

**NIGERIA LABOUR
CONGRESS**

A stylized illustration of a raised fist, rendered in dark red and black, is positioned on the left side of the lower half of the image. The fist is clenched and pointing upwards, symbolizing solidarity and struggle. The background of the lower half is a solid red color with a subtle, darker red pattern.

Contemporary History Of Working Class Struggles 1978 – 2018



NIGERIA LABOUR CONGRESS

**CONTEMPORARY HISTORY
Of
Working Class Struggles
(1978-2018)**

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PREFACE

In working on the project of writing a brief history of the NLC, time was our greatest constraint. In 40 years, the NLC, as an organisation, has produced tons of documents. Our desire was to have the organisation speak directly on the basis of its documents presented to organs or by pamphlets, leaflets and other such publications produced for the general membership of Congress or the society at large. We also wanted to allow the main actors in the life of the movement to explain, in their own words, the rationale for some of the decisions they took while in office, or what motivated them.

While this publication was able to benefit from the extensive use of Congress publications, we have decided not to use in this edition the direct interviews we conducted with major actors in the history of the NLC, apart from the interview with the incumbent NLC President, Comrade Ayuba Wabba, *mni*. This is deliberately so, because as a result of the need to beat the deadline for the anniversary edition, we had not talked with all the main actors, and we did not want to use some and not the others. Therefore, as agreed with the Congress leadership and the Organising Committee of the NLC at 40, we shall complete a fuller edition of the history between the end of the anniversary celebration and May Day. In that edition some four or so chapters not included in this edition will be reflected.

We wish to thank the leadership of Congress led by Comrade Ayuba Wabba, *mni* and that of the Organising Committee under

the chairmanship of Comrade Peters Adeyemi for giving us this rare privilege of documenting the history of NLC at 40.

We had depended on the written submission of the Pioneer President of Congress, Comrade Hassan Adebayo Sunmonu, who was himself an active member of the NLC at 40 Organising Committee, to do Chapter Two on Intervention and Restructuring of Trade Unions in the country. We are most indebted.

We wish to also express appreciation to Victor Kehinde Olaewe of Congress President's office for sacrificing consecutive weekends and working late for days with us on the manuscript. He worked very conscientiously, like his late dad, who had been a dependable hand in the General Secretary's office till his demise a couple of years ago.

We appreciate the efforts of other NLC Secretariat staff who helped in the transcription work especially Comrade Tahir Hashim. We also wish to express our gratitude to all those who gave us Congress documents and other publications which greatly assisted us, and will still do so in the fuller edition, to make our work easier and fulfilling.

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FOREWORD

When the National Executive Committee (NEC) of Congress approved the programme for the celebration of NLC at 40, and we subsequently constituted the organising committee to actualise this, I intimated the chairman of the committee on the importance of using the occasion to document the history of our movement. We agreed that no matter how sketchy, it was essential that we did not let the time available for doing this work to act as an obstacle to defeat the realisation of bringing out a publication on the anniversary of Congress.

I am therefore delighted that we have been able to achieve the publication of this brief history of our organisation, which is the first step in our resolve to document the rich struggles of our movement.

The Nigerian labour movement has evolved from colonial times to the present day as a fighting organisation of the working people of this country. From the rendition of the accounts of our forebears in the anti-colonial struggle up till the time of independence, and in the 58 years since we got political independence from Britain, the thread of our commitment to improved living condition of Nigerian workers and the mass of our people remains indelible and sticks out in all our struggles.

In the period since independence, we see that the ruling elites, both in flowing *babariga* and in khaki, only tolerate the workers who are the real producers of the wealth of the nation. All the concessions we have managed to win from our ruling elite had been as a result of hard bargains and struggles. The need for us as successor generation of the working class to be vigilant in order to maintain the hard-won benefits in our various places of work is accentuated by the fact that

in the current phase of neo-liberal economic paradigm, the corporate elite are more determined than their own forebears to reverse the gains of the working class and weaken the Nation State as an important institution in mediating with the working class.

As we stride towards the next decade and the 50th anniversary of the Nigeria Labour Congress, we face the challenge of rebuilding our organisation into a strong and dynamic fighting force, if our labour movement is to fulfil its mission as the undisputed champion of the working people of our dear country.

We take up the slogan; “Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win”, as our battle cry in our determination to continue to hold high the banners bequeathed to our generation by the generation gone by.

We shall not let them down. Victory is certain!

Comrade Ayuba Wabba, mni

February 2018

BACKGROUND TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADE UNIONS

A trade union is an association of workers formed primarily to fight for better conditions of services for its members. This is not all trade unions are concerned about, however, when they become class conscious, trade unions are a means of capturing political power to ensure workers total control over where they work and what they produce, for the good of all. Trade unionism therefore at the initial stage, is the collective act of improving and protecting the living conditions of all those who sell their labour power for livelihood, i.e. wage earners or employees. (Alabai & Umoru 1989:61)

Wage labour in various forms of domestic slavery and chattel had existed in pre-colonial period. However, the creation of a distinct Nigerian wage labour force must be credited to the colonial invasion of the territory today known as Nigeria, in the search for raw materials and external markets for manufactured goods.

After succeeding to forcefully take the lands from the indigenous population, the colonial invaders needed people to serve as guide to take them around. They also needed people whom they employed in the early commercial activities, like trade in palm oil, in the Delta region in contemporary Nigeria. These were to become the first set of the working class.

The result of the European scramble for Africa, which gave rise to the Berlin conferences of 1884-1885, where European powers sought and partitioned Africa, and divided it amongst themselves led to the economic exploitation and political domination of the African continent. This gave legal sanctions for the economic exploitation of the people. In the process of colonial settlement and the establishment of its administration, either through direct and indirect rule, they employed more labour force. This came in form of forced labour or paid employment to build the administrative infrastructure in the colonies, for colonial officials; for constructing roads and railways to the hinterland to link the coastal ports to facilitate cash crop exports, among others.

As Ananaba (1969) had noted, before the coming of the British colonialists to what is today known as Nigeria, the various societies within the country were involved in subsistence economy. To that extent, the notion of wage labour and the working class was non-existent. The people did their peasant farming through the instrumentality of village or clan cooperatives.

In the communities, able bodied adults (male and female groups) would take turns to work in the farm of one another. The person to whom the group was working in his or her farm had responsibility for feeding them while they are in the farm working or cultivating for the day.

Trade Unionism under Colonial Rule

As has been articulated in many historical accounts (Ananaba 1969) until 1939, workers in Nigeria (and other British West African colonies) could not form themselves into a union and be recognised by the colonial masters. The African workers were not expected to

raise their voice against the whims and caprices of the employers. They (workers) were expected to just listen, watch and obey.

However, this did not mean that the workers were silent all the time. Even without a union, on August 9, 1897, workers of the Public Works Department (PWD) organised a 3-day strike against the labour policies of Governor Henry McCallum in Lagos. This strike according to Fashoyin (1980:20) was met with strong resistance by the colonial authorities.

Perhaps, it might be necessary at this juncture to reflect on the history of trade unions in Britain to understand why the British colonial overlords decided to allow trade union recognition from 1939 onward in their colonies.

In the early days of the industrial revolution in Britain, working conditions in the workplaces were very harsh, with long working hours; with poor pay and workers labouring for as long as seventeen or more hours per day. The working people then started to group together as per their trades as bricklayers, cobblers, carpenters, and so on. Through these groupings, they were then able to approach their employers collectively and secure some changes to their working conditions and gain increases in their wages (see Arthiabah & Tham Mbiah 1995:14).

Before this collective action, the employers were all powerful, had full control over the workers. They hire whom they wanted, and paid what they considered appropriate, including how many hours the employees were to work. They resented the collective action of the workers as an encroachment on their rights and privileges as employers. They used their influence and dominance of the parliament to pass the Combination Act of 1799 which banned trade unions completely.

The action of the British bourgeois class forced the trade unions underground. They reacted violently against employers, who were using the new law to reduce workers' wages and demoting skilled workers to the grade of unskilled workmen, in addition to arbitrary extension of working hours and poor working conditions.

Workers formed gangs known as Luddites and took on the employers. When they are informed that an employer was unscrupulous, they would arrange to attack the said employer, loot the factory, destroy the machines and at times set fire on the building and disappear.

The authorities responded with harsh punishment for trade unionists, as the law had branded them conspirators. Workers who refused to dissolve unions when caught were severely punished by flogging, receiving long prison sentences or were banished or hanged on prosecution.

In reaction to this treatment, increased strikes and lock-outs, looting, arson, day light armed robberies and general unrest ensued. Amidst this, both the rich and the poor lived in fear for twenty-five years while this law was in force, banning the unions.

The British government eventually repealed the Combination Act in 1825, and the following year passed the Trade Union Act, which gave workers the legal right to organise and bargain collectively with their employers (Ibid. P. 13; Feather: 1963:15).

As recounted by numerous historical accounts, it was based on the bitter experience learnt from the attempt to suppress trade unions, that the British Parliament, many years later, in 1931 directed the Secretary of State for Colonial Affairs to issue what was called "Orders in Council" to governors of the colonies, to ask them to encourage the formation of trade unions, and focus their attention on

wages, rather than directing them towards political demands (ibid).

It was therefore to forestall potential strikes and workers' demonstrations which had begun in the 1920s that the order in council was given to the British Colonies.

The First Trade Unions in Nigeria: 1912 - 1943

The first trade union in Nigeria was the Southern Nigeria Civil Service Union, which was formed on August 19, 1912. The union changed its name to the Nigeria Civil Service Union after the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914.

The racial discrimination in the colonial civil service, low wages and poor conditions of service were among the key issues responsible for the establishment of the union. In the early period of colonial rule, discrimination on the basis of race was very pronounced. Nigerians, no matter how qualified, could not rise to attain 'senior service' position in colonial administration. In professional areas like medicine, despite having the same qualification, or even attending the same institution, a Nigerian could only rise to the post of Assistant Medical Officer. These racially discriminatory conditions led to the formation of unions, as the agitation of trade unionists helped to secure some improvement in the conditions of service of African workers.

For the next seventeen years, the history of trade unionism was more or less the history of the Civil Service Union until the formation of the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) in 1931 led by Ransome Kuti and others, but formally inaugurated the following year, 1932. This was followed by the Marine Daily Paid Workers' Union which came up in 1936 but changed its name to the Nigerian Marine African Workers Union in 1937.

As indicated earlier, the Trade Union Ordinance of 1938 which came into effect on April 1, 1939, formally legalized trade unionism in the country. The ordinance prescribed the rights and obligations of unions in the employer-employee setup. It also laid down the conditions for the registration of trade unions. Under these conditions, any five workers in an organisation could form a trade union.

According to Ubeku (1983:61), the ordinance gave considerable impetus to the development of trade unions in the country. Under the new regime, unions had to be registered before they could be recognised to engage in collective bargaining with an employer or embark on any industrial action.

This was how the Railway Union was forced to push through its registration as the first registered union in the country. The union had requested to dialogue with the management of the railways, on its demands for reversion to the daily paid system, as well as the inclusion of Saturday in the working week. The management refused to discuss with the union on the technical ground that it was not registered. This led the union to apply for registration. The Railway Workers Union received its certificate of registration in January 1940, making it the first to be given a certificate of registration with Comrade Michael Imoudu as its leader. (Ananaba op. cit. p. 22). This is partly responsible for the Legend of Comrade Imoudu as Nigeria's Labour leader No. 1.

The First Nigeria Labour Congress 1950-1953

By December 1941, a total of 41 unions with a total membership of 17,521 had registered under the trade union ordinance. The Post and Telegraphs Workers Union, the Nigerian Marine African Workers'

Union and the Public Works Department Workers Union were among the key unions that were registered within this period.

As has been observed by Bingel (1997:24) and others, up till this point individual unions were acting on their own to defend their individual interests, except where there was a coincidence of interest with those of sister unions.

One of the developments that triggered the desire to form a central trade union body to rally all the trade unions in the country was the introduction of government order in 1942, the General Defence Regulations outlawing strikes and lockouts. The workers considered such a measure as an attempt to stifle and suppress their new organisation.

They responded by a campaign to establish a central labour body through which they could show the strength of labour. The first central labour organisation that emerged from this was called the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUCN), with T. A. Bankole and M. A. Tokunboh as President and Secretary General respectively. (Bingel: op. cit. p. 26). M. A. Tokunboh went on in independent Nigeria to become Permanent Secretary in the Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity. He was also pioneer chairman of the board of the Michael Imoudu Institute for Labour Studies, Ilorin.

Upon its inauguration, the TUCN received solidarity messages from the leading nationalist leaders of the time and got official recognition by the colonial administration.

The TUCN, as noted by Adewunmi (2010:10), successfully prosecuted the 1945 general strike, which forced the colonial government to make major concessions to the workers. The 52-day strike involved about 500,000 workers. The workers were demanding among other things:

- i) *The repeal of Regulation 156 of the Nigerian General Defence Regulations which made strikes (and lock outs) illegal during the period of the war;*
- ii) *The release of Imoudu who had been imprisoned for his part in the 1942 industrial unrests; and*
- iii) *Award of a 100% salary increase to meet the menace of inflation caused by the war, an increase which has been granted European Civil Servants.* (Alabai and Umoru, op. cit. p.65).

As the effect of the strike became difficult to bear, Imoudu was released by the authorities, but it was not called off until an interim concession was won and announced.

The colonial authorities were very upset by the success of the strike and subsequently worked to undermine the TUCN and propped up smaller union bodies to compete with the central body.

The success of the 1945 general strike according to Ananaba, Otobo and Adewumi, was a big boost for the nationalists who stepped up their activities. Against the above background, the desirability or otherwise of political affiliation by trade unions became an issue. The big issue was whether or not the TUCN should affiliate to the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), as it was then the main political party.

Those against affiliation contended that “overt political links were incompatible with trade union principles” (Otobo, 1986:13). During its General Council meeting in December 1948, the TUCN decided against continued affiliation to the NCNC. Proponents of affiliation comprising unionists like Imoudu, F. O. Coker, P. O. Balonwu, Richard Aghedo and Nduka Eze went on to form the Nigerian

National Federation of Labour (NNFL) which was formally inaugurated in March 1949. Michael Imoudu and Nduka Eze were elected President and General Secretary respectively. The NNFL went on to form an alliance with the NCNC.

1949 Iva Valley Massacre and the First NLC

The November 18, 1949 massacre of protesting coal miners by the colonial state at Iva Valley, Enugu, provided a window of opportunity for reconciliation among rival labour leaders. At the instance of the Zikist movement, a National Emergency Committee (NEC) comprising of leading nationalists was formed. In the case of organised labour, a national labour committee made up of the leaders of the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria and the Nigeria National Federation of Labour, was set up to work in conjunction with the NEC.

In the resolution of the NEC, they called on the British government to hand over power to the people of Nigeria and self-government for Nigeria now.

The Iva Valley massacre served as a catalyst for reconciliation among the two labour centres. The outcome as Adewumi and others captured it, was the emergence of the Nigeria Labour Congress(NLC) in May 1950, as the new labour centre.

The new NLC was unable to pick up properly. This was because in the elections for the new leadership of the NLC, all the key positions were won by the radicals. The ex-TUCN officials felt a sense of domination and refused to surrender their assets to the NLC (Tanko, 1989; Jacobs, 1996, Bingel, 1997).

In May 1953, the All Nigerian Trade Union Federation (ANTUF)

was formed as successor to the first Nigeria Labour Congress. Comrade Imoudu again emerged as President, while Gogo Chu Nzeribe became Secretary General.

The new centre had among its aims the following:

- a) To improve the position and living conditions of the workers of Nigeria and to unite them in realisation of all objectives common to the interests of the working class;
- b) To seek for the state ownership of major industries in the country; and
- c) To establish and support the political wing of the workers movement (political party) with a view to realising a socialist government (Otobo, 1986:35; Adewunmi, 2010:12-13).

The decision not to affiliate to the ICFTU or WFTU angered some individuals who wanted to affiliate with the former. Therefore, in April 1957, they formed a new centre called the National Council of Trade Unions of Nigeria (NCTUN), with N. A. Cole as President, H. P. Adebola as Vice President and L. L. Borha as General Secretary. Both the colonial government and the ICFTU supported the new centre. In 1958, the government supported the participation of NCTUN's General Secretary at the ILO, while the ANTUF's Secretary General, S. U. Bassey was prevented at the airport by immigration officials from travelling to Geneva.

There were further attempts at unity, with the merger between ANTUF and NCTUN, leading to the establishment of a new central body called the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUCN) the 2nd TUCN. This was short-lived because the main actors, Imoudu, who emerged president, and Borha, who emerged General Secretary, stuck to their ideological positions.

The All-Nigeria Peace Conference in 1961 set up yet another reconciliatory committee where the two labour centres accepted to merge leading to the formation of the United Labour Congress (ULC). This was again short-lived as both ex-TUCN and NTUC leaders offered themselves for re-election. Imoudu's NTUC staged a walkout and formed the Independent United Labour Congress (IULC). The Adebola's TUCN became the United Labour Congress of Nigeria (ULCN). In 1963, a rival group was formed as a splinter with the name Nigeria Workers Council (NWC). This new body had to contend with two others, the Labour Unity Front (LUF), and the Nigerian Trade Union Federation (NTUF) (Bingel, op. cit. 30-31). This was how things stood up till the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil war in 1967.

The 2nd Nigeria Labour Congress

The second NLC came into being on 20th December, 1975, during the military dictatorship of Nigeria. The second NLC of December, 1975 has direct bearing on the birth of the present NLC.

The death, and burial of one of the leaders of the former United Labour Congress of Nigeria (ULC), Comrade J.A. Oduleye on 21st September, 1974 at Apena Cemetery, Ebute-Meta, Lagos, was the trigger to the creation of the Nigeria Labour Congress of December, 1975. As stated earlier, there were four labour centres in Nigeria by September, 1974. They were: Nigeria Trades Union Congress (NTUC); United Labour Congress of Nigeria (ULC), Labour Unity Front (LUF); and Nigeria Workers Council (NWC). Leaders of each of the four labour centres came to Apena Cemetery to pay their last respects to their colleague, Comrade J.A. Oduleye. Each of them in his funeral oration lamented the disunity within the Nigerian Trade

Union Movement and called for unity. It was at the Apena Cemetery that the late Okon Eshiett drafted the famous Apena Cemetery Declaration which was unanimously supported by the leaders of the four national centres.

In order to put the Apena Cemetery Declaration into immediate action, a 50-man Steering Committee was set up comprising leaders of the NTUC, ULC, LUF, NWC as well as the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT), which was not affiliated to any of the four centres.

The Steering Committee worked assiduously for 15 months (Sept. 1974 – December, 1975). In conformity with the law, each of the four national centres had to call Special Delegates Conferences, pass resolutions to formally dissolve their centres, before the new united centre could be launched.

During the 15 months of deliberation of the Steering Committee, agreement was reached for the slating of offices. The inaugural Delegates Conference of the new centre, which was called “Nigeria Labour Congress” (NLC) was fixed for 18-20 December, 1975.

The consensus arrived at in slating the offices of the second Nigeria Labour Congress of December 1975 did not please a tiny group of labour leaders including the late Armstrong Ogbonna, Comrade Jonathan Mba, the late Hudson Momodu, the late Paul Epuh, the late Muftau Oduntan, the late Paschal Bafyau, Edet Bassey Etienam, Obi Onwumere and Theophilous Mwemea. This group asked the Federal Military Government to stop the inauguration of the second NLC on 18th December, 1975 and probe the leaders of the Nigeria trade union movement, over their allegations that the Americans had taken over the United Labour Congress of Nigeria (ULCN), while the Russians were also alleged to have taken over the Nigeria Trades Union Congress (NTUC).

CHAPTER TWO

INTERVENTION AND RESTRUCTURING OF TRADE UNIONS IN THE COUNTRY

The Federal Military Government used the petition by those unionists who felt left out in the leadership structure of the December 1975 2nd NLC to directly intervene in the affairs of Nigerian trade unions. In a speech delivered by the then Federal Commissioner of Labour on 4th December 1975 to representatives of unions and the Nigerian Employers Consultative Association (NECA), Brigadier Henry Adefope, outlined the military government's policy on labour entitled: “The National Policy on Labour”.

According to the Federal Commissioner, the new policy had six (6) principal objectives. They include:

- a) The need to give a new sense of direction and a new image to the trade union movement in Nigeria;
- b) The desirability of removing completely from the trade union arena ideological or external influences which had plagued Nigerian trade union unity for more than a quarter of a century;
- c) The need to rationalise the structure and organisation of trade unions to ensure that they are self-sufficient financially in future, and not dependent upon foreign sources for finance;

- d) The need to provide facilities for trade union education in order to improve the quality of trade union leaders and the general knowledge and understanding of the purpose of trade unions by the rank and file members of these organisations;
- e) The need to strengthen the labour administration system in the country through the provision of adequate material and human resources for the Ministry of Labour for the enforcement of labour laws and regulations, and enhancement of institutions established by the government for the purpose of promoting effective labour administration in the country; and
- f) The need for the continued support of the principles and objectives of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) subject to the over-riding interests of the government and the people of Nigeria. (A. Abeku, 1983, p.211-212).

Inauguration of Second Nigeria Labour Congress

In spite of arrest of some delegates to the inaugural conference of the 2nd Nigeria Labour Congress, it was successfully launched on 20th December, 1975 with Wahab Goodluck emerging as President. The Federal Military Government refused to recognise the 2nd NLC; instead it eventually set up the Justice Duro Adebisi Commission of Enquiry to probe the trade unions. The report of Justice Adebisi's Commission of Enquiry was submitted on 31st August, 1976, six months after it was set up.

