PAYMENT OF STEVEDORING FEES BY INTERNATIONAL OIL COMPANIES
(IOCs) RESORT TO SHUTTING DOWN THE PORT

DEMAND ISSUANCE OF NEW BIOMETRIC CARDS TO DOCK WORKERS STATE OF SECURITY – A CALL

The prevailing level of security in Nigeria today is alarming. Nigeria is in the grip of various destructive forces that are bent on giving it a failed status. In our opinion the current state of insecurity is a manifestation of deep – rooted and structurally entrenched crisis development that create conditions of poverty, inequality and unemployment. We therefore call on the Federal Government to put in place serious measures to arrest this drift through social justice and development.

SENSITIZING WORKSHOPS, PURCHASE OF PALLIATIVES FOR COVID -19.
PAYMENT OF SEVERANCE PACKAGE TO TALLY CLERKS AND ONBOARD SHIP
GANGWAY SECURITY MEN.
ACQUISITION OF A PROPER WEB PAGE

Comrades we are committed to further the welfare of our members which is our core mandate consequently, we must band together and close ranks with the singular objective of contributing to stabilizing our economy and efficient governance especially in this trying period where economies are slowing down.

Because of his various Achievements Com. Adeyanju Adewale, anli, has been unanimously endorsed by all the four branches of the union, all organs and structures of the union to contest for another and second term of four years as President General, MWUN.



Comr. Waheed Adewale Adeyanju
President General, MWUN



Solidarity and Endorsement Visit to PG Waheed A. Adeyanju by all four branches of Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria



Presentation of Award and Citation to PG Comrade Waheed A. Adeyanju



MWUN President General pose with his Award with other leaders of the union



Women groups in MWUN pay courtesy and solidarity visit to MWUN President General



Women groups in MWUN pay courtesy and solidarity visit to MWUN President General



Comr. Felix S. Akingboye
Secretary General, MWUN



COVID-19: President General, Comrade Waheed Adeyanju leads Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria Distributes Safety Materials to Maritime Workers



MWUN provides relief materials to Seafarers & MT Drys Trader During COVID-19 Lockdown

NIGERIA'S DEMOCRACY, BECOMING AN ILLUSION?

Democracy, we are told is government of the people, for the people and by the people. It is a form of government in which the ultimate power resides in the people that is; they have the power to choose those who govern them through elections.

In ideal situations, the fact that the people decide who represents them at any level of political authority makes democracy beautiful. That is, to say that the people also have the power to remove from office the person who was elected to represent them, but did not deliver on the mandate given to him or her.

Ironically, democracy in Nigeria has deviated from or is deviating from the democratic norm where power resides in the people, as what we have now is just democracy of the political elite, where it is them who decide who wins or does not win election, since the ultimate aim of participating in electoral democracy now in Nigeria is to capture power or be close to those who have captured power, so that they can partake in the sharing of the national cake.

It is therefore, not surprising that the political elite have distorted and weakened the governance institutions, so that they can continue to manipulate the citizens to make them powerless and helpless in order not to hold them accountable for whatever they do or are supposed to do to give dividends of democracy to the people.

Since the essence of participation of the political elite in electoral democracy in Nigeria is not to serve the people, the people have been pauperized, so that they remain subservient to them and exist at the mercy of the political elite. The scenario where people exist at the mercy of the ruling political elite as is the case in Nigeria makes our democracy to be an illusion.

If we have to look back at the recent United States of America's Presidential election where the immediate past President wanted to cling onto power at all cost and by all means; we can see that America's democracy, being real, with strong institutions that are bigger than individuals and not like the weak institutions that we have here in Nigeria, was able to checkmate President Trump and go for the desired change, the Americans wanted by replacing him with the incumbent President, Joe Biden.

If it were to be Nigeria, one person and his foot soldiers, thugs and the rest who were benefitting from President Trump and his government would have fought tooth and nail to perpetuate him in power at all cost, so that they could continue to benefit to the detriment of millions of other people.

Nigeria's democracy and Nigerian people bedeviled with myriads of problems are being held captive by many prejudices, the worst of which are ethnicity, religion and perversion of capitalism to breed insurgency, banditry and kidnapping. Some of these prejudices are not founded on reasons, but are merely emotional feelings of those who hold them. These feelings breed instinctive hatred and dislike of others who are considered inferior or not worthy of being accorded certain recognitions.

Sentimental issues like religion, ethnicity and believe in a perverted capitalism just like human relationship based on blood are emotional and are held in the subconscious minds of those who hold them. They are not very easy to be uprooted and replaced with genuine feelings that can create change for better human situations to thrive.

In civilized climes like the United States, people subscribe to some of these sentiments, but the rates at which they value human lives over and above these divisive tendencies make them to moderate their feelings to favour humanism. These sentiments, if applied and used positively would place humanism above every other considerations. This is because the sentiments in themselves are supposed to be agents for realization of positive changes.

On the contrary, in Nigeria, the political elite manipulate these sentiments, then divide the Nigerian people along these sentimental lines to aspire to political power, cling onto it, at all cost or want to get there by all means, including, eliminating many people they considered being obstacles to realization of their aspirations.

The Nigerian political elite, seeing that they are running out of cards with the use of manipulation of our sentiments, use of thugs to aid them to capture political power, have added new methods like banditry, kidnapping of school children etc.

The political elite in Nigeria, since 1999, when Nigeria returned to democracy from long military rule make Nigeria to look like, it is their collective property, thus, see the Nigerian masses as not being fit to lay equal claim of ownership to the country, as they think, they embodied what Nigerians want or like. To them, what the masses need is poverty, that is why, they do not think twice before talking of increasing the pump price of petroleum products which affect all Nigerians.

With these thoughts at the back of their minds, they have undermined the country, its democracy and its people by using tactics that have made the citizens to be suspicious and scary of democracy, the system that supposed to serve and protect them. Their behaviours have made nonsense of what democracy should stand for, thus making it to look like it is an illusion, and not real.



By Tahir Hashim

*Assistant General Secretary,
Nigeria Labour Congress*

SOCIAL SPACE

COMRADE EMMANUEL UDOH BURIES MUM IN GRAND STYLE



14TH February

COMRADE PRINCE
IBRAHIM WALAMA

General Secretary, NUCECFWW

SOCIAL SPACE

Congratulations

The General Secretary RATTAWU and some CWC members felicitating with the National President Com. (Dr.) Kabir Garba Tsanni, On his promotion as Head of Dept Creative Arts in his unit.

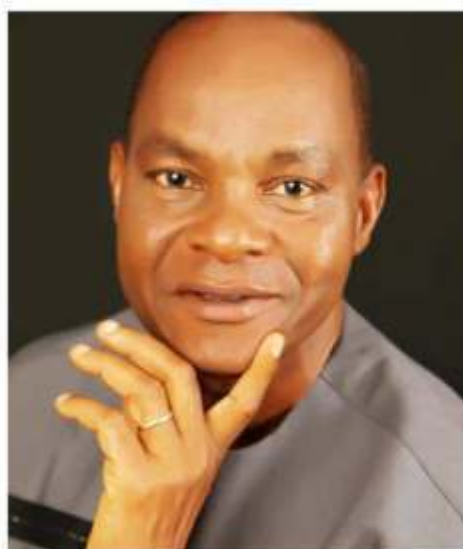


Congratulations Comrade President!

Obsequies



Comrade Didi Adodo
Former ISSSAN General Secretary



Comrade Charles Uzodike
Pioneer PASAN President

#StaySafe #ShowLove



We stand in Solidarity with our Heroes - Workers in the Frontline

They Work so that We may Live...
We Appreciate All Frontline Workers... Thank You



Health Workers



**Aviation &
Maritime Workers**

Journalists



**Sanitation
Workers**



**Road
Transport
Workers**



**Service and Utility
Workers**

**Informal Sector
Workers**



Call the National Centre for Disease Control on the following Telephone numbers if you require help, support and assistance
Toll Free Number: 0800 9700 0010, Whatsapp Number: +234708 711 0839, SMS Number: +234809 955 5577



In case of difficulties in your workplace or you need further information,
you can call the following NLC help lines
+234 811 7077 418 and +234 811 7077 419



THIS MESSAGE IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE NIGERIA LABOUR CONGRESS WITH THE SUPPORT OF INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION



NUFBTE 5-Star Hotel in Ibadan, Oyo State

Food Is The Engine Of Life

*On behalf of the National Executive Council (NEC)
of the National Union of Food Beverages and
Tobacco Employees (NUFBTE)*

*We wish all Nigerians Workers a very Productive
and Prosperous 2021. We also felicitate with the
leadership of Congress and all NLC Affiliate Unions
for the efforts in advancing the cause of the
Nigerian Working Class.*

*Our Struggles in Diverse fronts of Workers Rights
and Welfare will bear tremendous fruits.*