On 15th February, 1977, the Federal Military Government announced the banning, from trade union activities, of 11 trade union leaders

from trade union activities. This was directly the aftermath of the Justice Adebisi probe. The leaders of the movement banned were the following: Chief E.A.O. Odeyemi, Comrades W.O. Goodluck; S.U. Bassey; R.A. Ramos; J.U. Akpan; P.A. Isagua; J.O. Orotunde; S.O. Adeniran; P.A. Nwaneri; Chief M.O. Imodu; and M.J. Sule.

Following this drastic government intervention was the restructuring of the over 1,000 registered house unions, with active participation of trade union leaders and officials of the Federal Ministry of Labour. Employers' associations were similarly restructured. This exercise gave birth to 42 industrial unions between November 1977 and January, 1978.

Inaugural Conference of the Third and Present Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC)

Each of the 42 industrial unions sent 10 delegates to the inaugural conference of the “Central Labour Organisation (CLO), which at Ibadan on 28th February, 1978, was renamed “Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC).” The Draft Constitution of the “CLO” was mainly prepared by officials of the Federal Ministry of Labour, with no input from labour leaders.

The one-day inaugural conference was not enough to allow delegates to amend the entire constitution. Delegates were only able to amend the proposed name of the new centre from “Central Labour Organisation (CLO)” to “Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC).”

The late Major-General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua represented the Federal Military Government at the inaugural conference at Ibadan. He, on behalf of the Federal Military Government, announced “a

take-off' subvention of N1 million (one million naira) to the NLC. The four elective positions in the NLC were President, Deputy President, National Treasurer and Deputy National Treasurer, to which Comrades Hassan A. Sunmonu, David Ojeli, Peter O. Ero-Phillips and Morrison Mpamugo were respectively elected.

The Early Years: Challenges and Consolidation

At the inauguration of NLC, the challenges confronting its leaders were many. They include:

- The appointment of the General Secretary and other senior officers at the National Secretariat for the Congress to effectively take-off.
- The promulgation of the decrees (laws) formally establishing the NLC and the industrial unions affiliated to it (i.e. Decrees 21 and 22 of 1978);
- The release of the N1 million take-off subvention pledged by the Federal Military Government to the NLC and its affiliates i.e. the 42 industrial unions. The federal government eventually fulfilled the promised subvention in August 1978.
- The consolidation of the NLC and its industrial union affiliates;
- The establishment of the NLC State Councils in all the then existing 19 states;
- Consolidation of the NLC at home, and re-establishment and strengthening of relations with the Organisation of African

Trade Union Unity (OATUU), other national trade union centres within and outside Africa, as well as developing good relations with Nigeria Employers Consultative Association (NECA), and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as well as the then existing international trade union organisations (i.e. World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU); International Organisation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the World Confederation of Labour (WCL). The latter was despite the explicit prohibition by the decree prohibiting affiliation with international trade union organisations.

Achievements of the NLC in the Early Years

1. The National Secretariat in Lagos

The first NLC National Secretariat was at 42, Association Avenue, Ikorodu Road, Lagos. It was a one-storey building rented by the Federal Military Government from a landlord for the NLC. One of the properties seized from the Nigeria Trade Union Congress (one of the four national centres which merged to form the NLC was located at 29, Olajuwon Street, Surulere, Lagos. A chance visit by Comrade Hassan Sunmonu, the newly-elected President of NLC, to the headquarters of the Federal Ministry of Works, his former employers, at Tafawa Balewa Square in Lagos, gave him a shock. When he visited some of his former colleagues in the Building Division, he saw them designing the “Temporary Building of Michael Imoudu Institute of Labour Studies” on the 29, Olajuwon Street

property of the NLC. He asked the architects to stop work until he had clarification from the Federal Commissioner (Minister) of Labour, the late Major-General Henry Adefope.

Comrade Peter Olu Ero-Phillips, NLC's National Treasurer, and Comrade Sunmonu met Major-General Adefope in his office and asked him why the federal government was trying to steal NLC's property at 29, Olajuwon Street, Surulere, Lagos. He was shocked and denied the allegation. NLC's luck was that officials of the Federal Ministry of Labour did not inform, nor get the approval of the Federal Commissioner for Labour before they unilaterally seized the property. Subsequently, the NLC recovered the property and asked the Federal Ministry of Works to redesign the building, which eventually became its National Secretariat until it relocated from Lagos to Abuja, after which it served as the sub-secretariat of Congress up to now.

2. *Declaration of May Day (1st of May) as Public Holiday*

Thirteen years after the first military coup on 15th January 1966, multi-party democracy returned to Nigeria on 1st October, 1979. Alhaji Shehu Shagari was elected President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, while governors were elected to govern the then 19 states that made up the country.

NLC started agitation to get 1st of May (May Day) declared public holiday throughout Nigeria. In 1980, Alhaji Abubakar Rimi of Kano State and his Kaduna State counterpart, Alhaji Balarabe Musa, declared May 1 as public holiday. They were joined by four other progressive minded governors, namely; Alhaji Lateef Jakande of Lagos State, Chief Bola Ige of Oyo

State, Chief Jim Nwobodo of Anambra State, and Chief Solomon Lar of Plateau State.

With the success of May Day celebration of 1980 in the six states, the leadership of NLC decided to mobilise for a general strike on 1st May 1981 if the day was not declared a public holiday by the federal government. Happily, President Shehu Shagari, a few days to 1st May 1981 declared the day a public holiday throughout Nigeria. Nigerian workers and people have been enjoying 1st of May as public holiday since then.

3. *Recruitment of Intellectuals into the Trade Union Movement*

One of the most important achievements of the NLC in the early years was the recruitment of intellectuals as full-time officers of the trade unions, and as affiliates of the NLC. For example, the pioneer General Secretary of NLC was Comrade Aliyu Musa Dangiwa, who had a Masters' Degree in Public Administration, and was a lecturer at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The pioneer 1st Deputy General Secretary of NLC was the late Comrade Dr Lasisi Osunde, Ph.D. (Economics) who was a lecturer at the University of Lagos. The pioneer Assistant General Secretary in-charge of Education Department of NLC, was Dr Taiwo (Ph.D.), to name a few. Other Assistant General Secretaries such as Comrade Lawson Osagie, also had a Masters' Degree in International Law. Comrade Amaechi, who was in-charge of Research Department, also had a Masters' Degree. Comrades Yahaya Hashim and Salisu Mohammed were Assistant General Secretaries and each of them had a first degree before they came to join the services of NLC.

The pioneer General Secretary, Comrade Aliyu Musa Dangiwa, resumed duty on 1st September 1978. The new leadership designed the logo, the flag, the seal and the motto of the Congress. The motto which is “Labour Creates Wealth” remains till today. These were approved by the organs of NLC.

The new Congress Constitution was distributed among affiliate unions, and awareness raised on the newly introduced check-off dues system among affiliates and employers, to ensure compliance.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) formally affiliated to the NLC in June, 1982. The pioneer Trustee of the NLC was the late Comrade Dr Bala Usman, a historian of repute and Senior Lecturer at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Also, and in spite of the military decree to the contrary, the NLC affiliated ASUU, a year after it affiliated the Shop and Distributive Senior Staff Association in June 1981. Both the Shop and Distributive Trade Senior Staff Association and ASUU were classified as “senior staff” and therefore not supposed to be affiliated to the NLC. The NLC felt it was exercising its right under the Nigerian constitution and ILO Conventions 87 and 98 on Freedom of Association and the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining, both of which Nigeria had ratified.

4. *The Struggle for National Minimum Wage*

The struggle for national minimum wage in Nigeria started in earnest in 1980. The NLC had to call a nation-wide strike on 11th and 12th May, 1981 before the federal government started

negotiations with the leadership of NLC on 12th May, 1981. An agreement was reached for a national minimum wage of N125 per month and when the value of the naira was superior to the US dollar.

The National Minimum Wage was eventually passed into law by both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

5. *Winning the Battle for the Right of NLC to Send Participants to NIPSS*

The President of the NLC, Comrade Hassan Sunmonu, was invited to deliver a paper at the Nigerian Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru, on 8th March, 1980. He delivered a paper on: “The Role of Trade Unions in the Socio-Economic Development of Nigeria”. Among two participants of the Course that Comrade Sunmonu could re-call were Ambassador Enahoro (of blessed memory, and former Nigerian Ambassador to France), and Brigadier, (later Major-General) Paul Tarfa.

After the one-hour lecture, Comrade Sunmonu was subjected to many questions from both the participants and the course directors of the Institute, which he answered satisfactorily. Comrade Sunmonu was to later enquire from the course participants who among them was a trade unionist. None responded that any of them was a trade unionist. He then told the directing staff of NIPSS, as well as the course participants that the Institute was standing on two legs, and therefore needs to be made to stand on three legs to have better stability and relevance. Since then, NIPSS began offering NLC a slot or two beginning from February 1981.

The first trade unionist to come out of NIPSS was the late Comrade Bernard Obuah, pioneer 2nd Deputy General Secretary of NLC. Dr. Lasisi Osunde, the pioneer 1st Deputy General Secretary of Congress also attended NIPSS. Morgan Anigbo, one of the pioneer senior officers who rose to be deputy General Secretary, and acted as General Secretary on a number of times, also attended NIPSS.

Several other prominent NLC leaders have passed through the portals of NIPSS. Among this group are Comrades Ali Chiroma and Adams Oshiomhole (former Governor of Edo State). Chiroma and Oshiomhole went to NIPSS before serving as presidents of NLC. Same as Comrade Paschal Bafyau. Comrade Issa Aremu, former Vice President of NLC, as well as the current President of NLC, Comrade Ayuba Wabba, who went as National Treasurer of Congress. Comrade Abdulwahed Omar went to NIPSS in his last month as NLC President.

Comrade Ivor Takor, former National Treasurer of NLC, also went to NIPSS in that capacity. Comrade Khaleel Ibrahim, the current National Treasurer of Congress was sponsored to NIPSS before he became treasurer. Comrade John Odah, as General Secretary of Congress, went to NIPSS as a last minute replacement of a Deputy President of Congress, who was nominated in 2004 for the Course 26 Senior Executive Course (SEC). Comrade Odah won the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) Prize for the best project of that SEC. He was also designated among the best ten (10) participants of SEC 26.

People who succeeded in graduating from the Senior Executive Course are inducted as members of the National Institute (mni).

6. *Prioritisation of Workers' Education*

In conformity with the extant policies of the early years, foreign trade unions were not allowed to organise seminars and workers education programmes in Nigeria. This was sequel to allegations of foreign meddling in the affairs of the Nigerian trade union movement at the Justice Adebisi Commission of Enquiry, stated earlier.

The NLC leaders made maximum use of Nigerian intellectuals in our universities to organise workers education programmes, workshops and seminars for union leaders and members.

Thousands of trade unionists were sent to labour colleges of friendly national trade union centres in Europe (East and West), USA and Cuba. Some of the beneficiaries are still holding important positions in the NLC and its affiliates till today.

7. *Strengthening of Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU)*

NLC played a major role in the strengthening of the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU). At the time of the inauguration of NLC in 1978, it owed three years in arrears of dues to the OATUU, which amounted to \$9,000 (Nine thousand US dollars).

Before the end of 1978, the NLC paid the \$9,000 arrears and

added \$11,000 (eleven thousand US dollars) as solidarity to the OATUU. NLC never missed any of the meetings and activities of the OATUU. It should be remembered that the late Chief Emmanuel Odeyemi of Nigeria was the pioneer Assistant Treasurer, and later, Treasurer of OATUU. Comrade Peter O. Ero-Phillips, NLC's pioneer National Treasurer, was once Acting Assistant Treasurer of OATUU.

It was in consideration of NLC's commitment to OATUU that led to the election of Comrade Hassan A. Sunmonu as OATUU Secretary General from October 1986 – December 2012.

It is also important to state that the Federal Government of Nigeria had been giving OATUU an annual subvention of USD 200,000 (Two hundred thousand US Dollars) since 1987-2011, which was increased to USD 400,000 since 2012. This Federal Government annual subvention to the OATUU has contributed immensely to the growth, effectiveness and dynamism of the OATUU.

8. *Development of Strategic Alliances with NANS, Civil Society Organisations, Market Women Associations, etc.*

NLC developed strategic alliances with Nigerian Students through the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), Civil Society Organisations and the Nigerian Market Women Association. These bodies are well-represented in May Day celebrations up till today. For example, the May Day celebration of 1st May 1981, was attended by the President-General of Nigerian Market Women Association, the late Alhaja Abibat Mogaji, accompanied by over 100 uniformly dressed members at the National Stadium, Surulere, Lagos.

Alhaja Mogaji as well as the then President of NANS addressed the mammoth rally of workers at the National Stadium. The solidarity was such that an injury to workers automatically became an injury to the market women and students.

9. *Struggle Against IMF/World Bank Orthodox Structural Adjustment Programme*

After the symposium organised by the NLC in October 1981 on “IMF/World Bank” in which the late Professor Bade Onimode and the former Permanent Secretary, Federal Ministry of Finance, Alhaji Abubakar Alhaji (who was the Chief Negotiator for the Federal Government with the two Bretton Woods Institutions) delivered papers to over 500 Nigerian labour leaders, it became apparent that the IMF/World Bank orthodox Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), would lead to social and economic disasters for Nigeria and Nigerians.

At the end of the symposium participants adopted a resolution titled: “NIGERIA NOT FOR SALE”. This was to become a title of a popular pamphlet in which the NLC articulated vigorously the reasons for poor economic development in the country and what the country must do instead of taking the IMF loan and its dangerous conditions. From October 1981, the NLC began a vigorous public education against the orthodox Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of IMF/World Bank using the arguments outlined in the pamphlet.

A military coup led by Major General Muhammadu Buhari

overthrew the Shagari government on 31st December 1981. The Buhari government subsequently refused to take the \$2.8 billion IMF/World Bank loan as well as the accompanying Structural Adjustment Programme. But Buhari's military junta was to be overthrown 20 months later by another coup led by General Ibrahim Babangida. While the Babangida military government equally turned down the IMF/World Bank loan, due to popular disapproval, it however accepted to implement SAP.

The NLC led the Nigerian people in a protracted struggle against SAP. In spite of this and true to its colour as a military dictatorship, the Babangida administration implemented major planks of the harsh conditions of SAP. The consequences of that decision are still negatively affecting Nigerians and Nigeria today.

10. *NLC's Role at the International Labour Organisation (ILO)*

Since June 1978 to date, NLC has always sent strong teams of worker delegates to the International Labour Conferences in Geneva. Worker delegates of other countries have not failed to recognise NLC's role in the ILO.

Comrade Ali Chiroma was elected Deputy Member of the ILO Governing Body in June 1988, and he was elected twice for the 3-year-term. Another former President of the NLC, Comrade Adams Oshiomhole, was elected twice as Titular Member of the ILO Governing Body. His successor as NLC President, Comrade Abdulwahed Omar, also served as Titular

Member of the ILO Governing Body. The current President of the NLC, Comrade Ayuba Wabba, was elected Titular Member of the ILO Governing in June 2017.

11. Active Co-Founders of The Organisation of Trade Unions of West Africa (OTUWA)

NLC was a very active promoter for the founding of OTUWA, which is one of the regional trade union organisations founded by OATUU to which national trade union centres in West Africa are affiliated. It was launched in April 1984 in Conakry, Guinea. The launching ceremony of OTUWA was the last official function of the late President of Guinea, Ahmed Sekou Toure, before he died.

Comrade Salisu Muhammad of the NLC was elected Assistant Secretary General of OTUWA in 1987. Chom Bagu served in the same capacity in the early 1990s.

It was also a credit to the role of the NLC which made members of OTUWA to relocate the Secretariat of OTUWA from Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire) to Abuja, Nigeria at the organisation's re-launch conference held in Abuja in October 2015. The appointment of Comrade John E. Odah former General Secretary of NLC as the current Executive Secretary of OTUWA is another confirmation of the role of the NLC at the regional, continental and international levels of trade union activity.

CHAPTER THREE

NLC DELEGATES CONFERENCES

i) Kano, February 1981 Delegates Conference

The Kano Conference was the first Triennial Delegates Conference of Congress. It was held against the background of the return to democratic rule of the Second Republic. Within the context of multi-party democracy, the various political parties tried in subtle and not-so-subtle ways to have influence with the only central labour organisation in the country.

The minimum wage campaign and the subsequent two-day national strike in May 1981 before the resolution in favour of workers clearly put the Comrade Sunmonu leadership at odds with the NPN-led federal government. The veterans and other unionists had just before the Kano conference canvassed for the leadership that emerged from the Ibadan inaugural conference in 1978 to be returned intact for the purpose of continuity and building leadership succession. This was however rejected by Comrade David Ojeli and his group.

Once it became clear that NCSU's Ojeli was challenging Comrade Sunmonu for the Presidency of Congress, the Sunmonu group asked Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria (MHWUN) to nominate a candidate for Deputy President. Comrade Alajo, then General Secretary of the union (Medical and Health), after consultation at his union level, submitted the name of Comrade Ali Chiroma, who was then Deputy President of the union.

In the elections which held at the end of the conference, Comrade Sunmonu was re-elected President, defeating his erstwhile Deputy, Ojeli. Comrade Ali Chiroma and John Dubre of NUPENG were elected Deputy Presidents. Both Comrade Ero-Philips of Electricity Union and Comrade Morrison Mpamugo, retained their positions as National Treasurer and Deputy National Treasurer, respectively.

ii) Enugu, February 1984 Delegates Conference

The February 1984 Delegates Conference in the Coal City of Enugu brought to an end the six-year tenure of Comrade Hassan Sunmonu as President of NLC. The succession battle to replace him had his two deputies in the race: Comrade John Dubre, President of the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG), and Comrade Ali Chiroma of Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria.

Internal crisis within NUPENG and the promotion of Comrade John Dubre by AGIP Oil Company, employers of Comrade Dubre, to senior staff cadre ultimately truncated his candidature for Congress President, as a faction of the union went to court and obtained an injunction to prevent him from standing as a candidate.

Two other contestants who emerged as presidential candidates were Comrade Aruna Aghonikhena of the Nigerian Ports Authority Workers Union and Comrade Takai Shamang of the National Union of Electricity and Gas Workers. Comrade Aghonikhena was rumoured to have worked behind the scene with a faction of NUPENG opposed to Comrade Dubre's candidature, to obtain the court injunction barring him from the contest, in the hope that those supporting the outgoing president would support his election bid.

In the end, Comrade Ali Chiroma was instead supported by the

majority of delegates and he emerged the President of Congress as successor to Comrade Sunmonu. Comrade Lawrence Peterside from Civil Service Technical Workers Union (CSTWU), Comrade Sunmonu's union, was voted as 1st Deputy President, while Comrade Halilu Ibrahim, then President of the National Union of Banks, Insurance and Financial Institutions Employees (NUBIFIE) was returned as 2nd Deputy President. Comrade Stevenson Oshidipe, President of National Union of Food, Beverages and Tobacco Employees (NUFBTE), was elected National Treasurer. Comrade Morrison Mpamugo was elected Deputy National Treasurer.

iii) Benin February 1988 Delegates' Conference

As the end of the 1st tenure of Comrade Ali Chiroma's Presidency of the Congress drew nearer, the secretariat began preparations in earnest for the delegates conference already scheduled to hold in Benin City in February 1988.

The military regime of General Babangida had a running battle with the Congress in the last few years, over the regime's implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP); an economic blueprint of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which brought tremendous hardship on workers and the mass of the Nigerian people. This made the Chiroma leadership to take up a number of struggles against the regime – including protests against increase in the pump price of petroleum products. Other struggles that Comrade Chiroma led include the aborted ones against the massacre of ABU students in May 1986 and the anti-Apartheid protests in Lagos and Kano to object to Margret Thatcher, British Prime Minister's visit to Nigeria in 1988.

The military regime wanted to see the back of Comrade Chiroma as leader of the NLC and took full advantage of the seeming division within the NLC between the 'progressives' and 'democrats' to strike during the February 1988 Delegates Conference.

The conference was scheduled for 24-26 February 1988. The Democrats were fielding Comrade Takai Shamang of Electricity Union as their presidential candidate against the incumbent President, Comrade Chiroma. However, in the morning of the opening ceremony (24th February), the 'Democrats' announced that they had held their own conference and that Comrade Shamang had emerged President.

The main Congress, and delegates from majority of the unions, went ahead with the official conference with officials of the Federal Ministry of Labour (including the minister) in attendance; and international guests from fraternal organisations, including the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU), the Commonwealth Trade Union Council (CTUC) and members from diplomatic missions. The two-third quorum needed for the Congress to go ahead was easily surpassed, and at the end of the conference, elections held in which Comrade Chiroma was re-elected for a second term as President.

For the two Deputy President positions, Comrades Morrison Mpamugo and Jonathan Ihonde of RATTAWU were elected, defeating Comrades Frank Oramulu of NULGE and Nasir Balogun. For the three (3) Vice President positions, Comrades Paschal Bafyau of NUR, Adams Oshiomhole of Textile Union and Emmanuel Ojeiwa of Typists and Stenographers Union were elected. Comrades Joshua Ogunleye of Dockworkers Union and Kabir Yar'Adua of RATTAWU were defeated. Comrade Stevenson Oshidipe, the incumbent National Treasurer was returned against Comrade Adegunle Sodade, a candidate of the 'Democrats'. (Otobo 1992:102)

When the Chiroma executive, and the secretariat headed by Dr Lasisi Osunde, returned to Lagos, they were denied access to the 29 Olajuwon headquarters of NLC, as the police had sealed the premises.

On the 29th February, 1988, Abubakar Umar, the Federal Minister of Labour, Employment and Productivity, in a nationwide broadcast announced the decision of the Babangida administration to dissolve the Chiroma leadership of NLC, and appointed Michael Ogunkoya as Sole Administrator. The regime gave the contested or parallel conferences of the NLC that held in Benin, as the reason for its action, to avoid breakdown of law and order. It said the Sole Administrator will organise fresh delegates conference within six months.

In the end, the Sole Administrator stayed put for 10 months, and succeeded in organising a special delegates conference on December 19, 1988, after the 'Progressives' and the 'Democrats' within the NLC agreed to bury their differences and attended a unified conference.

iv) Lagos, December 1988 Special Delegates' Conference

The frosty relationship between the government and the majority of industrial unions affiliated to NLC following the dissolution of its leadership continued for many months as the majority of the unions in the 'Progressives' camp refused to cooperate with the Sole Administrator. This was the state of affairs when the government on April 10, 1988 effected yet another increase in the pump price of petroleum products.

In reaction to the above, students across many university campuses around the nation began spontaneous protests and demonstrations,

leading the government to closing down virtually all higher educational institutions in the country.

The 'Progressives' used the opportunity provided by the fuel price increase to show that despite the dissolution of NLC's leadership, they could still fight as organised labour. Several unions, including those of Banks, Insurance and Financial Institutions; Nurses; Food and Beverages; Medical and Health; Civil Service Technical Workers Union, among others, joined the protest already started by the students by embarking on strike.

This forced the government to constitute an official delegation to meet the leadership of the striking workers. The Minister of Petroleum Resources and advisers to President Babangida and his Deputy met with union leaders on 22nd April 1988. This was followed with meetings with the Minister of Labour, Employment and Productivity six days later.

Eventually on 29th April 1988, an 11-person delegation of the 42 industrial unions was constituted to meet with President Babangida. He was however represented by the Secretary to the Government of the Federation; Ministers of labour and of information and culture, and the political adviser to the president among others. A number of agreements were reached, including government's acceptance to stop further increases in the price of petroleum products. (Otobo. Op. cit. 109)

The Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) played a critical mediating role in bringing the 'progressives' and 'democrats' together to resolve their differences thereby paving the way for a Special Delegates Conference which held in December 1988.

According to some of the participants at those meetings, the demand of the 'Democrats' to have the secretariat staff of NLC relieved of

their positions and the secretariat re-constituted afresh was sternly rejected by the 'Progressives'. They however agreed that both Comrades Chiroma and Shamang should not be fielded as presidential candidates. In the end, two slates were created with President and Deputy President and National Treasurer in slates A and B respectively. The 'Progressives' took the slate with the President and the 'Democrats' took the one with the 1st Deputy President and National Treasurer, and other positions were evenly shared.

It was based on this sharing formula that a united team went to the Special Delegates Conference and the following officers emerged:

Comrade Paschal Bafyau of NUR, President; Comrade Frank Oramulu of NULGE was returned as 1st Deputy President; Comrade Adams Oshiomhole of Textile Union was elected 2nd Deputy President; Comrades Gabriel Falade of NUT, Agbe Davies of Precision Union and Stevenson Oshidipe of Food Union were elected as Vice Presidents. Comrade Raufu Sanyaolu of Construction Union emerged National Treasurer, Comrade Peter Asamba of NUCAMP was elected as Deputy Treasurer; Comrade Emmanuel Ijeh of NASU as National Trustee; Comrade Daniel Adekola of National Union of Public Corporation Employees (NUPCE) as National Auditor 1, and Comrade Mohammed Aruwa of NUPTE as National Auditor II.

v) Abuja February 1992 Conference

At the end of the 1st term of the Comrade Bafyau leadership of the NLC, the whole elected officers were returned for a 2nd term. Efforts by some unions to make Comrade Adams Oshiomhole to stand against Comrade Bafyau on a more radical platform were

unsuccessful as Comrade Oshiomhole was returned as 2nd Deputy President as per the earlier agreement just before the December 1988 conference.

However, in August 1994, the Abacha administration as part of the fall out over the annulment of the 1993 Presidential Elections, in which Chief MKO Abiola was widely believed to have won, by the Babangida military regime, he (Babangida) was forced to step aside from Aso Villa as military president. While doing so, he installed Ernest Shonekan as interim Head of State, with General Sani Abacha as Chief of the Armed Forces. Abacha subsequently shoved Shonekan aside and became Head of State.

The Abacha regime later promulgated Decrees 9 and 10 of 1994 dissolving the leaderships of NUPENG and PENGASSAN, as well as that of NLC under the leadership of Comrade Paschal Bafyau. It appointed Sole Administrators for the two oil unions; and for the NLC, Ason Bur, a former Deputy Governor of Benue State, who was first appointed as Sole Administrator. He was later replaced by Ahmed Gusau, who was also a former Deputy Governor of Sokoto State.

The NLC got its independence back four years later after the demise of General Abacha in office as Nigeria's Head of state.

vi) Abuja January 1999 Delegates' Conference

Under Abacha's regime, his labour minister, Uba Ahmed, a 2nd republic politician, did his utmost best to reorganise trade unions and the NLC in his own image. In his bid to weaken trade unions, he introduced hitherto unknown categorisation of “card carrying members”, and “non-card carrying members” of industrial unions. This was an ingenious effort to divide the unions along elected

officers and appointed officers. The military administration went on to promulgate decree (No. 4) of 1996, which barred General Secretaries of unions from contesting elective positions.

The sudden death of General Abacha in June 1998 paved the way for the new military ruler, General Abdulsalami Abubakar to create the enabling environment for the NLC and its affiliates to reclaim their organisation and to hold its delegates' conference to elect a new leadership in early 1999. The General Abdulsalami Abubakar regime repealed Decrees No.4 and 10 of 1996, which were targeted at preventing General Secretaries of industrial unions from contesting positions in the NLC. The regime similarly repealed Decrees No. 9 and 10 of 1994, banning the Executive councils of NUPENG and PENGASSAN, as well as the NLC. The repeal of these decrees came a few days before the arrival of a 4-man team sent by the ILO on a contact mission. The mission was led by the former Chief Justice of Mauritius, Mr Raj S. Lallah. They arrived on August 16, 1998. (Labour Factsheet, Vol. 4 No. 2:9).

With the ban on NLC lifted, industrial unions met and constituted a Caretaker Committee to prepare for elections into the offices of Congress. The Caretaker Committee, headed by Comrade Godwin Wokeh of Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria, had the following members, namely: Comrade A. A. Salam of NULGE, Comrade Ladi Iliya of NASU, Comrade Adebayo Kazeem of Food Union, Jeje Odeajo of NUPTE and Henry Adekweh of Construction Union.

After recalling some of the senior and principal officers of Congress sent away by the Sole Administrator, the Caretaker Committee fixed January 27, 1999 for a special delegates conference of NLC. Comrade Adams Oshiomhole of the Textile union, who was Deputy

President in the Comrade Bafyau leadership, was one of the two contenders for President. Comrade Uzoije Ukaummunna, former President of the Dockworkers Union of Nigeria, before the 1996 merger of all the unions in the maritime sector into the Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria (MWUN), was the 2nd candidate for Congress President.

Comrade Ukaummunna, in an interview with The Guardian Newspapers, which was re-published in the Nigeria Labour Factsheet, said he was contesting for the NLC Presidency to unite the labour movement.

For Comrade Oshiomhole, his vision for a new NLC was basically that of a 'New Beginning' to reclaim Congress' lost fame and reconnect with Congress traditional allies in civil society.

In the election which held at the end of the Special Delegates Conference, Comrade Adams Oshiomhole emerged as President, easily defeating his challenger. Others in the leadership that emerged were: Comrade Precious Kiri-Kalio of NUEE as Deputy President; Comrade Lucas Damulak of Chemical, Metallic, Leather, Rubber and Non-metallic Workers as Deputy President; Comrade Daniel Adekola of Amalgamated Union as Vice President; Comrade Issa Tijani of NUPENG as Vice President; Comrade Mohammed Erena of Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria as Vice President, Comrade Henry Adekweh of Construction Union as Vice President; Comrade R.A. Lawal of NUPTE as National Trustee and Comrade John Onyenemere of Food Union as National Treasurer. Other elected national officers include Comrade Ivor Takor of NASU as Deputy National Treasurer; Comrade Bright Billy Anokwuru of Shop and Distributive Workers Union as Internal Auditor; and

Comrade Zakari Mustapha of the Mine Workers Union of Nigeria as Internal Auditor.

vii) Abuja 2003 Delegates' Conference

The 2003 Delegates Conference of NLC witnessed the re-election of Comrade Adams Oshiomhole for the 2nd term. He defeated Clever Nnorom of National Union of Air Transport Employees (NUATE) for the position. Comrades J. I. Akinlaja of NUPENG and Abdulwahed Omar of NUT were the two Deputy Presidents elected with him. The four Vice Presidents were Comrades Daniel Adekola from Amalgamated Union, Fidelis Edeh from Nigeria Civil Service Union (NCSU), Henry Adekweh of Construction Union and Onikolease Irabor of Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria.

Comrade Ivor Takor moved up the treasury ladder as he was elected National Treasurer. Due to internal crisis within the Food Union, the General Secretary, Comrade Adebayo Kazeem, was unavailable to sign the nomination form of the President of the Union, Comrade John Onyenemere, so he could not contest for re-election as National Treasurer. Comrade Gidado Hamman of National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) was elected Deputy National Treasurer. Bright Billy Anokwuru from Shop and Distributive Union was returned as Internal Auditor, while for the first time, a female unionist, Comrade Esther Timothy-Cookey from NUBIFIE, was elected into the National Administrative Council (NAC) of NLC.

viii) Abuja 2007 Delegates' Conference

As the eventful 8-year presidency of Comrade Oshiomhole drew to an end, the issue of succession again took the centre stage as the secretariat prepared for the delegates conference scheduled to hold

at the International Conference Centre in Abuja. At the initial stages, five persons indicated interest in running for the soon-to-be-vacant position of President of NLC. These were Comrade Abdulwahed Omar, outgoing Deputy President from NUT; Comrade Onikolease Irabor, outgoing Vice President from Maritime Workers Union; Comrade Fidelis Edeh, outgoing Vice President from NCSU; Comrade Peter Akpatason from NUPENG and Comrade Peters Adeyemi from NASU.

Comrade Oshiomhole called a meeting of the five and pleaded with them to work out an arrangement among themselves so that some of them could take other positions, as they were all from very key unions that it would be a disservice to the movement if they stayed out of the NAC on account of having many contesting for the one slot of President.

After considerable consultation, NASU announced that its candidate, Comrade Adeyemi, was stepping down for the candidate of NUT. This broke the stalemate as the Maritime Union shifted its ambition to contesting for Deputy President. The NUPENG candidate initially shifted attention to contesting for National Treasurer. However, after further discussion, he eventually filed for Trustee. In the end the field was cleared for only two contestants vying for the position – Comrades Omar of NUT and Edeh of NCSU.

During this conference, the constitutional amendment granting the position of Vice President to the Chairperson of the National Women Commission had come into effect, bringing the Vice President positions to five. Similarly, the conference also created an additional Deputy President position, as well as Internal Auditor position, and gave them to senior staff unions under the Confederation of Free Trade Unions (CFTU) that had merged with the NLC. It was resolved that after four years, the two positions created would be abolished, as the

CFTU colleagues would have had enough time to mix and interact with their counterpart unions in Congress and be able to contest and win elections into any position they may wish to vie for.

The conference also decided to create two ex-officio positions in the NAC for women, as it was discovered that none of the unions were willing to nominate women for any of the executive positions.

In the end, the composition of the National Administrative Council (NAC) after the elections was as follows:

- Abdulwahed I. Omar (NUT) - President
- Peters Adeyemi (NASU) - Deputy President
- Onikolease Irabor (Maritime) - Deputy President
- P. A. K. Adewusi (SSANU) - Deputy President
- Abdullahi Bungudu (AAEUN) - Vice President
- Kingsley Ogba (NULGE) - Vice President
- Issa Aremu (Textile) - Vice President
- John Onyenemere (NUFBTE) - Vice President
- Ladi Iliya (NASU
& Chairperson NWC) - Vice President
- Ayuba Wabba (MHWUN) - National Treasurer
- Gidado Hamman (NURTW) - Deputy National Treasurer
- Peter Akpatason (NUPENG) - Trustee
- Abubakar Sadiq (AUPCTRE) - Internal Auditor
- Samuel Adeoye (Construction) - Internal Auditor
- Bashorun Hakeem (ASBIFIE) - Internal Auditor
- Lovina Okoro (Nurses) - Ex-Officio
- Coretta Balogun (RATTAWU) - Ex-Officio

This was the composition of the elected NAC for the 2007-2011 tenure after which the next delegates conference of Congress again held in Abuja.

ix) Abuja 2011 Delegates' Conference

The 2011 Delegates Conference during which Comrade Abdulwahed Omar, the incumbent President of the Congress, sought re-election also took place at the Thisday Dome in Abuja.

Prior to the election, the National Administrative Council (NAC) of the NLC, in tandem with the tradition of the NLC, met a few days to the Delegates Conference to consider the reports of the different Conference Ad hoc committees. The NAC approved and recommended to the other organs of the Congress a simplified voting system that removed ambiguity from the determination of the clear choice of workers for each elective position. The reports of the other sub-committees were also approved after minimal adjustments were made on their recommendations.

The 2011 Delegates Conference saw the creation of two new positions of Deputy President and Internal Auditor thus expanding the elected NAC positions. Also, following a constitutional amendment at the 2011 conference, the Deputy Chairperson of the National Women Commission became an ex-officio member of NAC. This brought the elected NAC number to 18.

In the elections that held at the end of the conference, Comrade Abdulwahed Omar was returned for another term of four years as Congress President. The three deputy presidents elected were: Comrades Promise Adewusi (SSANU), Joseph Ajaero (NUEE) and Kiri Mohammed (NCSU).

The five Vice Presidents elected were: Comrades Issa Aremu

(Textile), Emmanuel Nted (Maritime), Lawal Dutsinma (Nurses) and Lucy Offiong (NCSU and Chairperson NWC). Comrade Ayuba Wabba (MHWUN) was re-elected National Treasurer; Comrade Boniface Isok (NULFLAMPE) as Financial Secretary. A constitutional amendment changed the Deputy Treasurer position to Financial Secretary. Comrade Igwe Achese (NUPENG) was elected Trustee. The three Internal Auditor positions went to: Comrades Abdullahi Bungudu (AAEUN), Samuel Adeoye (Construction) and Danjuma Kunini (NUPPPPROW). The Ex officio positions went to Amina Danesi (ASSBIFIE), Sarah Gana (NUSAN) and Oby Eze (MHWUN & Deputy Chairperson NWC).

x) Abuja 2015 Delegates' Conference

The 2015 Delegates Conference of Congress held at the International Conference Centre, Abuja from February 8-11, 2015. The conference which showed signs of turbulence was eventually disrupted by some unions during the final stages of voting and ballot boxes smashed in the full glare of the national and international media.

Before this unfortunate turn of events, the Congress was called upon to use its supreme powers as specified in the constitution to decide on the eligibility of the NAAT candidate, Dr Comfort Oko to be on the ballot for the position of ex-officio. The Congress also decided in favour of the NURTW candidate, Comrade Yasin Najeem, being on the ballot for the position of Deputy President. Both had issues with their nomination forms and rather than resolve them administratively or at the other organs of Congress, they were referred to the Delegates Conference, which voted in both instances to give them the opportunity to test their popularity among delegates.

Following the disruption of the voting at the February Delegates

Conference, elders and veterans of the Congress intervened, and after series of discussions with all the concerned parties or stakeholders, March 15, 2018 was fixed to conduct the elections into the National Administrative Council of Congress. At the end of the exercise, the following emerged as elected officers of Congress for the 2015-2019 tenure.

- Ayuba Wabba (MHWUN) - President
- Peters Adeyemi (NASU) - Deputy President
- Kiri Mohammed (NCSU) - Deputy President
- Yasin Najeem (NURTW) - Deputy President
- Solomon Adelegan (AUPCTRE) - Vice President
- Lawal Dutsinma (Nurses) - Vice President
- Lateef Oyelekan (NUFBTE) - Vice President
- Asugwuni Amechi (Construction) - Vice President
- Khaleel Ibrahim (NULGE) - National Treasurer
- Safiyanu Mohammed (NUATE) - Financial Secretary
- Boniface Isok (NUCFRAMPE) - National Trustee
- Leke Success (NUHPSW) - Internal Auditor
- Simon Anchaver (AAEUN) - Internal Auditor
- Dr Yemisi Bamgbose (RATTAWU) - Internal Auditor
- Dr Comfort Oko (NAAT) - Ex-officio
- Amina Danesi (ASBIFIE) - Ex-officio

The National Women Commission held its conference on February 2017 and elected its national officers. Comrade Mercy Okezie of AUPCTRE was elected chairperson. She thereafter joined the NAC as Vice President in line with the constitution. Comrade Salamatu

Aliu of NUT who was elected Deputy Chairperson of the National Women Commission similarly became a member of NAC in an ex-officio capacity.

Comrade Joe Ajaero, General Secretary of NUEE, who lost in the contest for President of NLC, along with Comrade Igwe Achese, President of NUPENG, who contested for Deputy President and lost, along with some others left Abuja at the end of the Eagle Square elections and declared that they had formed a parallel leadership of NLC, claiming that the election at Eagle Square was rigged against them. Comrade Issa Aremu of Textile Union, who initially went with them, later retraced his steps and returned to the NLC.

After almost two years of posing as a parallel president of NLC, Comrades Ajaero and Achese announced the formation of a new centre called the United Labour Congress of Nigeria (ULCN). Of course, as the trade union laws currently stand in the country, while any twelve new unions can apply for registration as a labour centre, such unions cannot have been from any of the existing centres.

CHAPTER FOUR

NLC: FOUR DECADES OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STRUGGLES

This chapter seeks to briefly highlight the various dimensions of the struggles waged by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC). One dimension of the struggle, which remains the core role of the NLC, is that of the welfare and defence of the rights of workers in particular and the working class in general, represented in campaigns for national minimum wage and collective bargaining agreements. The second trajectory takes into account the struggles championed by NLC as the leader and embodiment of the mass democratic movement; serving as a pan-Nigerian platform of both the employed and unemployed, in the quest for the entrenchment of democracy and democratic consolidation as well as laying a strong foundation for sustainable development in the country.

Although the struggle, as often expressed, continues, and in on all fronts of the social spectrum; a reflection of this nature is required to take into account the successes and the not-so-successful engagements for historical and strategic ramifications, particularly in the interest of national interest and the future generation of the Nigerian mass movement.

This reflection clearly shows that the current NLC has in the four decades of its founding undoubtedly been the most representative nationalist, democratic rallying platform for the Nigerian mass movement by forging coalitions or allies with civil society

organisations, students and market men and women in the pursuit of an egalitarian society.

In playing the role of an anchor of the mass movement, the Congress and its leaders naturally engaged in pitch battles and brutal confrontations with Nigeria's ruling elite – both military dictatorships and their civilian variants – through street protests/demonstrations and rallies, general strikes, enlightenment and advocacy campaigns, all in the determined collective effort to ensure social justice in the country.

Like its counterparts elsewhere, particularly in the third world; the struggles spearheaded by the NLC are driven and guided by working class ideology in shaping policies to steer the political economy of the nation in line with the broad aspirations of the masses. Since its founding, the NLC has effectively played this role not only in its ideological posturing in terms of defending the interest of the working class by agitating to extract benefits for its members, but even more actively in coherently articulating sound alternative policy views to those of successive governments. This has inexorably made the NLC to become the most formidable nationalist rallying platform for Nigerians wishing to either move the country forward or who, when oppressed, turned to for redress.

It is the effectiveness with which the NLC had played this role that perhaps compelled the late Prof Festus Iyayi to argue that a more realistic appreciation of the NLC must go beyond merely framing its role in the context of contributions made to the economic, political and social development of Nigeria in the period of its existence but even more in the context of national liberation:

I believe that this way of examining the role of the NLC in the development of Nigeria is narrow and limits

understanding of the significance of the contributions of NLC in this regard. It is much more appropriate, I believe, to understand this contribution within the context of Nigeria's national liberation. A country may be democratic and developed but may not be liberated from foreign rule and domination. I believe that what the NLC has been involved in over the period has not just been the struggle for democracy and development but more fundamentally for Nigeria's national liberation. This fact emerges again and again when we examine the positions and struggles of the NLC on economic, political and social issues in Nigeria. It emerges in the rootedness of NLC's positions in the popular need, in the popular imagination and in historical experience. Whether it is in the area of the economic direction of the country, external debts, students' rights, the struggle against military rule, the debate on the political future of the country, politics and the electoral process, the establishment of a workers' party, or other related political issues, the NLC has pursued a vision of national liberation. For this reason, I shall speak about the contribution of the NLC to national liberation and development rather than simply national development. I shall also argue that what has been so important in the work of the NLC has not been its achievements in terms of shaping political, economic and social policy but its shaping of the popular imagination about another Nigeria that is better and realizable.

The interventions, activities and engagements of the NLC upon take-off in 1975 after the Apapa Cemetery Declaration of September 1974, and following the 1976 re-organisation that produced the

current NLC in 1978, perfectly fit the above narrative portrayed by the late Prof. Iyayi in the paper he delivered during the commemoration of NLC's 30th anniversary celebration on February 28, 2008 at the Yar'Adua Centre, Abuja.

From the leadership of its founding President, Comrade Hassan Sunmonu, through those of Comrades Ali Chiroma, Paschal Bafyau, Adams Oshiomhole, Abdulwahed Omar up to the current President, Comrade Ayuba Wabba, Nigerians, irrespective of their ideological leaning, have come to rely on the NLC's emancipatory capacity and potential in ways that positively have bearing on the socio-economic and political lives of Nigerians.

Among the key areas that the NLC, as both a trade union and mass movement champion, had initiated struggles and extracted victories include the following:

- 1) Minimum wage struggles;
- 2) Campaign against Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP);
- 3) Campaign against neo-liberalism: anti-privatisation, anti-deregulation struggles and fuel price increases;
- 4) Anti-corruption struggles; and
- 5) Pro-democracy struggles/free and fair elections, among other social crusades.

National Minimum Wage Struggles

For the purpose of this brief history, an abridged account of the struggles on three or four of the above thematic areas is necessary, if not for anything, but to illustrate the national emancipatory role of

the NLC, particularly in the context of the accuracy or prophetic certainty of its interventions, contestations and engagements with government on socio-economic policies and development issues.

The take-off point of a historical narrative that attempts to capture the broad framework of the struggles by the labour movement naturally ought to be on the existential challenges of workers, issues relating to “bread and butter” and the general wellbeing of the working class. In this regard, the leadership of Comrade Sunmonu, the founding President of the NLC, took a consciously liberating decision in protecting the interest of workers. Noting that the non-existence of a national minimum wage was one of the concerns of workers upon the inception of the NLC, Comrade Sunmonu's leadership did not waste time in steering workers to agitate for institutionalising a national wage benchmark, the absence of which had rendered workers vulnerable to exploitation by employers.

The Comrade Sunmonu leadership started agitations on the matter soon after inauguration but the then military regime under General Olusegun Obasanjo set up a panel on it. However, not willing to take any concrete action on the matter, the government dilly-dallied until it handed over power to the Shehu Shagari government in 1979.

While the Shagari government was equally reluctant to act on NLC's demand for a national minimum wage even though it generously awarded huge salary and allowance packages to the political class, the Sunmonu leadership, in an expression of its anger and frustration with the government threatened, and actually, called out workers on a general strike which commenced on 11th May, 1981. Initially, the government thought that it was just a mere threat, a bluff that the NLC would be unable to sustain; and therefore the strike was going to fail.

The national strike, which was highly successful, lasted for only two days before the government succumbed to the demands by pleading with NLC to end the strike which was suspended on 12th May, 1981 after a negotiated agreement with the government on a monthly national minimum wage of N125. Momoh (quoted in Iyayi (2008), noted with regard to the strike, thus:

The Sunmonu led strike was a success to the extent that the state and capital made concessions to labour and acknowledged the miserable social conditions of the working class, caused especially by the rising cost of living, poor conditions of service, and workers' retrenchment. But the strike, in a political sense, showed the limits of economism. Although the issues upon which the NLC's demands were hinged were welfare oriented, the essence of their demands raised political and class questions.

Among other outcomes of the May 1981 two-day general strike was the fact that the Kano and Kaduna States governments which were led by the progressive leaning Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) governors, Alhaji Abubakar Rimi and Alhaji Balarabe Musa, respectively, decided to top the N125 national minimum wage by N2 in addition to declaring May 1 as public holiday for the first time in the history of Nigeria. The following year, the Shagari NPN-led federal government was therefore compelled to declare May Day a national holiday.

In the subsequent military regimes after the dethronement of the Shagari government on December 31, 1983, the national minimum wage issue remained a major component of the struggles by the NLC, which the military governments usually unilaterally awarded without setting up the tripartite negotiating committee canvassed by

the ILO in line with its Minimum Wage Fixing Convention No. 131 and Minimum Wage Fixing Machinery Convention No.26, all of which were ratified by Nigeria.

The issue of minimum wage did not take centre stage again in national discourse until 1989 when the NLC under the leadership of Comrade Paschal Bafyau as President set up a minimum wage committee under the chairmanship of Comrade Adams Oshiomhole. The Oshiomhole Minimum Wage Committee drew up an agenda, which after due deliberations by the organs of the NLC, adopted N1,000 as a basis for proposal for negotiation and transmitted same to the military government.

The government, unwilling to fast-track the process, kept quiet for a long time until the NLC began threatening to embark on strike and heating up the polity thereby forcing the government to set up a negotiating committee chaired by Air Vice Marshal Hamza Abdullahi, with Prof Damachi and the then Colonel Olagunsoye Oyinlola, among others, as government nominees while Comrade Oshiomhole led representatives of NLC.

After the committee held a couple of meetings at the old Parliament Building in Lagos, it however became clear to the NLC that the government was reluctant in making progress as workers were becoming more agitated.

In the course of the protracted negotiation, the leadership of Congress sought and got approval to engage with President Babangida at the then seat of power in Dodan Barracks, where they discussed, among other things, the issues of minimum wage and the banning of NLC from participation at international labour activities beyond the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU).

Typical of military dictatorships, President Babangida, at the meeting unilaterally offered to pay N250 as minimum wage stating that the matter had been on for too long without any progress. While he had wanted the NLC leadership to respond immediately to the offer, the delegation insisted that in line with the tradition and democratic tenets of the trade union movement, the issues (minimum wage and international affiliation, which was also resolved in favour of Congress) must be taken through the organs of NLC for ratification. The NEC meeting of the NLC, which met soon after, accepted the N250 benchmark and it became the national minimum wage till September 1998, when then outgoing Federal Military Government under General Abdulsalami Abubakar issued a directive to increase the minimum wage and other levels of wages (especially in the public sector). The implementation of the directive resulted in the increase of the nation's minimum monthly wage to N3,000 and N3,500 for states and federal government workers respectively.

With the emergence of democratic leadership under President Olusegun Obasanjo who had promised to improve the welfare of workers by paying a living wage, the leadership of the NLC under Comrade Adams Oshiomhole as President demanded for N20,000 as minimum wage.

Put under pressure by the NLC, the Obasanjo leadership was not able to kick-start the tri-partite negotiating process until April 11, 2000 when he announced the Committee and appointed his Chief Economic Adviser, Chief Philip Asiodu, as chairman, with Comrade Oshiomhole heading the labour team. The tripartite committee negotiated a minimum wage of N7,500 for federal public sector workers and N5,500 for state public sector workers. In the

negotiation, government agreed and promised to an increment of 25% the following year and 15% the year after.

Another landmark minimum wage struggle commenced in December 2009, when NLC leadership under Comrade Abdulwahed Omar kicked off the process by tabling a demand for the payment of N52,200 per month. The demand was approved by the NEC of Congress which held in Kano on December 18, 2008, which resolved that N5,500 for state workers and N7,500 for federal workers were no longer adequate to take care of the basic needs of workers. “To us, the minimum wage fixed eight years ago is no longer tenable, nor have the 25 per cent and 15 per cent wage adjustments sufficiently shielded the worker from spiralling inflation and ever poorer standard of living,” Comrade Omar, asserted while addressing journalists after the NEC meeting on December 18, 2008.

NLC resolved that though it was aware that the ruling class was likely to argue that the government would be unable to meet the demand on the basis of the then global economic meltdown, the Congress was not prepared to take any excuses since workers ought not to be held responsible for the profligate nature of our elite who in the past nine years of democratic governance had squandered the country's income from oil.

While the federal government reacted positively almost immediate to the agitation through the Minister of Labour and Productivity, Adetokunbo Kayode (SAN), who described the issue of increase in minimum wage for workers as very important, the government dragged the process for over two years. In fact, the NLC had to carry out nationwide rallies and protests campaigning for a new national minimum wage along with other core struggles on electoral reforms,

strengthening the fight against corruption and anti-deregulation campaign which it kicked off in May 2009 in Lagos.

The nationwide campaign and protest rallies forced the government to set up in July 2009 the Minimum Wage Tripartite Committee under the chairmanship of Retired Justice Alfa Belgore with representations from the NLC and TUC, on the side of organised labour, the National Employers Consultative Association (NECA) and state and federal governments. The NLC was represented in the committee by Comrade Abdulwahed Omar, President; Comrade Peters Adeyemi, Deputy President; Comrade Promise Adewusi Deputy President; Comrade S.O.Z. Ejiofoh, General Secretary of Amalgamated Union, Comrade Issa Aremu Vice President and Dr Peter Ozo-Eson, then NLC's Chief Economist, but now its General Secretary.

The tripartite committee worked for almost a year and arrived at a negotiated figure of N18,000 as the new national minimum wage which was submitted to President Goodluck Jonathan in July 2010, along with a draft bill that contained provisions for systematic wage reviews if and when the need arose in order to avoid inflationary backlashes that usually follow salary increase.

While the NLC leadership had thought that the government was going to expedite the passage of the bill against the backdrop of the fact that it was collectively negotiated, that was not to be until the Congress had to issue an ultimatum at the end of its NEC meeting held in Akure in July 2010, where it threatened, and actually wrote a memo to the federal government on the directive of NEC.

The dilly-dallying continued until the NLC had to again convene an emergency NEC meeting on October 27, 2010 to further deliberate on the issue and came out with the resolve to embark on a three-day

warning strike. To effect the resolution, the NEC set up a Strike Committee chaired by Comrade Promise Adewusi while fixing the warning strike to commence from November 10-12, 2010.

The NEC resolution and the mobilisation for the strike got the desired response. Just a few days to the commencement of the strike, and in the frantic effort to scuttle it, the federal government opened discussions with organised labour with two meetings; the first with the Minister of Labour and Productivity, and the second with the National Council of State Committee set up by President Jonathan and chaired by the Vice President, Namadi Sambo, and the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, the governors of Edo, Adamawa, Benue, Niger, Jigawa and Lagos as members. While the Minister of Labour met with organised labour on November 8, 2010, the Council of State Committee met with them on November 9, 2010, the eve of the commencement of the strike.

In these meetings, government came out with the argument that the N18,000 negotiated figure was merely a recommendation by the Belgore-led committee subject to be reviewed by government but organised labour maintained that that was not true on the basis of the principles of tripartism.

The deadlock eventually compelled President Jonathan to request to personally meet with the leadership of NLC and their counterparts in TUC. At the engagement with the President held on the evening of the first day of the strike, which was very successful, President Jonathan, while expressing his willingness to implement the new wage, however pleaded that he needed some time to convene a meeting of the National Council of State to iron out grey areas with governors and former heads of state. Subsequently, the Council of State meeting held and endorsed the new minimum wage bill and

thereafter transmitted it to both chambers of the National Assembly which gave it accelerated passage paving the way for the signing into law by President Jonathan on Friday March 25, 2011.

Like the protracted struggle for the implementation of the 2011 National Minimum Wage Act, the struggle to activate the re-opener clause to commence negotiation for a new national minimum wage regime will be two years by April 2018. Comrade Ayuba Wabba, NLC President, while addressing workers at the 2016 May Day celebration in Abuja revealed that the NLC had submitted a demand for a new national minimum wage of N56,000.

Comrade Wabba said the submission of the demand was in fulfilment of a promise his leadership had made to Nigerian workers at the 2015 May Day celebration soon after it was elected at the 2015 Delegates Conference of NLC that as soon as the then new government of President Muhammadu Buhari had been sworn in on May 29, 2015 and settled down, the NLC would table a proposal for the negotiation of a new National Minimum Wage against the fact that the National Minimum Wage Act 2011 has a five-year re-opener clause for new negotiations to commence.

Following repeated threats by the leadership of Congress on its gradual inability to calm workers on their expectation of a negotiated new national minimum wage, the 2017 May Day revolt against the Minister of Labour and Employment, Dr Chris Ngige, jolted the Buhari government from its leisurely approach to issues to step up the tripartite committee which the President personally inaugurated on November 27, 2017 at the Presidential Villa, Abuja.

In his New Year message in January 2018, the NLC President, Comrade Wabba stated that workers expect that before the end of the

third quarter 2018, negotiations and other legislative protocols ought to have been completed for workers to begin to enjoy a new wage in the face of increasing economic hardship.

The Struggles against SAP, Privatisation, Deregulation, Subsidy and Fuel Price Increase

Of the struggles that brought the NLC fame and pain in equal measure were the resistance and contestations against neo-liberal policies of successive governments, in both military and civilian dispensations. Equally in the category of 'dangerous' struggles and activism was NLC leadership's preoccupation with, and determination to making the Congress an unapologetic fulcrum of human rights struggle; the champion of democratic values and guardian of Nigerian nationalism in addition to its traditional role of defender of workers interests.

These manifest most clearly in the ideological clarity, tone and fervour with which the NLC's views were expressed and in the committed and unrelenting manner in which its successive leadership had mobilised its members, the masses and resources for causes they believed in.

Prof Iyayi aptly captured this when he stated:

In all areas, the NLC has captured the imagination of the country as the defender of the common man and as the repository of the best values of Nigerian society. In fact, the NLC has given hope to the vast majority of Nigerians who are excluded, marginalised, exploited and oppressed that a better Nigeria is not only possible but also realizable. This imagination is so robust and so alive that ordinary men and women in Nigeria not only identify with the NLC but expect it to be the answer to all their problems. This explains the

observation made by Adams Oshiomhole at the last Delegates Conference in Abuja that almost all transporters in Nigeria now routinely mount 'Nigeria Labour Congress' on their vehicles. Thus the country now expects the NLC to act when elections are rigged, when fuel prices are increased, when wages are not paid, when the rulers steal the nation's resources, when some foreign loan is being taken through the back door, when bogus foreign debts are being paid or student activists are expelled by some high handed Vice-Chancellor. In effect, the NLC has been so effective throughout the period that the people expect it to be the government in power. (Iyayi: 2008).

The dynamism of a popular organisation described in glowing terms above was not developed with the birth, or re-birth, of the NLC in the current era; or even in the era immediately preceding this. Rather, it could be argued that it is a natural component, and indeed, in the DNA, of the Nigeria labour movement, in the context of the historic role the founding fathers of the movement were recorded to have played in the struggle for the political independence of Nigeria.

The literature of NLC's struggles and national solidarity remain the most reliable and voluble attestation to its commitment to the working class, nationalism and humanity represented in its confrontations and battles with the ruling elite (either military or civilian) in their determination to enforce anti-people policies imposed on them by western capitalist hegemonies in their quest to perpetuate the economic exploitation and domination of developing economies. This renewed affront which began in the early 1980s through an initial attempt to force the Shagari government to take IMF/World Bank loan instantly drew stiff resistance from the labour movement led by the NLC which rightly saw in the loan the

dangerous economic trap that would undermine Nigeria's sovereignty.

Contemporary popular struggles by the NLC therefore pre-dates the SAP struggles, which of course were the most protracted of the battles that ultimately defined the courage and commitment of its leadership and members to the ideological principles of the working class. The IBB SAP era struggle kicked off the most brutal confrontations with Nigeria's ruling class and culminated in the pro-democracy movement under General Abacha's dictatorship and tipped under the harsh economic policies of the Obasanjo leadership.

While NLC's contemporary role as the defenders of Nigerian sovereignty and nationalism dates back to the Murtala/Obasanjo military regime's anti-people policies in the public service, education and oil sectors, its status as the most patriotic nationalist organisation became definitive from 1983, some months before the coup that ousted the civilian government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari.

At a time when neo-liberalism was newly rearing its head in the political economy of Nigeria, the NLC, which was barely five years and therefore still being nurtured to effectively play its trade union role by its founding leadership under Comrade Hassan Sunmonu, out of courage and patriotism, was provoked to challenge the plan of the Shagari government to privatise Nigeria's national assets.

Although its activism and opposition to privatisation, and indeed the entire neo-liberal enterprise whose principal aim is capital accumulation through asset stripping of public assets in the name of privatisation, and unhindered market access through a wholesale deregulation of the economy; gained profound national attention from the SAP struggles under IBB's junta, NLC's contestations as a

movement against these policies actually began much earlier when it challenged the Shagari government's attempt to sell some government companies and parastatals.

In its seminal pamphlet; **“Nigeria: Not For Sale”**, released sometime in October 1983, the NLC strongly argued that rather than the excuse of inefficiency and unprofitability, the government's plan to privatise some national firms was actually part of the conditions for a loan package that Nigeria was seeking from the IMF.

In deconstructing the argument advanced by the government for privatisation, NLC's propositions, which still remain as fresh and relevant as they were 35 years when they were first made, located the challenge of “inefficiency” in the character of government officials and political appointees. Making the point under what it terms “The Real Problem”, the NLC states:

The Nigeria Labour Congress does not deny that most public institutions in the country have been inefficient and incurring losses. But the reasons for this state of affairs are known to everybody. It is an open secret that majority of the Board members of public companies and corporations are political appointees. Thus a number of these board members have no professional knowledge or experience of the companies to which they are appointed board members. Most of them are appointed simply in compensation for the loss of elective offices.

The majority of these political appointees' first priority as a result of their loss in the political race has often been to amortise their loss at a fast rate by crude and primitive accumulation of capital at the expense of the health of the industry and nation. This is often done in many ways:

- *Award of questionable contracts.*
- *Floating of private companies for securing company contracts.*
- *Board members taking loans from companies of which they are members, erecting building with the loans, and renting same to the same companies at fantastic rates over questionable period of time.*
- *In banks and financial institutions, most board members secure for themselves and their relatives unsecured huge loans contrary to banking regulations. [Emphasis in original].*
- *Using of company materials and labour to execute their private jobs at the expense of the company.*
- *Multiple board membership for individuals*
- *Unnecessary overseas tours*
- *Over-pricing and over-invoicing of goods*
- *Excessive remuneration and perquisites of board members out of proportion to their functions and the financial liquidity of the company.*
- *The purchase of unnecessary materials by board members.*
- *Importation of obsolete machinery by board members.*
- *Frustration of workers by board members.*
- *Board members taking distributorship of goods produced by their companies*

– *Nepotism by board members.*

A few concrete instances could be cited here. Nigeria External Telecommunications (NET) was reported in the newspapers recently to have budgeted One Million Naira for “special events” in 1983. A total of N619,130 was alleged to have been earmarked for “gifts” in commemoration of NET's 21st Anniversary; and a pair of scissors and ceremonial cloths were allegedly bought at N4,5000.00 for the official commissioning of Kaduna Earth Project of NET in Kaduna State. Nobody has denied this report.

Similarly, NPA workers union has repeatedly shown that it is the frivolous activities in NPA that are responsible for waste of funds and inefficiencies. It pointed out that:

- (a) Engagement of private companies like CTC and RORO in services formerly handled by the NPA and from which it made profit has increasingly led to loss of revenue for NPA.*
- (b) Indiscriminate purchase of furniture and equipment which amounted to over three million naira in 1982 leads to further wasteful spending.*
- (c) Engagement of ARA automation computer consultants which is unnecessary has led to a spending of N24,000 in foreign exchange monthly by the NPA.*

Another example is the newspaper report on Hadejia/Jamajare River Basin Development Authority and confirmed by the General Manager that his 3 houses

were hired from him by the authority, one of which was hired for him and furnished by the authority with advance payment made for two years.

The list of unethical practices of these board members is endless.

The inability of government to diagnose and find solution to these problems is responsible for the pathetic state of these government owned companies and corporations. (“Nigeria: Not For Sale”; pp. 1-2).

The NLC did not just dismiss as untenable government's position; or offered concrete alternative viewpoints that are patently practicable in political and economic terms, irrespective of whatever ideological standpoint, but unequivocally proclaimed that it is a dangerous road through which to take the country. It argued that as a patriotic organisation, the NLC owes the country a duty of raising the alarm on the consequences, and to call on other patriotic Nigerians to resist or speak out against the selling off of national assets, which it argued will lead to “economic slavery”.

To underscore the urgency and historic significance of the position of the NLC at that point in time and in the context of contemporary experience, particularly since the unmitigated commencement of the privatisation exercise under Obasanjo's second coming, it would be important to also quote at length the second and final section of the ***Nigeria:-Not-For-Sale*** document, under the sub-heading; “National Independence”, basically to illustrate NLC's apprehension and foresight. The Congress postulated that:

The way out is not the sale of these companies and corporations to private individuals, but the correction of the ills as listed above. It is surprising that a corporation

like the Nigerian Ports Authority for which the Federal Government spent over N600 million (some of which was borrowed) for ports development, is one of the corporations earmarked for sale to private ports operators.

At this stage, it is necessary to emphasise that there is hardly any country in Africa and most of the developing world where the ports are owned by private companies and individuals. The security of the country makes it inadvisable for the government or anybody to contemplate selling out Nigerian ports to private companies and individuals. The same holds for strategic sectors of our economy like Nigerian Airways, Nigerian Airports Authority, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC), National Electric Power Authority (NEPA), the Banks and Insurance Companies, Post and Telegraphs, Nigerian External Telecommunications, the Oil Refineries and the Steel companies, the Nigerian National Shipping Line, etc.

Already, the most important sector of our economy – the oil sector – is dominated by foreign and private interests. All operations in this sector are under the control of these interests. For example, out of the 8 dominant companies involved in exploration and production of oil, 6 are American, 1 French and the other Dutch-American; of all the 4 major oil marketing companies, 2 are American, 1 Italian and the other French; also of the 7 major oil drilling contractors, 5 are American, 1 Italian, and the seventh French. Similarly, all the 8

major equipment suppliers in the oil industry are American and of the 3 major oil dredging contractors, 1 is British and the 2 others American. Moreover, even the terminals which are on Nigeria's territory and used for evacuation of oil are not controlled by Nigeria. These are Excravos, Bonny, Brass Forcados, Pennington and Quaiboe. Similarly, none of the tankers that come and lift oil out of Nigeria are owned by government or Nigerians.

It is therefore self-evident that our economy is in the hands of foreigners, mainly the United States. Is it then surprising that an oil glut could be imposed on Nigeria so successfully? The answer is of course no.

This is why it is shocking that the government, instead of considering taking over the other vital sectors of the economy, still in private hands, for the purpose of protecting our country's sovereignty and interests, is talking of selling even more sectors to private hands. The arguments of the government that it is because they are inefficient and not profitable cannot hold water.

The problem is not that of public ownership. Nor is inefficiency a good argument for selling off our public corporations. Inefficiency is a common malaise in the country and not only our ports and airways are inefficient. The Nigeria Police Force is equally inefficient; do we then sell off the Police Force to the U.S. Marine, or private security companies? Or can we hand over the government itself to the British because the administration is inefficient?

The plan to sell many of the public owned companies and corporations must be opposed by all patriotic Nigerians, not only because it goes against the progressive goal of increasing government participation in the economy as obtains in other parts of the world, but also because the establishments for sale are amongst the most vital and strategic institutions of Nigeria's economy. Control and ownership of such institutions by any party other than the government will mean a serious loss of our Country's Independence and Sovereignty.

Furthermore, Congress considers that Government's proposal to sell these companies and corporations to individuals will amount to a deliberate attempt to use public funds for the enrichment of a few individuals at the expense of the nation. What is needed is a radical reorganisation under public ownership. To want to reorganise under private control is to ensure that accruing profit goes into private pockets and this will lead to retrenchment in the public sector and will bring untold hardships to the working people of this country. It will only benefit the IMF and its mentors who demand for privatisation. The sales would inevitably lead to economic slavery and the pauperisation of the nation.

This is certainly not what Nigerians bargained for when we fought for and won our political independence twenty-three (23) years ago.

Congress considers the winning of economic independence the corollary of political independence.

Any attempt, by any government to undermine the struggle for economic independence of Nigeria is unpatriotic and must be resisted by all patriotic forces in Nigeria. When the Airways, the Ports, the Railways are sold, our Countrymen, what will be left of our Country? Nigeria is not for sale! (pp. 3-4).

The NLC was able to restrain the Shagari government from going ahead with the privatisation plan or taking a loan from IMF as he was swept from power by a military coup on December 31, 1983 that installed General Muhammadu Buhari as Head of State.

The true test of NLC's ideological commitment and capacity for mobilisation against privatisation of public enterprises, pauperisation and enslavement of the Nigerian citizenry, which it thought had effectively ended with the overthrow of the Shagari government, came again two years later when the IBB regime introduced the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). This was after Nigerians had overwhelmingly rejected IMF loan that the government had planned to take.

There were added scenarios to NLC's protracted battles to IBB's socio-economic programmes. Naturally, the first scenario is rooted in the ideological disposition of NLC and its allies in civil society and the student union movement to IMF or World Bank or any policy related to these two institutions seen by the global progressive community as working against the interest of the working class and the vulnerable in society. So IBB's attempt in accessing a loan from the IMF was an automatic red flag and genuine concern for suspicion and resistance.

The second scenario was the destruction of confidence that existed in the public; and at least to some degree in some quarters within the

labour movement, when IBB went ahead to implement all the conditions attached to the IMF loan by imposing SAP on the country. While the NLC and its allies were amenable to subjecting the IMF loan to public debate, in which they actively and excitedly participated in, they were however grievously offended when the IBB government failed to keep to its side of the bargain not to take the IMF loan if after the debate it was proven beyond doubt that taking the loan and implementing all its conditionalities were against national interest.

Bristling with anger from the deception and betrayal of the IBB government during the IMF debate, the NLC, like it did during the Shagari's attempt at privatisation, mounted massive opposition and stiff campaign by carrying broad enlightenment campaign on the dangers of SAP.

The enlightenment campaign yielded positive results to the extent that even key members of the ruling elite, like (General) Obasanjo who had as military head of state defied the patriotic positions of the NLC on key socio-economic policies (and was to later do same as President), became one of the most formidable opponents of SAP. In a statement that has come to be a historic vindication of NLC's long held position against neo-liberalism, Obasanjo noted shortly after SAP's take-off that:

It appeared to me that we now have a structural adjustment programme which seems to drastically reduce the living standards of all classes of productive workers except speculators and commissions agents...

If we are substantially dictated to, let us tell those who preach trade liberalisation and other harmful measures to us, and which they do not practice on the ruins of their

own economy and at great economic decline, social dislocation and turbulence and political consequences that we can ill afford...

Adjustment is part of the process of existence. But it must have a human face, human heart and milk of kindness and must not ignore what I call human survival and dignity – issues of employment, food, shelter, education and health. (Daily Times, 30 November, 1987).

The NLC, in spite of its appreciation of the enormous powers and brutality of the military government and in real danger to the organisation and its leadership spearheaded the struggle against SAP. It raised popular consciousness against SAP's consequences – devaluation of the naira, removal of subsidies on petroleum products and state-funded education, downsizing of the public service, a pseudonym for retrenchment of workers in the public service, among other anti-development and anti-welfare policies – all of which soon manifested thereby leading to lamentations from many quarters such as Obasanjo as quoted above.

The NLC, in its Report of NEC to the Delegates Conference of the NLC held in Benin-City on February 24, 1988, and which the military government bungled, noted on its struggle against SAP thus:

Government's argument for the introduction of SAP is that by rejecting the IMF loan the measures have become necessary as a self-imposed strategy for solving the nation's economic crisis, and in order to encourage self-reliance and self-sufficiency. The fact, however, remains that all the components of SAP either by coincidence or otherwise are the same conditionalities

the IMF is known to have imposed. The NEC of Congress consistently opposed major aspects of SAP on (various) grounds.

From the above, the NLC seemed to have become despondent and powerless, but its ideological commitment to continue the struggle is reflected in the persistent resistance it mounted for years and which invariably restrained to a large extent the government from implementing the totality of SAP's prescriptions which would obviously have further worsened living conditions and the Nigerian economy.

NLC's resilience in resisting neo-liberalism is reflected in its long history of opposition to fuel price increase in the name of removal of subsidy on petroleum products or persistent rejection of deregulation of the downstream sector of the petroleum industry. From January 6, 1978, when the military government under General Obasanjo first introduced into the political economy of Nigeria fuel price increase, to May 27, 2007, just two days to his exit as democratically elected President, the NLC had led Nigerians to resist virtually on the 18 occasions that our leaders under one excuse or the other had to increase the price of petrol.

As noted by Iyayi on February 28, 2008 during the 30th anniversary of the NLC:

All the protests from 1998 were led by the NLC. Following this record of commitment, the NLC has come to function as the rallying point against increases in fuel prices by government. The NLC has committed large amounts of its lean resources to this struggle. It has led demonstrations through cities and villages across the country to register the opposition of the people against the practice and fire the popular imagination that resistance to route out

despotic regimes is necessary and possible. And for the effort, it has paid huge prices that have included proscription, detention and even death for members of the NLC family. We cannot forget Comrade Chima Ubani and others who died in the course of this struggle.

It can be argued that over the years, NLC has come to be defined and framed more by the narratives of its struggles and contestations with government on the politics of oil and oil pricing. Invariably, Nigerians seem to have come to the conclusion, just as the government may have taken it for granted, that leading a resistance to perceived anti-people policies or any socio-economic and political issues was the basic responsibility of the NLC. The consequences of this perception of responsibility remain a great burden on both the NLC as an organisation, and its leaders who are under obligation to carry out this mandate imposed on them by popular consent. This is a mandate that is repeatedly strengthened by the organs of the NLC, again and again over the years through resolutions that ultimately fortify its working class ideology from government meddlesomeness.

It is therefore this lack of capacity by especially successive military governments to influence the dynamics within the NLC that is expressed often in its (government) brutal approach of proscription or in the attempt to tinker with the legal framework of the enabling labour laws or clampdown on labour leaders, strategies which were adopted in the anti-SAP years and throughout NLC's extensive struggle over fuel price increments, subsidy removal, deregulation and pro-democracy activism.

This hostile approach made engagements and negotiations with the NLC over oil price or any other interface difficult and often either drove underground resistance or constrained to civil disobedience through street protests that often turned violent. This also resulted in

closure of campuses of Nigerian universities after violent protests, some of which resulted in the killing of students and protesters by the police.

NLC and Obasanjo's Second Coming

While the expectation of organised labour was that with the berthing on May 29, 1999 of democratic governance, the usual arbitrary and authoritarian tendency of indiscriminate increase in petroleum products prices was going to be a thing of the past, they were shocked to discover that the government that emerged under Obasanjo became the most imperious in terms of implementation of every aspect of neo-liberalism.

It in fact came to be that those aspects of neo-liberalism that past military governments couldn't contemplate introducing – the wholesale privatisation of public enterprises, indeed the selling off of every saleable public assets; both lucrative and non-lucrative government assets such as parastatals, government staff quarters, etc., full deregulation of the downstream sector of the petroleum industry and withdrawal of subsidy, among others – became the core policies of the Obasanjo government.

Obasanjo, as noted earlier, increased fuel price 11 times in his 8 years in office, and on each occasion, the NLC had to mobilise Nigerians to oppose the increase. He equally too sold many government enterprises and property including federal government staff quarters in Abuja and elsewhere. At the peak of the privatisation exercise, the Obasanjo administration planned to sell even federal roads, airports and seaports under the pseudonym of concessioning. By the time he was due to leave office after a futile effort to amend the constitution to grant him a third term in office, Obasanjo had lined up Nigeria's four refineries for auction to his cronies, a decision that was only reversed by his

successor following stiff opposition from the NLC after some days of general strike. To handle the privatisation project, Obasanjo set up the Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE), and put a Director General, Nasir Ahmed el-Rufai, that was ready to sell even the State House at the slightest snapping of fingers from Obasanjo.

What this means for the NLC was that it was permanently on a protest mode and whenever called, workers and Nigerians responded and were perpetually on the streets throughout the Obasanjo presidency, engaged in protest after protest – against privatisation, withdrawal of subsidy and fuel price increase or petrol tax, among other demonstrations.

State Brutality against NLC and Protesters

Even in a brief history of the NLC as this, it cannot be 'brief' as to be unable to accommodate quite a detail of state brutality against protesters during the many bitter strikes, particularly during the protests in 2003, which left a trail of blood and death. A total number of 19 were killed in the course of these struggles while many were injured, with others arrested, brutalised and put in custody for days without trial.

While a comprehensive list of those killed will be published in the full history of the NLC, a brief account of the brutality meted to six staff of NLC and others is narrated below. The six comrades include Comrade Linus Ukamba, Comrade Eustace James, Comrade Nuhu Toro, Comrade Emmanuel Udoh, Comrade Emmanuel Anasi, and Comrade Innocent Ogwuche. They were rounded up by the police at gunpoint and arrested in Abuja on October 14, 2003, as they were protesting and trying to ensure compliance with the agreed price of N34 per litre by petrol stations that were selling products at a higher rate.

They were manhandled by the police and taken to the office of the FCT Police Commissioner who later dispatched them to different police stations for detention. While in Police custody, the six comrades were severely beaten up by criminals in the police cells, apparently on police order. Comrade Linus Ukamba was left unconscious with burst eardrums and the others with one form of injury or the other. Apart from this, they were refused bail or denied medical attention as the police claimed that it was only President Obasanjo who could order their release at that time.

Subsequently, they were taken to a Magistrate's Court at Wuse Zone 5, Abuja, where criminal charges of “disturbing public peace” were profered against them on October 15, 2003. The Chief Magistrate again refused them bail and ordered that they be remanded in custody at the Kuje Medium Security Prison. However, on October 20, 2003, they were brought to the same court where they were released on bail. The then NLC President, Comrade Adams Oshiomhole, described the act as “justice delayed,” while the Constitutional Rights Project described their release as belated.

Before this incident, the police during the June 2003 strike arrested and detained over 50 persons across the nation. In Abuja, the police beat to pulp two journalists, Mr George Oshodi of French News Agency and Mrs Funmi Komolafe of Vanguard. Also arrested were popular musician, Charles Oputa (a.k.a. Charlie Boy), Comrade Chris Uyot, then NLC's Head of Industrial Relations Department, Comrades Hauwa Mustapha, Chinyere Amogu, Chinwe Ewurum, Nuhu Toro, Kalu Uche, Isaiah Eigege, Moses Umoru, Innocent Ogwuche and Ibrahim Osue, all of NLC National Secretariat.

Comrade Oshiomhole was to be arrested in October 2004 at the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport on his way to Delta State. The NEC report to the 9th Delegates Conference of Congress, which gave

account of the commando style arrest of the NLC President stated:

The NLC President, Comrade Adams Oshiomhole, also has criminal charges pending since 2001 ...He was rudely intercepted at gunpoint, hurled to ground and savagely dragged to a waiting car by men of FCT Command of the State Security Services (SSS). The car sped off in a hail of smoke, dust and gunfire. Mr Obadiah Bapven, one of his aides, was severely beaten up and detained at the Abuja office of the SSS.

Concern about the life of Comrade Oshiomhole became a serious issue subsequently. Congress was forced to cry out following widespread rumours that he might be assassinated and the incident passed off as an armed robbery attack. Congress thus called on the Federal Government to affirm that there was no truth to the report and that none of its agencies or functionaries would use the tool of assassination against the NLC leadership.

Against the manifest commitment of the NLC to lead the resistance against the anti-people policies of the Obasanjo Presidency, President Obasanjo personally saw the NLC as a serious threat. After the October 2003 strike and protests, he launched a stinging attack on the NLC leaders in a nationwide address, accusing the NLC leadership of attempting to constitute a parallel government.

To demonstrate his seriousness on the allegation, and in the effort to de-radicalise or neutralise and if possible destroy the NLC, he, in 2004, sought some amendments to the Trade Union Act to de-register the NLC. He only failed to achieve this through sheer resistance and determination of the NLC who mobilised to ensure that the clauses that will guarantee his wishes were not passed.

The Struggle During Yar'Adua's Government

In its history of struggles, particularly against deregulation of the downstream sector of the petroleum industry and arbitrary increases in products prices, the most organised and comprehensive input the NLC had made to streamlining the oil sector to serve national interest was during the brief leadership of the late President Yar'Adua, although it, however, did not come on a platter of gold.

NLC's initial contestation with the Yar'Adua government was an inherited problem from the Obasanjo administration. A few days to the end of his second 4-year tenure in May 2007, President Obasanjo authorised the increment in the prices of petroleum products, making it the 11th and final time under his leadership. This increment was in addition to a 100 per cent increase in Value Added Tax (VAT) from 5 per cent to 10 per cent as well as the sales of the Port Harcourt and Kaduna refineries.

A week after President Yar'Adua was sworn in, precisely on June 5, 2007, the NLC gave his government a 14-day ultimatum to reverse the increases in the prices of petroleum products and the VAT. The Congress also asked the government to nullify the sale of the Port Harcourt and Kaduna refineries as well as the Egbin Power Plant in Lagos to unspecified private entities. In addition to these demands, the Congress demanded the implementation of a 15-per cent salary increase for workers with effect from January 1, 2007.

While the government did not immediately respond to the demands of labour, a couple of days to the end of the ultimatum, it initiated frantic efforts to negotiate with labour in order to abort the general strike. These efforts failed and the general strike commenced and lasted for four days before both government and labour arrived at a consensus on all the issues.

In a joint communiqué issued at the end of the meeting with representatives of government led by the then Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Ambassador Babagana Kingibe, the NLC and TUC declared that President Yar'Adua personally wrote a letter in which he made “some fundamental commitments.”

The agreements reached with government, according to the communiqué, include the reversal of the VAT rate from 10% to 5%; the reduction in the increment in the price of petrol reduced from N75 to N70 per litre; while the increments in prices of diesel and kerosene were completely reversed. It was also agreed that government will “set-up an expert committee to examine the pricing mechanism of petroleum products and make recommendation bearing in mind the strategic nature of the products and the impact of the prices on the economy and the social lives and the livelihood of Nigerians. Both the NLC and the T.U.C will be represented on the committee.” Also agreed to be set up, with both the NLC and TUC being represented, is “an expert committee to examine the recent privatization and concession exercises, especially the sale of 61 % government equity in the refineries and the proposal for the power sector.”

The government, the communiqué stated, agreed to implement the 15% salary increase for federal government employees with effect from the 1st of January 2007.

But as the Yar'Adua government settled down, and without really taking into consideration the basic terms of the agreement with regard to the expert committee “to examine the pricing mechanism of petroleum products,” it expressed the intention, through the then Minister of Petroleum, Alhaji Rilwanu Lukman, who announced that the federal government was prepared to fully deregulate the downstream operations of the oil industry. This pronouncement

naturally irked the NLC, which convened its NEC meeting where it was resolved to take the proactive step of educating the public on the dangers of deregulation through a series of national mass protests, rallies and campaign.

The campaign that later came to be known as Anti-deregulation Protests also served as warning to the Yar'Adua administration that the NLC was going to do all within its power to fight the policy as it did in the past. The campaign, organised in collaboration with progressive civil society organisations started on May 13, 2009 in Lagos, moved to Asaba, Delta State capital on May 15, 2009, Kano on June 16, 2009 and Maiduguri on June 23, 2009. Enugu hosted the rally on July 17, 2009, Makurdi on July 22, 2009, Ibadan on August 13, 2009 and the grand finale held in Abuja on October 29, 2009, where for the first time, a mass protest by the NLC first entered the premises of the National Assembly.

In the NEC Report to the 10th Delegates' Conference of the NLC which held from March 1st - 3rd 2011 in Abuja, the NLC noted that:

The zeal and commitment of Labour and Civil Society Organisations in the campaign was not only measured by the huge financial resources committed to the success of the campaign or the character of the civil/human rights and pro-democracy activists who attended the rallies at each point but most significantly by the degree of personal commitment and endurance to trek long distances of up to 15 kilometres across host cities to deliver to governors the charter of demands from the coalition for onward transmission to the President.

It is remarkable to note that the entire campaign was absolutely peaceful, even in the so-called traditionally

volatile states where peaceful protests often turn violent. At every city during the protests, massive crowds of people joined the protests chanting solidarity songs.

Apart from inspiring a consciousness for mass protest as a potent weapon of civil disobedience, the campaign was a forceful invocation for action and a symbol of the mass disaffection towards not just the deregulation policy but also a vocal denunciation of the existing model of leadership by our political leadership. (P...)

In addition to the above, the campaign yielded the desired impact as the Yar'Adua government, unlike its predecessors in power, quickly got the message early that confrontation with the NLC or any arbitrariness in forcibly implementing the deregulation policy was not going to produce any sustained benefits for either the government or the public. Having seen the expression of disenchantment of Nigerians in the course of the protests and the massive participation by Nigerians, the government opted to instead dialogue and consult with the NLC, an initiative which the NLC accepted with some degree of suspicion, since no past government had the civility to do so on the issue.

The government delegation, led by the then Minister of Finance, Dr Mansur Muhktar, met with three organs of the NLC, with the National Administrative Council (NAC) on October 16, 2009 the Central Working Committee (CWC) on November 10, 2009 and the National Executive Council (NEC) the following day on November 11, 2009.

The NEC Report to the 11th Delegates' Conference highlighted the deliberations with the government delegation as follows:

At each point, both sides spoke frankly and rigidly maintained their diametrically opposed positions. While government stuck to its age-old stand on the possible

benefits of using the proceeds that would be derived from a deregulated downstream oil industry for infrastructural development that would bring succour to the people, Congress argued that this promise had never been fulfilled in the past when price increases were forced on the people. In clear and unequivocal terms, Congress stated that instead of the expected succour, the economic condition of the masses worsened after every subsidy withdrawal leading to increased prices of products which in turn led to escalating prices of goods and service.

Though Congress acknowledged the civility of the late President Yar'adua's government in terms of consultation and dialogue, it demanded that government should for the time being concentrate its energy and resources on improving infrastructure across the country.

Following pleas from the government delegation at the end of the consultation with NEC for the NLC to further look into the issue of deregulation in the context of what the Yar'Adua government said it was going to do, the NEC set up a 10-person committee. The committee, which later came to be known as the NLC Deregulation Committee, was chaired by Comrade Peters Adeyemi, Deputy President of Congress, with the following members:

1. Comrade Kiri Mohammed, Deputy President of Congress and President of NCSU,
2. Comrade Issa Aremu, Vice President of Congress and General Secretary of Textile Union;
3. Comrade Peters Akpatason, National Trustee of Congress and President of NUPENG
4. Comrade Henry Odugala, General Secretary of RATTAWU and Member of CWC and NEC (now late)

5. Comrade Ayeoribe, Chairperson, NLC Council, Kwara State and member of CWC and NEC
6. Comrade Comrade D.D. Bissalah, Chairperson, NLC Council, Kaduna State and member of CWC and NEC
7. Comrade Mike Okeme, Chairperson, NLC Council, Delta State and member of CWC and NEC
8. Comrade Bidemi Alafiatayo, Member of NEC from Ekiti State Council of NLC
9. Comrade John Odah, General Secretary of Congress, Member/Secretary

The committee was mandated to:

1. Hold further interactions with the government team with a view to getting additional information on the state of the downstream sector of the petroleum industry. The government team included the Minister of Finance, and chairman of the Presidential Economic Management Team, Dr Mansur Muhktar; representative of the Governors Forum, the Group Managing Director of NNPC, representative of the multi-disciplinary taskforce team on PIB and deregulation, and the Executive Secretary of the Major Marketers Association of Nigeria (MOMAN), Mr Obafemi Olaware.
2. Consult our civil society allies (LASCO) on the on-going dialogue with the government.
3. Make recommendation(s) on its findings to the National Executive Council.

In carrying out its work, the committee sat for two weeks within which it met and interacted with those identified in the terms of reference and

came out with a comprehensive report of its finding and recommendations.

The committee, while it reported a number of findings, recommended what it described as three scenarios and urged the NEC to deliberate on them and adopt one or work out to harmonise the three scenarios into one. In summary, Scenario One essentially recommended that the NLC maintained its traditional opposition to any policy of deregulation. The kernel of Scenario Two is that the NLC should work with the government to sanitise and overhaul the petroleum industry against the backdrop of its many challenges. In Scenario Three, the committee noted that the NLC had been so pre-occupied with fuel pricing politics in a way that it was not able to dedicate the desired time, energy and resources to core challenges of workers. As a result, it recommended that the struggle against deregulation should be left to the Nigerian public to devise its own strategies of confrontation with the government.

The NEC, which met on December 15, 2009 at the Labour House in Abuja had a prolonged deliberation on the findings and recommendations made by the committee, and in a communiqué that was issued at the end of the meeting, the NLC resolved, among other things that:

...while agreeing to the issue of restructuring of the downstream sector of the petroleum industry for effective delivery, it is unequivocally opposed to any increase in the prices of petroleum products and that government, as a matter of urgency, should provide an enabling environment for any meaningful restructuring and transformation to take place by ensuring that:

- (i) The existing four refineries undergo complete repairs and functioning (in full capacity).*

- (ii) *Additional refineries, either solely-owned by the NNPC or through joint partnership with oil companies, or through private sector initiative are established to ensure that the estimated 40% petroleum products which would otherwise still be imported can be refined domestically in the country.*
- (iii) *Regulatory agencies will have to be properly strengthened to sanction potential defaulters.*
- (iv) *Power projections must be attained to encourage manufacturing and boost industrial growth.*
- (v) *Roads are fixed and railway system reactivated and put in place a viable system of mass transit system to ease free movement of people and goods across the nation. (P. 173)*

The comprehensive and ideologically conscious nature of NLC's engagement with the Yar'Adua government is reflected in the response from the Minister of Finance and Chairman of the Presidential Economic Team to the decisions of NEC. In a letter to the NLC, dated January 19, 2010, Dr Muhktar said, among other things:

I am writing in connection with the series of discussions we have held with the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) over the proposed reforms in the downstream petroleum sector in the last six months. We are grateful for the constructive engagement during this period.

We have carefully studied the communiqué issued by the National Executive Council of the NLC. We acknowledge the commitment demonstrated by the NLC in independently studying and verifying the issues facing the

sector, as reflected in the rigour of the analysis. We also welcome your appreciation of the need for reforms. We are however concerned that the conditions and timeframe stated in your communiqué will not allow meaningful progress in reforming this very important sector. Moreover, the communiqué fails to acknowledge substantial progress that government has already made in addressing some of the issues you presented.

We are particularly concerned about your unequivocal opposition to deregulation as a prelude to reforms in the sector. While price liberalisation is not the sole objective of the downstream sector reforms, it is sine qua non for any meaningful reforms to take place in the downstream petroleum sector. (P. 177)

In the heat of the controversy that followed President Yar'Adua's sickness, the then Acting President Goodluck Jonathan expressed the desire of government to continue with the dialogue with the NLC in order to address what the government called “areas of disagreement over deregulation.” For this purpose, the NLC convened an emergency meeting of its NEC in Kaduna on March 4, 2010, where after prolonged and tensed deliberation; it endorsed the request to participate in the dialogue. The NEC, among other things, stated that the NLC was not “opposed to negotiation and dialogue with Government whenever necessary and on any issue of policy that has far reaching impact on workers and the Nigerian masses.”

While the NEC mandated the then top leadership of Congress to represent Congress in the dialogue, led by Congress President, Comrade Abdulwahed Omar, along with the three Deputy Presidents of Congress – Comrades Peters Adeyemi, Onikolease Irabor, Promise Adewusi; one Vice President, Comrade Issa Aremu; the National

Treasurer, Comrade Ayuba Wabba, and the General Secretary, Comrade John Odah – it directed the team “to be guided by the NEC resolution of December 15, 2009 when it received the report of the 10-person Committee on Deregulation.”

By the time President Yar'Adua died on May 5, 2010, the NLC and government's team had not met. In its report to the Delegates Conference the following year, the NEC of Congress was quoted to have stated with respect to the deregulation issue thus:

Since then,[Kaduna NEC of March 4, 2010] the committee has neither sat nor has anything been heard from government over the issue even though some officials and functionaries of government continue to make comments which indicate the intention of government to consider the policy to deregulate, we had course to respond to such pronouncements from the CBN governor, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi [now Emir of Kano, Mohammed Sanusi II] on July 29, 2010 and the current Minister of Finance, Mr Olusegun Aganga on September 6, 2010 upon their call for total removal of subsidy on petroleum products.

This is the subsisting situation for the moment with respect to deregulation. As can be seen, Nigerian workers remain opposed to deregulation of the downstream sector of the industry and to fuel price increases. Historical evidence and experience show overwhelmingly that deregulation is inimical to the interests of the Nigerian people. (P.32)

On New Year Day, the following year, 2012, President Jonathan increased petrol price from N67 to N97. There was a spontaneous

popular response to the increment in a way that many described it as the Nigerian version of the Arab Spring that swept across the Arab world beginning from Tunisia. The NLC, along with its civil society allies initially led the protests, with the Congress calling and embarking on a general strike.

The strike, and the protests were called off a couple of days after it commenced on the ground that some political opposition elements had taken advantage of the revolt and steering it towards a call for regime change. The circumstances surrounding the suspension remains a major point of dispute between labour and its allies up to 2015 when some of the issues were discussed at the leadership Retreat in Tinapa, Cross River State, organised by the Ayuba Wabba leadership of Congress.

Conclusion

The history of the NLC is simply and squarely the history of popular struggles. Evidently, no historical appreciation of the NLC can be said to be complete with the narrative of its struggles and history of popular struggles that will be told without the dynamic role of the NLC being told.

While some people might argue that the jury is still out, there is no doubt, from the role the labour movement played in the struggle for political independence, through the challenging period of patriotic vigilance in the respective years of military dictatorships, up to the current democratic dispensation that has seen the NLC vigorously interrogate every policy process by offering alternative viewpoints when it sees that those been pursued by the ruling elite were really against popular interest; it is clear that the NLC has done its patriotic duty.

Presidents of NLC



Hassan Sunmonu (1978 – 1984)



Ali Chiroma, *nni* (1984 – 1988)



Paschal Bafyau, *nni* (1988 – 1994)



Adams Oshiomhole, *nni* (1999 – 2007)



Abdulwahed Omar, *nni* (2007 – 2015)



Ayuba Wabba, *nni* (2015 – Date)

General Secretaries of NLC



Aliyu M. Dangiwa
(1978 – 1986)



Dr. Lasisi Osunde
(1986 – 1992)



John E. Odah, *mni*
(2001 – 2013)



Dr. Peter Ozo-Eson
(2014 – Date)



2nd L – 2nd R: H.A. Sunmonu, Lawrence Peterside and Shodende, long term Head of Congress Cooperative Department.



L–R: Comrades M. Mpamugo, Ali Chiroma and H.A. Sunmonu.



Comrade Paschal Bafyau addressing a May Day celebration.



Comrade Bafyau (centre) and former Minister of Labour, Bunu Sheriff to his left.



NLC leaders with His Eminence Sultan Abubakar, Sultan of Sokoto during a courtesy visit. L-R: M. Mpamugo (in tie), Alhaji Akawu (State Chairman then) Dangiwa, Sunmonu, Ojeli and Ero-Philips.



Bunu Sheriff, former Minister of Labour with Comrade Ali Chiroma.



Comrade Ayuba Wabba of Medical and Health Workers Union.



Comrade Gidado Hamman of NURTW leading Road Transport Workers at May Day parade.



L-R: Comrades Jonny Obong and Peters Adeyemi, NUT and NASU respectively. Both later became General Secretaries of their respective unions.



L-R: Comrades Babatunde Laide of Construction Union and Chris Uyo of Congress Headquarters.



Congress campaign outing.



Congress campaign outing



Comrade Adams Oshiomhole, Comrade Gidado Hamman and Comrade Benson Upah at a meeting with members of House of Representatives Ad-hoc Committee on Appropriate Petroleum Pricing.



L-R: Comrades Lawson Osagie, Yahaya Hashim, Morgan Anigbo and Salisu Mohammad, heads of NLC departments in the mid-1980s.



Comrades H.A. Sunmonu and Adams Oshiomhole, Congress 1st and 4th Presidents respectively.



Addressing a Pension Union rally: Standing from right: Ivor Takor, Congress Treasurer; Adams Oshiomhole and Hogan Morgan, President of the Pension Union.



In front: Comrade Azumi Bebeji, former Chairperson NLC Kano State Women Committee (and former memeber House of Representatives).



L-R: Linus Ukamba, Head of Congress Organisation Department and Peters Adeyemi of NASU, officiating a May Day celebration in Abuja.



L-R: Comrades John Odah and Abdulwahed Omar, Congress General Secretary and President respectively.



Comrades Lovina Okoro and Ladi Iliya, former members of Congress' National Administrative Committee (NAC).



L-R: SOZ Ejiofah, Emmanuel Okongwu of Shop and Distributive Union and Dr. Peter Ozo-Eson.



Comrade Bafyau in the middle, singing the Workers Solidarity song.



President Obasanjo addressing Workers May Day at the Tafawa Balewa Square in Lagos.



Principal officers of Congress leading a protest campaign from the front.



HE Nasir El-Rufai and Senator Dino Melaye protesting against increment in fuel price in 2012



Cross-section of Comrades at the 2012 protest against increase in the pump price of petrol.



Labour Civil Society and Political Leaders march against increment in petrol price in 2012



L-R: Comrade Promise Adewusi (then NLC Deputy President), Prof. Dipo Fashina (LASCO Chairman), Comrade Peter Esele (then TUC President), Comrade Abdulwahed Omar (then NLC President), Comrade Joe Ajaero (then NLC Deputy President), Comrade Ayuba Wabba (then NLC National Treasurer), Comrade Issa Aremu (then GS, Textile Union) leading the protest against increment in fuel price in 2012

CHAPTER FIVE

POPULAR RESISTANCE AGAINST THE INCREASE IN PETROL PRICES

On August 1, 2011, President Goodluck Jonathan gave a hint that the Federal Government would introduce a policy of complete deregulation of the downstream petroleum sub-sector which would lead to increase in the pump price of Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) also known locally as 'petrol' or 'fuel'. The reason the Federal Government gave was that government needed to cut down on the amount spent on petrol subsidy in order to free up funds for infrastructural development. This reason was not different from the reason adduced by previous governments for previous eighteen increases in the pump price of petrol since the mid-eighties.

The response of the Nigeria Labour Congress when the disposition of government on petrol price regime was disclosed was to warn the Federal Government against any increase in the pump price of petrol products. The Congress maintained that any increase in the price of petrol would erode the gains of the then national minimum wage which was only signed into law about five months earlier. The Congress also posited that an increase in the price of petrol would impose very difficult conditions on the suffering masses of Nigeria.

Despite the opposition of the Nigeria Labour Congress, Organized Labour and their allies in Civil Society, the government of President

Goodluck Jonathan went ahead on 1st January 2012 announced the increase in the pump price of petrol from N65 (Sixty-Five Naira) to N141 (One Hundred and Forty-One Naira) representing about 117% increase. Owing to earlier positions of resistance by the Congress from August 1, 2011 when the policy of complete deregulation and fresh increase in the pump price of petrol was first made public, Nigerians took individual and spontaneous actions to demonstrate their displeasure with the policy of the Federal Government.

On Wednesday 4th January 2012, the NLC convened its National Executive Council (NEC) meeting at the Pascal Bafyau Labour House, Abuja. The only agenda of the meeting was the deregulation policy of the Federal Government and the subsequent increase in the pump price of petrol. Present at the meeting as observers were pro-democracy activists and members of radical civil society organizations. At the end of very robust debates and discussions, the NEC resolved to embark on an indefinite strike action and mass action from January 9, 2012 if the price increase was not reversed.

The Trade Union Congress (TUC) also held its own National Executive Council meeting at its national secretariat in Lagos with the leadership of civil society organizations based in Lagos State in attendance. The resolution of the two national labour centers in Nigeria was unanimous in condemning the astronomical increase in the pump price of petrol and demanded for an immediate reversal to the original price of N65.00 The position of the two national labour centers – the Nigeria Labour Congress and the Trade Union Congress was captured in a Joint Communiqué which was titled “***In Defence of the Nigerian People on Fuel Price Increases***”.

Despite the ultimatum issued by the Nigeria Labour Congress, the Federal Government refused to yield to the demands of Labour and categorically told Nigerians that the complete withdrawal of petrol subsidy had come to stay and was irreversible. Following the expiry of the ultimatum given to government, the Nigeria Labour Congress embarked on a nationwide industrial action from 9th January 2012.

Prior to the strike action, the Nigeria Labour Congress and its civil society allies had embarked on a robust mobilization campaign of Nigerian workers and people through mass leafleteering, jingles on radio stations and advocacy visits to faith-based organizations. By the 9th of January 2012, the whole country was already wet with desire to resist the increase by government of the pump price of petrol. During the massive mobilization, many trade unionists, activists and volunteers were accosted, arrested and harassed by security operatives in Abuja, Lagos, Kano and other parts of the country.

The nationwide strike action which commenced in the midnight of Sunday 8th January 2012 was a monumental success as workers all over the country downed their tools and joined. Even in some states in the South East and South South where the State Governments threatened workers with the adversarial “no work... no pay” policy, very skeletal official work in the public service was recorded.

Workers did not just stay at home during the strike action – they trooped to the streets in their thousands. On the first day of the strike action which was Monday 9th January 2012, workers mobilized at the popular Berger Roundabout in Wuse Zone 6 and marched down through the City Centre to what later became dubbed as the

“Freedom Square”, a junction somewhere in Wuse 2 and intersecting Ademola Adetokunbo Crescent - a popular business boulevard.

The Abuja Protest Organizing Committee was chaired by Comrade Ayuba Wabba, mni then Treasurer of the NLC while Comrade Owei Lakemfa then Congress Ag. General Secretary served as the Secretary of the Committee. The Lagos Protest Organizing Committee was headed by Comrade Joe Ajaero, then NLC Deputy President.

On the first day of popular resistance at the “Freedom Square”, the NLC leadership and Labour Civil Society Organizations addressed thousands of Nigerian workers and people numbering more than twenty thousand and stretching a distance of more than 2 kilometers. The leadership of Organized Labour in attendance included then President of Congress, Comrade Abdulwahed Omar, Comrade Peter Esele, then President of the Trade Union Congress, Comrade Ayuba Wabba, then Treasurer of Congress, Comrade Kiri Mohammed, then Deputy President. Members of Labour Civil Society Coalition (LASCO) in attendance were Dr. Dipo Fashina, Comrades Abiodun Aremu, Jaye Gaskiya, and Ezenwa Nwagwu.

On the second day of the protest, the crowd swelled to more than forty thousand Nigerians including members of opposing political parties. The former Minister of the Federal Capital Territory, Mallam Nasir EL-Rufai, a former member of the House of Representative, Hon. Dino Melaye and Alhaji Buba Galadima were some of the notable faces of the opposition that took part in the protest and even made speeches to Nigerians from the second day of the popular protest.

In his speech, the former Minister of the FCTA and later to become Governor of Kaduna State, Mallam Nasir El-Rufai condemned the hike in the price of petrol describing it as unacceptable. He alleged that the petrol subsidy regime was anti-masses, riddled with corruption and could have been averted if Nigerian refineries were working.

Similar sentiments were shared by Alhaji Buba Galadima and Hon. Dino Melaye who posited that the increase in the pump price of petrol and the so-called complete withdrawal of petrol subsidy and total deregulation of the downstream petroleum sector were gimmicks by the ruling Peoples Democratic Party to continue to inflict hardship on the Nigerian people. While urging the people to resist the policy, the members of the opposition political party called for a probe into the use of the petrol subsidy in the past few years.

Following discussions with Organized Labour forcing government to reduce the price of petrol to N85.00, the strike action and mass protests were called off by the NLC.

CHAPTER SIX

LABOUR AND POLITICS

The numerous problems affecting workers, such as unemployment, retrenchment, high costs of essential commodities, inability to pay rent, job insecurity, poverty, hunger and other forms of deprivations, etc, etc, are all products of political decision. Therefore, the solution to these endemic problems are also necessarily located in our collective ability to rise to the challenge of continuously and tirelessly inculcating the working classes and their political allies with proletarian consciousness and enhance their capacity to struggle and win political power and use it for their total emancipation.

Take note, that, there is politics in the Unions, and the Unions should also, be in politics. (1986 May Day Address of NLC President, Comrade Ali Chiroma)

In Nigeria, the earliest historical roots of labour's involvement in politics were deeply entrenched in the direct colonial encounter, which created the imperial nexus between the British colonialists on the one hand, and the Nigerian citizens, who though relatively unorganised, spontaneously felt the need to free the country from the shackles of foreign domination, on the other hand.

This colonial debacle was facilitated by a complete and comprehensive political, economic and judicial system of alien administration imposed on Nigerians by the supremacy of the British colonial masters.

However, among the indigenous social groups that began to coalesce to oppose the exploitative and oppressive policies laid down by the colonialists, the nascent labour force, even though numerically small and widely dispersed, had yet, started to collectively display appreciative organisational skills and also exhibited remarkable confidence and bravery in defence of their rights and against other manifestations of colonial exploitation.

These were the formidable, organised and credible social groups that posed as major hurdles which the colonial administration had to contend with in their desperate bid to keep the population under bondage. Therefore, it didn't take long before the coterie of the educated leaders who were also emerging as the country's political elite; clearly saw the compelling need to co-mingle their nationalist efforts with the patriotic potency of workers' organisational power.

Consistent with the determination to forge a common anti-colonialist front, labour leaders inevitably took up the challenge to lay a foundation for the building of political consciousness in concurrent combination with the arduous task of running their trade union organisations. Thus, those who played the pioneering role of trade union leadership in Nigeria were deeply cognizant of the urgent necessity for workers to be highly conscious and politically educated in order to be able to decide, design and defend their own class interests.

Among the frontline of labour leaders who made waves in the 1940s, symbolised in their dogged commitment, courage and patriotism to both trade unionism and nationalism was the intrepid late Pa Michael Imoudu, famously and affectionately called; “Labour Leader Number One”.

So influential was Comrade Imoudu that he later rose to become the Vice President of the NCNC; the biggest and most formidable

political party in the forefront of the battles against British colonial domination.

In the 1950s, the discernible differences between the class interest of workers and that of the pseudo-nationalists continued to widen quite significantly. The spasmodic character of this social group coupled with the open contempt they egregiously displayed towards workers and other low income citizens, helped to erode any semblance of mutual regard and camaraderie that might exist between them.

In the circumstance, a section of the trade union leaders opted to form their own political party in 1951. This pioneering effort was however, short lived.

In 1964, another effort was made by Pa Imoudu to form a labour party. The New Nigerian Labour Party (NLP) had Pa Imoudu and Eskor Toyo as National Chairman and General Secretary, respectively. Again, the military coup of 1966, and the subsequent civil war that gripped the country, truncated the promising potentials shown by the party.

There was also the Socialist Workers and Farmers Party (SWAFP) which had its origin in the struggles of the Nigerian Youth Council (NYC) and the Nigeria Trade Union Congress (NTUC). Though the SWAFP remained underground for a long time because of prolonged military rule which had banned political activities, it maintained its links with the trade unions (see *Rebuilding The Nigeria labour movement and the Labour Party: Proceedings of the 19th Annual Kolagbodi Memorial Lecture: 2016:55-6*)

During the 2nd Republic, Pa Imoudu was also one of the leaders of the radical Peoples Redemption Party of the late Mallam Aminu Kano that produced the civilian governors of Kano State, the late Alhaji Abubakar Rimi and Balarabe Musa of Kaduna State. Pa Imoudu was Vice President of the original PRP.

The Third Republic and the Effort to Form the 2nd Labour Party

It was not until 1989, following the deceptive and seemingly unending IBB's political transition that labour again came to manifest its political consciousness in its quest to become politically involved and to equally play an active role in the pressure to send the military back to the barracks and return the country to democratic governance.

Barely a decade from its inception, the leadership of Congress under the late Comrade Paschal Bafyau, in full appreciation of this wind of change hovering over the country, summoned a broad-based meeting of progressive intellectuals, activists, trade unionists and labour veterans in the ancient city of Calabar in April 1989, to deliberate on the need for the Congress to spearhead the formation of a workers' party.

Despite frantic moves made by some pro-labour politicians to discourage workers and their organisations from dabbling into the what has generally been described as “murky waters of politics” on the ground that that labour lacked the financial muscle to take part in active politics, the meeting overwhelmingly resolved to form a working class party and called on workers to prepare for labour's full participation in the transition program, even as suspicious as progressives were of IBB's intentions and programme.

Calabar Pre-NEC Workshop on Labour and the Political Transition Programme

In the context of the above narrative, the NLC leadership organised a pre-NEC National Workshop on the theme: “Labour and the Political Transition Programme” which held in Calabar from 2nd - 4th

April, 1989. NLC's Political Committee, headed by Congress Deputy President, Comrade Frank Oramulu, which had earlier done a report to the Central Working Committee of NLC, was charged with organising the workshop, at the end of which a report was produced for the National Executive Council that met in the same venue on 5th April, 1989.

The committee made a number of recommendations in its report with extensive background in order to underscore the issues and what subsequently happened in the practical implementation of the resolutions of the Calabar NEC of April 1989, which accepted all the recommendations.

There was unanimity of views on the need for workers and the trade unions to transcend mere bread and butter struggles in favour of an active involvement in partisan politics. However, the character of such a party, and how to arrive at the formation of it were keenly contested. It was noted in the report that:

“...the broad perspectives are identifiable from the discussions at the workshop.

i) A workers' party with a clear Socialist Programme

ii) A workers' party with a Social Democratic Programme.

The first position is consistent with the submission of the NLC to the Political Bureau and the Political Bureau's recommendation.

The second is anchored on a welfarist programme which leaves the essential features of capitalism unaffected. The aim is to carry all trends within the trade union movement along in the quest for a political voice.

On the immediate role of the trade union movement led by the NLC in the politics of the third republic, two dominant views were canvassed.

- a) *That the trade union in alliance with other strata of the oppressed classes – the peasantry, youths, intellectuals, professional, etc., team up to form a workers' party which will seek for registration as one of the two political parties, to contest for power in the politics of the 3rd republic.*
- b) *That the whole transition programme of the Federal Military Government is a ruse. Workers participation in this transition programme will give legitimacy to an arrangement which is tied up to the IMF/World Bank economic enslavement of the Nigeria people. It was suggested by those who pushed this view that the NLC and trade unions should set up a body in alliance with other oppressed strata of society to form a popular democratic front which will campaign and defend the fundamental rights of Nigerians; and to give intensified political education to members.*

FINDINGS

After exhaustive consideration of the totality of information gathered from the workshop the committee found as follows:

- 1) *The consensus of opinion was that Nigerian workers cannot afford to be apolitical in the politics of the third republic.*
- 2) *That the philosophy of a workers' party to be formed has to be socialist, in line with the ideology of the working class.*
- 3) *That the NLC cannot convert itself into a political party. This is recognised in its submission to the Political Bureau.*
- 4) *The responsibility of the NLC is therefore to participate along with its allies in educating and mobilising workers to participate in, and support the formation of a working peoples party of workers, peasants, students, the unemployed, progressives, intellectuals, artisans, market women, etc.*

- 5) *Since a truly working peoples party shall be controlled by the working people themselves, all the formations that bring it about must accept the oppressed and the exploited as the true proprietors and controllers of the party. Consequently, the NLC must radically prepare itself for democracy in the working peoples party by demonstrating greater commitment to democratic culture.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the foregoing the committee hereby recommends as follows:

- 1. That the NLC should support the formation of a working peoples' party whose philosophy should be based on socialist programme in line with the verdict of the Nigerian people as contained in the Report of the Political Bureau and in accordance with the NLC's submission to the Political Bureau.*
- 2. That in order to achieve this objective, the NLC should organise and revitalise the Local Government Area Councils of Congress.*
- 3. That the NLC should make a very strong representation to the Federal Military Government to repeal section 15, 1-3 of the Trade Union Decree No. 31 of 1973 which bars trade unions from using their funds for political purpose. Similarly, enactments in any of our statute books which places barrier on workers participation in partisan politics should be repealed.*
- 4. That a massive public campaign be embarked upon by all trade unions against the retention of these prohibitive and oppressive laws which prevent the Nigerian workers from taking active part in partisan politics.*

5. *That the NLC should as a matter of urgency set the machinery in motion to identify genuine pro-labour political groupings for the purpose of possible collaboration in the formation of the proposed party.*
6. *That trade unions should embark on intensive political education of their membership.*
7. *That he NLC should mobilise resources towards the establishment of a workers' newspaper since we cannot depend on the bourgeois outfits to propagate our cause.*
8. *We also recommend that the Political Committee of Congress be re-designated political commission, which will serve as a standing committee of NLC.*

The Commission should be given the mandate to meet with all groups that are known to be allies of the working people of Nigeria, with a view to working together towards the formation of the party”.

Other members of the Committee who signed the report apart from Comrade Oramulu were: Comrades M.O. Agbe-Davies, J.K. Abam, J.I. Akinlaja, S.K. Oyebanjo, E.U. Ijeh, J.O. Ansa, M. Olabode, P. Asamba, I.U. Nwokocha, E.K. Iorshagher, and John Odah as secretary to the committee.

After the Calabar April 1989 NEC Meeting gave the Bafyau regime the broad mandate it requested to work toward the formation of a Labour Party, it wasted no time in preparations to float the Party. As recommended by the political committee, the name was changed to NLC Political Commission, with Comrade Oramulu as Chairman, and Comrade SOZ Ejiofoh was named Secretary of the Commission. The Political Commission was charged with the task of forming the Labour Party. This was done, and Hajia Azumi Bebeji, Chairperson of NLC Women's Wing in Kano State did the

formal proclamation of the party at a launch ceremony at the National Arts Theatre, Iganmu, Lagos.

With all the problems associated with time constraints, acute shortage of financial resources and other logistical impediments, the NLC was able to rise up to the challenge of party formation. The party emerged as number 5 out of the 7 political associations that were recommended to the Babangida government by the Electoral Management Board.

These courageous recommendations were jettisoned by the military government who went ahead to decree two political parties for the country. The two parties were christened, the National Republican Convention (NRC) and Social Democratic Party (SDP). “One a little to the right; the other, a little to the left”.

In a bid by the military regime to co-opt the NLC into its transition programme and NLC's buy-in, the regime appointed the chairman and secretary of the Congress Political Commission, Comrade S.O.Z. Ejiofor and Comrade A.A. Salam, into the caretaker committees of the SDP and NRC, respectively.

Undaunted, the labour movement remains implacable in its desire to create a veritable political platform, to seek people's mandate, to usher in a more humane and popular democratic rule, to rescue workers and the labouring masses from the interminable sufferings they have been sentenced to by the ruling elite.

In the excitement of democratic dispensation following the restoration of leadership of Congress from the control of government imposed Sole Administrator, the NLC, under the leadership of Adams Oshiomhole, once again felt the overriding desire to establish a strong working class party to mobilise workers

and contest for political power. This resolution was given a huge impetus by the NEC meeting of NLC which held at Bauchi in 2003.

The Bauchi NEC meeting unanimously agreed to set up a political party. Comrade S.O.Z. Ejiofoh was named as chairman of NLC Political Commission to midwife this new party, with Comrade A.A. Salam as secretary. In the end, the Party for Social Democracy (PSD) was successfully registered by INEC. Comrades S.O.Z. Ejiofoh and A. A. Salam acted as National Chairman and General Secretary, respectively, till the party's first National Convention in 2004.

At the 2004 National Convention of the party, it was agreed that the name should be changed to Labour Party, as the initial fear that naming the party as “Labour Party” would drive away potential non-labour activists was deemed unfounded. Comrade Dan Nwanyanwu, former President of NUBIFIE, and Comrade A.A. Salam, former General Secretary of NULGE, both former NEC members of NLC were recommended by the NLC leadership to lead the party as National Chairman and National Secretary, respectively. In deference to the NLC, these recommendations were accepted by the National Convention of the party and they became the key leaders of the new Labour Party.

To their credit, Comrades Dan Nwanyanwu and A.A. Salam tried to translate the potentials of the party into reality by bringing some notable politicians into the party which climaxed with the entry of Dr Olusegun Mimiko, who used the party's platform to govern Ondo State for two consecutive terms as a governor.

The leadership of the Labour Party led in the initial campaign of Comrade Oshiomhole to establish the party in the 18 local government areas of Edo State and in his governorship campaigns in

the state. The party later struck an alliance with the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), and Comrade Oshiomhole rode on the platform of this alliance to win the governorship election in Edo State.

The management of the victory of the party's candidates to win election in Edo and Ondo were perhaps the key highlights of the leadership of Comrades Nwanyanwu and Salam of the party, just as the decline and eventual crisis that engulfed the party are also part of their legacy.

Iyayi's Report on Reposition of the Labour Party

The NLC sent a delegation to Norway to understudy how the LO Norway (NLC counterpart in Norway) had managed its relationship with the Norwegian Labour Party; a relationship that had lasted over one hundred years. Initially, Comrade Nwanyanwu was part of the four-person delegation, but he opted out at the last moment. The delegation which was headed by the then Congress President, Comrade Abdulwahed Omar, had Comrade Ladi Iliya, Congress Vice President, and Dr. Festus Iyayi, a former President of ASUU, as members. Upon their return, Comrade Iyayi, who acted as secretary of the delegation, wrote an elaborate report for the Congress. On the basis of this report, he was commissioned to do an assessment of the Labour Party for Congress.

The assessment was completed with Comrade Iyayi submitting a 143-page report, which was eventually printed. The report was presented at a National Executive Council meeting of the NLC in July 2010 at Akure, Ondo State. Comrades Nwanyanwu and Salam were invited to the Ondo NEC meeting in their official capacities as leaders of the Labour Party. Though the Iyayi Report was deferred to enable NEC members to properly study the contents for a more robust deliberation at a subsequent NEC meeting called for that

purpose, the NEC however took up the two senior party officers on their stewardship of the party.

The chairman complained that most State Council officers of NLC were not giving support to the party but were instead working with their respective governors. He was however reminded that prior to the meeting, he had not raised this with the leadership of Congress for the issue to be discussed at the relevant organs(s) and addressed. He was reminded that the Congress leadership recommended himself and Comrade Salam as Chairman and Secretary of the party on the understanding that having been members of Congress NEC in the past, they ought to have understood the essence of NEC's supremacy on these issues.

Unfortunately, the Iyayi report never got discussed again in a Congress organ, as following the February 2011 NLC National Delegates Conference, crisis emerged in the Congress, which diverted its attention from pursuing the Labour Party project as it ought to have done when it commissioned the assessment.

Crisis in the Labour Party

As the nation prepared for the 2015 general elections, there emerged a series of political re-alignments. The Labour Party got caught up in these political manoeuvres as the arrowhead of the party, and Governor of Ondo State, was also finishing his tenure as two-term Governor of Ondo State, in order to secure his own political future at the national level, he opted to go back to the ruling PDP, which he had left eight years earlier to run for governor on the platform of the Labour Party.

Expectedly, these issues will be elaborated upon with views of all sides to the matter given expression in the full edition of this work in

a few months' time. However, on the basis of his announcement decamping from the Labour Party, sections of the party and the Congress leadership felt that the convention of the Labour Party earlier scheduled for Akure in Ondo State should be postponed and the venue shifted. This was not however agreeable to the party leadership led by Comrades Nwanyanwu and Salam.

They therefore proceeded to organise the convention as scheduled, and Comrade Salam emerged as National Chairman of the party, with Comrade Nwanyanwu elected as chairman of the party's Board of Trustees. They invited INEC to witness the convention, and the INEC later gave it a clean bill of health.

The Congress, working with those who heeded its call for the boycott of the Ondo convention, did not recognise the leadership of the party that came out of the convention. Congress NEC subsequently mandated the leadership to constitute a seven-man Caretaker Committee to take over the party. This was how Comrade Salisu Muhammad, a former Ag. General Secretary of NLC was appointed Caretaker Committee Chairman of the party, with another former staff of Congress headquarters, Comrade Lawson Osagie, as Secretary. This was done in November 2014. The 2015 Delegates' Conference of the Congress endorsed the NEC decisions that the Congress should take over the party and reorganise it to be able to properly serve the genuine interest of the working people of this country.

In due course, Comrade Nwanyanwu fell out with the new chairman of the party, Comrade Salam and the former returned the certificate of registration of the party to the NLC leadership. However, since the Chairman had earlier been recognised by the INEC, Comrade Salam went on to report that the certificate was missing and got INEC to

issue it another one. He subsequently went on to operate the party, despite the position of the NLC.

The new NLC leadership under Comrade Wabba has been involved in subtle diplomacy to resolve this crisis when it emerged victorious from the March 2015 delegates' conference.

In late 2017, a group who had been with Salam from the Akure convention, organised a special convention to remove him as chairman. This expanded the crisis into a three dimensional one. The Congress leadership, in the light of this new development, wrote to INEC to allow it to resolve the crisis. The Congress said it had set up a Political Commission which will work to bring the parties to the crisis together to hold a unified convention. The INEC endorsed this plan, and the Congress leadership and the Political Commission have worked very hard to get all parties to withdraw pending cases in court, and the final stage of the resolution of the conflict appears to be within reach.

Towards Repositioning the Labour Party

It is a common knowledge in progressive circles, that, about a decade and a half ago, the Nigerian labour movement, under the leadership of the NLC, had spearheaded the formation of the Labour Party and subsequently got it registered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and was jubilantly launched by workers. Right from the outset, the Labour Party was intended to be clearly different and was also designed to be robustly distinct, in both content and character from all the registered political parties in Nigeria.

This expectation was anchored on the well-known positive political disposition and strong class consciousness often times manifested

by the Nigerian working classes, in their countless battles for social justice and democracy in our country. Even today, the Democratic Socialist heritages of the Nigerian working class and their political allies are poignantly visible and indelibly stamped in their core ideological, organisational and operational principles.

In furtherance of the common vision outlined above, the Labour Political Commission set up by the NLC, proceeded to lay down some collective resolutions of workers on the way forward with regards to the re-organisation of the Labour Party.

They were as follows:

- 1.) The leadership of a worker's party must emerge from the ideologically most advanced, committed persons having their deep roots within the labour movement;
- 2.) The party of the working class must have a program distinct from all other parties. The articulation of that program will depend upon the state of the political consciousness of workers. Definitely, its content should be unambiguously socialist;
- 3.) The party of workers should be based on working class membership and should be sustained by workers, NOT with the “assistance” of, or in “alliance” with segments of the ruling class.

Conclusion

Given the prevailing loss of confidence by a majority of Nigerians in the capacity of the dominant conservative parties to usher in the dawn of a genuinely emancipatory politico-economic governance structure in the country, as exemplified by the noticeable and

alarming rise in political apathy and despondency throughout the nation, the renewed enthusiasm shown by critical stakeholders to reposition and revitalise the Labour Party, is highly exhilarating.

In line with his unwavering determination to give tangible effect to the decision on the reorganisation of the party taken by the workers, Comrade Ayuba Wabba has since assuming the mantle of leadership as the president of Congress spared neither efforts nor resources to achieve the full re-calibration of the party.

It is on record that he has so far succeeded in securing the cooperation of the two factions for them to allow the NLC to chart a new course towards an amicable, all-inclusive resolution of the raging conflict; and, has also obtained INEC's approval to proceed with a transitional arrangement toward holding a Special National Convention, under INEC's supervision to elect a new executive for the party.

It is even a source of pride and great comfort to all genuine patriots that the NLC, through its reconstituted Political Commission, is now vigorously blazing the trail, by encouraging all groups and opposing tendencies, both in and outside the party, to cooperate, share and buy into its vision of working together in solidarity in order to transform the Labour Party into a formidable political party capable of mobilising the broad sections of Nigerian people for their democratic mandate, preparatory to bringing the party to power.

This is a task to which all hands must be on deck. Towards this end, if anything were to serve as a guide, the brief but chequered history of the party as highlighted above, is enough to convince all on the need to give NLC the chance to bring this unfortunate chapter in the party's life to an end, and chart a brighter future for the party.

CHAPTER SEVEN

NLC, THE STUDENT MOVEMENT AND OTHER CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

The triumph of the working class movement with the rebirth of the Nigeria Labour Congress following its inaugural delegates Conference at the end of February 1978 ensured that almost three years after its ban by the military administration of Murtala-Obasanjo, Nigerian workers were able to regain their organisation. The same military was soon to descend on another critical voice of the Nigerian people that year after the students led by their organisation, the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) in April of that year embarked on boycott of classes over the plan of the Federal military government to increase feeding and accommodation fees of University students. The 'Ali Must Go' protest led to the killing of many students, and the banning of NUNS.

The students were later to defy the ban and went on to float the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), as successor organisation to NUNS, to continue their struggle for the democratisation of education, and of the Nigerian society as a whole. Chris Mammah who came to office as NANS President in January 1982, in an interview for this book, recalled that the NANS under his leadership had a very cordial relationship with the NLC. He contended that prior to his election as president; the relationship between the two organisations was at a 'low ebb'. He attributed this to the position of his predecessor on some key issues that polarised the student and the labour movements. Among these issues were the

Shagari government's conscious effort to draw a dividing line between the labour and the student movements in their response to the affairs of the day.

He continued: “At the take-off of my administration, I paid a courtesy call on Comrade Hassan Sunmonu-led NLC Executive at its Olajuwon Street, Yaba, Lagos Head Office in mid-February and held exploratory talks on how both bodies could work together”. He said the NANS leadership were well received and that “after three hours of discussion, we narrowed the differences between both bodies and rescheduled a further meeting for another three weeks”.

Mammah said they agreed, among other things, to:

- Work together on common positions to check the drift of the country towards fascism by the then government;
- Align with other progressive forces to achieve the above goal;
- Support each other in the improvement of member's needs, whether welfare and/or otherwise.

This agreement, he argued, helped largely to cement the cordial relationship between both organisations throughout his time in office.

His successor as NANS President, the late Chris Abashi, from the University of Jos, who emerged NANS President from the December 1982 Kano convention continued in the footsteps of his predecessor in sustaining the NANS relationship with the apex labour organisation. Coming from the same progressive and radical background as Mammah, it was not difficult to see where the allegiance of his administration lay.

Speaking at a public lecture at the University of Jos in 1985, after he

had finished his one-year tenure as NANS President, Abashi rigorously defended the necessity of the NANS-NLC alliance. He commended the historic role played by Nigerian workers in the dismantling of direct colonial rule in Nigeria thus:

...colonialism which was the political domination and control of our country, found it increasingly difficult to continue its direct administration as a result of the struggles of the working people of our country which found expression in the 1929 Aba women's resistance against poll tax, the 1949 Enugu coal miners strike and the 1945 Railway Workers strike, led by the indomitable Michael Imoudu, which completely paralysed the raw-material export oriented colonial economy. (Abashi, 1985:49)

He urged students to participate actively in the alliance between the workers and students and ignore all those who tell them to face their books and leave the workers to face their struggle. For him:

...the working class and the peasants are therefore the only classes with the political and economic capacity to successfully challenge the rule of capital. The student movement should therefore work in a formidable alliance with the democratic organisations of the workers, peasants, market women and the progressive intelligentsia. That is why the alliance entered into between the NLC and the NANS...should be supported by all students as a historic testimony of the indestructible link which binds the workers together with the students in the struggle against a common enemy. (Abashi, 1985:59).

According to Ngozi Iwere, the first female NANS Public Relations Officer who was elected as part of the Abashi leadership in Bayero University in December 1982, the students have ideological reasons for building alliances. This was for the social transformation of

society as a whole. Continuing, she stated:

The leadership of NANS was conscious that in order to fulfil its mission it had to build bridges and alliances both within the student population and with other democratic forces in society. The alliance with the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) began at this initial phase in NANS history. In 1982, the NLC was invited to the NANS convention and NANS subsequently instructed its constituent unions to collaborate with the respective State Councils of the NLC. NANS gave full support to the NLC in its struggle for a new minimum wage for workers in Nigeria in 1981-82. The fraternal relationship culminated in the signing of a 'Memorandum of Understanding' on a formal alliance in 1984. The working class was recognized as having a vanguard role in the struggle for socio-economic justice and the enthronement of a people-centred government. (Iwere, 2005:33)

The NLC on its part chose the historic 7th convention of the NANS in March 1986, again in Bayero University, Kano to outline its thoughts publicly on the relationship between the workers and the students' movement. In a speech to the convention, the NLC 1st Deputy President, Comrade Lawrence Peterside in a brief but loaded statement entitled: “Our Alliance is Historical and Necessary”, said:

It is significant that today for the first time since your formation, you are holding a legally accepted convention in full recognition of the government and the state. And let no one under-rate this significance for your recognition is not coming out of magnanimity and benevolence of a kind government; on the contrary, it is an acceptance that the reality of your existence does not depend on the will of the state. We can only congratulate the government for the

wisdom of recognizing this fact and the courage of accepting the futility of past policy positions.

For the Nigeria Labour Congress, your official recognition is victory of immense proportions. It is the attainment of a desire that you be given your proper place among the popular forces of our nation. NLC's recognition of NANS when the government had not, led to official protestations from government circles and even earned us the accusation of engaging in subversion. We can say it here today that we are proud that we did not yield to the pressure applied on us not to grant you our premises and facilities and not to align with you as we did. Those of you who had the misfortune of a 'chat' with law enforcement agents know that at one time there was even the ridiculous idea in government that the NLC was using and manipulating the NANS for some other ends. Our reply was that on the contrary, NANS is using the NLC but using it for a just cause; a cause for which you can continue to use us today or any day. But so much for the attitude of governments who must find excuses to deny people the right to freely organize and intervene in the affairs of the nation.

Comrade Peterside then went on to give the delegates to the convention some advice about the future as when he noted that:

Having crossed a major hurdle, you must now address yourself to the burning question of organisation and relevance. We must recognize that there is a tremendous reservoir of youthful energy yet untapped; that the students, youths and especially those under NANS constitute only a part of the youth of this country. But your capacity to help the non-schooling youth of lower institutions depends on your capacity to solve your own organizational problems and to overcome the institutional problems and to overcome the institutional divisions and distinctions that exist between you.

We also think that you face the problem all organisations face when they grow. You have become an institution in society without having institutionalized your power. You might therefore have to face the problem of choosing between remaining fluid with a rotating secretariat, zoning leadership and high turnover of leaders or institutionalizing student power through permanent secretariat, a longer leadership tenure and some bureaucracy.

Both have their advantages. Your present fluid nature has allowed tremendous flexibility and manoeuvres that a more stable structure with it's slow decision making could have limited success. At the same time, the rapid changes in both leadership, it's style and shifts of secretariat, has not allowed for centre of focus and continuity; all of which are necessary ingredients for securing membership loyalty and thus a consultative role of the affairs of members.

We are of course aware that there are other serious problems you face which can only be solved in the field and with experience. Whatever options you choose and however you decide to solve your problems, we shall continue to support you to solve your problems, we shall continue to support you and seek ways of working with you.

Speaking on the third and final point, on the “Worker-Student Alliance”, Comrade Peterside stated that:

The alliance between workers and students which the NLC and NANS started to encourage beginning with the efforts of the NLC and Chris Abashi executive is a historical alliance that is based on our common role in the struggle against colonialism.

It is on record that the main burden of the anti-colonial struggle was borne by the Nigerian workers, the peasant farmers, the students and intellectuals and the Nigerian women. In their

separate struggles against colonialism as it affected their various constituencies, these popular forces linked up in solidarity with one another and that way united their efforts into one mighty blow that crushed colonialism. This was our first lesson in the power of a people united in struggle. Those who joke about our alliance and raise dust about it today, know too well its potential effects. They know its historical effect. But our alliance is not only historical in origin it is a necessity. Just as it was necessary to align in the anti-colonial struggle, it is still relevant today to maintain our alliance.

We are still economically dominated by foreign private interests through international financial institutions, multi-nationals and the international trade system. The economic domination of our country has seriously compromised the gains we made from independence.

Moreover, we are engulfed in the crisis of capitalism which further impoverishes our people, deepens the under-development of our country, creates massive unemployment, inflationary pressure and cuts in social spending, especially health and education.

No relief seems in sight and any hope of more spending on education from the budget of 1986 or relief from the serious unemployment situation now seems far-fetched. Pressures from organisations like trade unions and student unions have failed to reverse the trend. Neither the ASUU nor NANS has stopped the commercialisation and even the collapse of the educational system just as the trade unions and NLC have failed to stop unemployment and retrenchment.

Therefore, a challenge faces us now. The crisis that is obviously systemic cannot be faced effectively by any single group. There is now a need to broaden and deepen our alliance to include

other popular sections that along with us fought for Nigeria's independence. Indeed, the problems before us cannot be solved if we do not address ourselves to the issue of exercise of power by popular forces. It is here that our alliance will have a role to play as the country prepares to return to constitutional rule by 1990.

Less than three months after the 7th NANS convention in which Comrade Emma Ezeazu, a post-graduate history student of University of Nigeria Nsukka, was elected NANS new president, the nation's universities and other tertiary institutions' campuses were thrown into a monumental crisis. The main campus of ABU, Zaria students protested the decision of the university authority to expel the Chairman of the caretaker committee of the student union and suspend the Public Relations Officer. On May 23, 1986, the school authorities called in the police, who subsequently murdered at least four students. The new NANS leadership called a senate meeting for the University of Nigeria, Nsukka from 25th May 1986.

At the end of the Senate meeting, the leadership proceeded to Lagos, where they met with the leadership of the NLC to brief it about the crisis and requested for Congress support and solidarity action.

At a press Conference addressed by Comrade Ezeazu on May 28, 1986, entitled: "On the Threshold of History", the NANS gave a background to the crisis, the decision of NANS Senate to order indefinite nationwide boycott of classes and its demands on the Federal Military Government.

According to Comrade Ezeazu:

The Senate rejects the commission of inquiry setup by President Babangida and headed by Major-General Emmanuel Abisoye (rtd) to investigate the massacre at ABU because, apart from its

terms not being adequate, its membership is reactionary and undemocratic. The Senate urges Segun Okeowo, one time NUNS President, to withdraw from the commission, if he still has the interest of Nigerian students at heart. The NANS Senate also calls on the NLC to withdraw its representative on the Commission, Dr Lasisi Osunde. (p.11)

The NANS President, in concluding the press conference, called for practical solidarity from democratic and mass organisations in the country in its struggle.

Finally, at this hour of our trial, the hour of national shame and horrible genocide committed against us, we are calling on all popular mass organisations, such as ASUU and NLC to show their solidarity with us in an active and positive way. This struggle, of our right to life, is also the general struggle of the oppressed masses against imperialism and its local agents and building of a society free from the exploitation of man by man. (p.13) [Emphasis in the original].

The NLC, after a meeting of the Central Working Committee (CWC) called to deliberate on the crisis and the request of NANS, announced its decision that the Congress General Secretary, Dr Lasisi Osunde, would not serve on the Abisoye Commission. It also decided to hold a “National Day of Solidarity” with Nigerian students, on June 4, 1986.

In preparation for the execution of the directive of the Central Working Committee, the Congress secretariat printed thousands of mobilisational posters, leaflets and pamphlets in support of the students, which NANS activists volunteered to distribute around the country. The Babangida regime deployed tanks across strategic locations, and put the armed forces – the Navy, Air Force and the Army on full alert, and in a Gestapo-styled operation, sealed the

NLC offices in all states of the federation and in the night of June 3, arrested national officers of the NLC including Comrades Chiroma, Osunde, Oshidipe and Salisu Mohammed, President, General Secretary, National Treasurer and Head of Information of NLC respectively.

The historical coincidence of June 4 as a date on which Jerry Rawlings of Ghana did his first coup, made Babangida and his security apparatus to go into the frenzy of stopping the harmless workers national protest, and even sought to justify this by the false claim that the NLC was trying to organise the equivalent of a 'civilian coup'.

The NLC pulled out of serving in the Abisoye Panel on the ABU killings, as it stated, its demand for a judicial commission of inquiry was not heeded by the federal government.

At the end of Abisoye's panel work, which NANS, ASUU national leaderships, and the NLC boycotted, the federal government decided to set up the Akanbi Panel to further look into the crisis and to specifically establish the link between the students, ASUU and NLC, and their alleged foreign linkages. The NLC worked together with ASUU and the national body of NANS and engaged the services of Alao-Aka Bashorun Chambers to fight off the witch-hunt of individual students and lecturers as well as groups. Comrade Femi Falana, from the Aka Bashorun chambers, indeed went around the country with the panel, standing for NANS, ASUU and NLC to give legal protection to these democratic organisations.

At the Lagos sitting of the panel, Mr Osunbor, the police counsel, went to the extent of tendering Comrade Festus Iyayi's novel, ***Violence***, as evidence that as a lecturer in the University of Benin, and ASUU President, he was in the habit of encouraging students to have violent behaviour.



Emergent new leaders of NLC at the Delegates Conference of 27th January 1999. L-R: John Onyenemere (Treasurer), Daniel Adekola (Vice President), Zakari Mustapha (Auditor), Lucas Damulak (Deputy President).



Delegates singing solidarity song at the January 1999 Conference that elected the Oshiomhole-led Congress leadership.



L-R: Comrade Issa Tijjani, Vice President of New leadership and Raji Lawal, National Trustee at the January 1999 Conference.



Vice President Mohammed Erena, Deputy President Damulak at the January 1999 Delegates Conference that elected them.



L-R: Comrades SOZ Ejiofor, Kiri Kalio, Congress Deputy President, John Onjenemere, Congress Treasurer and Linus Ukamba of Congress Secretariat.



Comrade Sunmonu (centre) with members of the Congress Caretaker Committee that took over after the NLC was unbanned by Gen. Abdusalami's regime. Photo was taken at Imoudu Hall, Congress National Secretariat on 31st October, 1998.



L-R: Prof. Jerry Gana, Nelson Mandela and Comrade Paschal Bafyau. Bafyau was a member of National Organising Committee on Mandela's visit to Nigeria in 1992.



Nigerian workers welcome Mandela to Nigeria.



President Bafyau and General Secretary Lasisi Osunde receiving an AFL-CIO delegation at Bafyau's Olajuwon office in Lagos.



L-R: Chief MKO Abiola, Comrade Pashal Bafyau and Dr. Lasisi Osunde. Congress General Secretary. Congress Head of Information Comrade Salisu Mohammad is behind Dr. Osunde.



At COSATU office in Johannesburg when a 5-person delegation led by Comrade Oshiomhole visited South Africa in 1999 soon after regaining NLC from the military Sole Administrator. Other members of the delegation were: Comrade Mohammed Erena, Ivor Takor, Rita Goyit and Remi Fakoya – (now Ihejirika).



Deputy President Kiri Kalio and Vice President Daniel Adekola at the 27th January 1999 Delegates Conference.



L-R: President William Madisha of COSATU and President Adams Oshiomhole of NLC.



Newly elected President Adams Oshiomhole granting interview to the Editor of New Nigerian Newspaper, Yakubu Aliyu and his Sunday New Nigerian counterpart, Benson Upah on 27th January, 1999.



Workers in a protest rally against high cost of foodstuff.



Workers celebrate Year 2010 May Day at the Eagle Square Abuja.



2nd L-R: Comrades Ibrahim Halilu of NUBIFIE, Lawrence Peterside of CSTWU, and H.A. Sunmonu at the OATUU Congress in Lagos in 1985.



2nd L-R: Comrades Yahaya Hashim and H.A. Sunmonu at OATUU Congress at the National Arts Theatre, Lagos in 1985.



Congress delegation to the Lagos Plan of Action Conference held at NIIA Lagos.
2nd L-R: Sunmonu, SOZ Ejiofah, Jola Ogunlusi of NUJ and Jonathan Ihonde.



Congress delegation at the Lagos Plan of Action Conference in NIIA, Lagos. L-R:
Sunmonu, Obua, Peterside, Dangiwa and others.



L-R: Comrades Esther Cooley, Onikoliase Irabor and Adams Oshiomhole at the end of the 2007 NLC Delegate Conference. New President Omar is next to Oshiomhole.



Workers protesting their bondage in chains.



Minister of Labour Musa Gwadabe, President Olusegun Obasanjo and Adams Oshiomhole sharing a joke at an NLC May Day celebration in Abuja.



2nd L-R: Segun Oshinowo DG of NECA, Dr. Temibi Agary, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Comrade Adams Oshiomhole at a Labour event.



L-R: Comrades Kwasi Adu-Amakwah of Ghana TUC and Adams Oshiomhole at the end of NLC-GTUC Bilateral Conference in Abuja.



Reception at the end of NLC-COSATU Bilateral Conference in Abuja. Comrade Oshiomhole is sandwiched between Minister of Labour Bunu Sheriff and William Madisha COSATU President. Comrade Zwelinzuma Vavi of COSATU is in suit to the right.



Comrade Oshiomhole at the National Hospital in Abuja to see workers shot by police during Congress anti-fuel price increase struggle in 2003. The worker being consoled is Mr. Basiru Habibu, who was shot by the police during the protest against increase in fuel price.



Femi Falana, Oshiomhole and Gani Fawehimi at one of their court appearances to defend NLC against the Federal Government.



Comrade Bafyau leading railway workers in a May Day parade.



President Jonathan joins Labour leaders to cut May Day cake at Eagle Square in Abuja.



Labour 'Amazons' on the match: May Day parade at Eagle Square, Abuja.



Chima Ubani answering questions from the press on NLC/LASCO campaign against fuel price increase and for making our refineries work. Comrade Ubani was killed alongside Mr. Tunji Oyeleru of Vanguard Newspapers (right insert) in a car crash on the way from one of such rallies in Maiduguri in September 2005.

The period between 1986 and 1988 was a very difficult period for NANS as it fought protracted legal and political battles for survival. Comrade Ezeazu, who was a target of national manhunt by the State Security Services and was in and out of detention, became the first NANS President to spend three years (instead of one) in office. By the time the Ilorin convention of NANS held in June 1988, and Comrade Salihu Lukman of ABU took over as President, Comrade Labaran Maku, then PRO, was the only officer of NANS from the March 1986 convention that was physically present. Comrade Ezeazu was in detention.

By the February 1988 Delegates Conference of the NLC, the Babangida regime was able to take its pound of flesh from the Comrade Chiroma leadership of NLC. The regime refused to recognise the re-election of Chiroma and his colleagues, using the excuse of a parallel 'election' by the Comrade Shamang group, to impose an administrator on the NLC from February 29 to December 1988. (See account of this in Chapter 3: Congress Delegates Conferences).

After the NLC regained its independence with the election of Comrade Paschal Bafyau in the December 1988 Special Delegates Conference, the fate of the students movement and the students' umbrella organisation was one of the concerns of the Congress and the industrial unions. In his address to the opening session of the first National Executive Council (NEC) meeting of NLC on April 5, 1989, Comrade Paschal Bafyau called on the Federal Military Government to lift the ban on NANS.

In that address, Comrade Bafyau stated as follows:

Comrades, at the negotiation between representatives of the 42 industrial unions and government held in 1988, the

issue of lifting of the ban on NANS was deliberated upon, it was agreed that the ban on NANS should be lifted and that the Nigerian students should be free to have one student organisation without organisational hindrances. We call and urge the Federal Military Government to lift the ban on NANS, and or implement the agreement reached in the memorandum of agreement on the subject. (p.7)

Ironically, in the perception of the leaders of the student movement, the relationship between the NLC and the student movement declined and collapsed during the tenure of Comrade Bafyau as NLC President.

According to Comrade Lukman, who became President of NANS four months before Comrade Bafyau was elected;

In December 1988, a new leadership was elected for the NLC, with Paschal Bafyau emerging president. The NANS leadership met with Bafyau who throughout the meeting, which lasted for about an hour, told the story of his experience in the constitution drafting committee. Nothing was discussed in terms of the organizational cooperation between the NLC and the NANS, or the supposedly existing NLC-NANS alliance. The new NLC leadership dodged the issues altogether. (Lukman, 2005:70)

Comrade Chris Mammah, NANS President in 1982, when asked what his recollection of what must have been responsible for the eventual distance between NANS and NLC, argued that it should be remembered that the government of the day had frowned at the alliance between the students and the labour movement from day one. He said:

Series of efforts were made to undermine the relationship. Ultimately, when Comrade Paschal Bafyau emerged the NLC president, it gave those opposed to the alliance the opportunity to weaken the relationship...

...the Bafyau executive wasted no time in distancing itself from the alliance. It refused initially to meet with the leadership of NANS and even made critical remarks about the Association. It was a low point in the NANS/NLC relationship. The circumstance of Bafyau's emergence and the 'new' orientation of the new leadership did not help matters.

The relationship between NANS and the NLC in the '80s enabled students' activists and cadres from the student movement to be recruited into senior positions. This began with the recruitment of two former activists from ABU, Zaria; Comrades Yahaya Hashim and Salisu Muhammad, as heads of Industrial Relations and Information departments, respectively in 1982. After the 1986 students' crisis, the NLC further reinforced its secretariat with four cadres and former student union activists – Comrades Chom Bagu, Issa Aremu, Chris Uytot and John Odah. They were deployed in the Organising, Research and Statistics, Information and Education departments of NLC, respectively. Comrade Chom Bagu went on to become National Secretary of one of Congress' affiliates, the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ); Comrade Aremu, who left Congress earlier, was to become General Secretary of the Textile Union years later, while Comrade Uytot in his 31st year of service to Congress (at the time of compiling this history) is Deputy General Secretary of Congress. Comrade Odah was appointed General Secretary of Congress in December 2001 by Congress NEC and retired from the services of NLC by the end of April 2013, and

currently Executive Secretary, Organisation of Trade Unions of West Africa (OTUWA).

Other NANS leaders like Comrade Lukman worked in the Textile Union before he moved to the NLC in 2000. He left the services of NLC as Head of Education department. Comrade Olaitan Oyerinde, who had served in Comrade Lukman's NANS executive as an ex-officio member, came to work in the NLC and rose to become Deputy General Secretary of the organisation.

NLC and Civil Society Organisations

The Congress has a rich history of collaboration with other Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the course of its 40 years of existence as a central trade union organisation. Under its founding President, Comrade Sunmonu, who himself was a product of the student movement (President of Yaba College of Technology; and 2nd Vice President of NUNS in 1966/67), the NLC worked with the national student movement, progressive academics and market women (and men) associations, during popular struggles.

But for a dip in this collaboration during the Comrade Bafyau years at the NLC, other NLC leaderships sought to build on this foundation and improved on the work with other civil society organisations.

Coming out of over four years ban by the General Abacha military junta, the NLC, as part of its broad programme of New Beginning, the Oshiomhole leadership that emerged in February 1999 prioritised re-building the relationship between the Congress and Civil Society Organisations.

To actualise this, the Congress organised an NLC-Civil Society Pro-democracy Summit in 2001. The Congress extended invitation to

professional organisations – Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), Nigerian Society of Engineers (NSE); faith-based apex organisations and labour support/and other conventional NGOs. The summit came up with two outcomes; it took up the political project which eventually culminated in the revival of the Labour Party. Secondly, the Labour-Civil Society Coalition (LASCO) emerged from these processes.

In the Secretariat Report to the Asaba National Executive Council (NEC) meeting of Congress on March 6, 2001, it reported under the title: Establishment of Pro-democracy network, as follows:

A civil society pro-democracy summit has taken place under the project... the NEC is called upon to affirm the resolutions of the summit, particularly with respect to commitment to provide leadership to other civil society organisations on the questions of promoting, deepening and defending democracy in Nigeria, which necessitated the establishment of a civil society network and efforts to form an alternative political platform/party.

The pro-labour organisations/labour support NGOs went on to consummate a coalition with the NLC, and this was what became known as LASCO. It was a loose coalition, with the NLC President and Comrade Dipo Fashina serving as co-chairs of LASCO. The NLC General Secretary with Comrade Chima Ubani on the civil society side served as co-secretaries of the coalition. Following the death of Comrade Ubani, Comrade Abiodun Aremu took over as co-secretary.

During the 8-year tenure of President Obasanjo in his second coming as Head of State from May 1999, the NLC fought a number of battles with the administration due to its penchant for arbitrary increases in

the prices of petroleum products. To achieve the measure of success it had, the NLC ensured effective mobilisation of critical sections of the populace before embarking on mass protests/strikes. It sought to win over market men and women organisations, artisans and other informal sector operators, by sending emissaries to hold meetings with different segments of the sector or through targeted messages in posters, leaflets and handbills.

To get the understanding of others, it was not uncommon that the NLC would address letters to key traditional rulers across the country, as well as to leadership of faith-based organisations and professional bodies.

The Comrade Oshiomhole leadership of NLC did a nationwide mobilisation tour during which NLC and LASCO leadership addressed rallies in each of the geo-political zones of the country from Lagos to Kano, Maiduguri, Abuja and Yola, among other cities. It was after addressing the Maiduguri rally, in which Comrade Ali Chiroma, 2nd President of Congress, who resides in the town participated, that while returning to Abuja with the official vehicle of the NLC that the late Chima Ubani (Co-secretary of LASCO) and Tunji Oyerelu, photo journalist of Vanguard Newspapers, died in an accident on Maiduguri-Potiskum road on September 21, 2005.

The Omar leadership of Congress initiated a similar campaign across the country in 2009. The campaign involving NLC-Civil Society allies in LASCO was on three issues namely: Anti-deregulation, new minimum wage; and the implementation of the Justice Uwais Electoral Reform Committee Report. The Uwais Committee had been set up at the onset of the Yar'Adua government to review the electoral processes in the country and make recommendations on how elections in the country can be better managed in line with the principles of free and fair elections. The

General Secretary of Congress, Comrade John Odah, was a Congress nominee to the 22-person panel, which had submitted a wide-ranging set of recommendations on electoral reforms to the federal government at the end of almost 18 months of its work.

The national rallies held in Asaba in the South-South; Enugu in the South-East; Makurdi in the North-Central; Lagos and Ibadan in the South-West; Kano in the North-West; Maiduguri in the North-East and Abuja in the Federal Capital. All the rallies were attended by officials of LASCO.

One of the immediate outcomes of the massive national campaign was the opening of dialogue with top officials of the Yar'Adua administration on deregulation of petroleum sector, which led to the NEC of Congress setting up of the Comrade Adeyemi-chaired 10-person Congress Committee on Deregulation (Reported in this book in Chapter 4).

Subsequently, the government also set up the National Minimum Wage Negotiating Committee under the chairmanship of retired Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Alfa Belgore, which eventually recommended the N18,000 minimum wage, that president Jonathan signed in to law in 2011.

The January 2012 general strike over President Jonathan's shock New Year massive increase in the pump price of petrol witnessed one of the contested national protest actions in the history of NLC protests against increases in the price of petroleum products. Spontaneous reactions had already begun in many cities of the country before the NLC processes of embarking on national strike was kicked into motion. Apart from the traditional allies of Congress, musicians and the main opposition party had weighed into the massive protests in major cities of the country, especially in

Lagos and Abuja, in what was then christened “Occupy Nigeria” protest. As has been the tradition, once Congress entered the fray, it took control of proceedings in prosecuting the national strike action.

Following days of almost complete national shutdown and many rounds of negotiation between labour and the federal government, the Congress leadership in consultation with the TUC called off the national protest, without appearing to obtain an agreement with the government. Though this was not the first time this happen in labour's many previous campaigns on this subject matter, many Nigerians including labour's traditional civil society allies, complained bitterly about the way the January 2012 action was ended.

This marked a major turning point in NLC'S relationship with its civil society allies. It was against the above background that the 2015 NLC Delegates Conference held. Hence, one of the motions to the conference (motion No.28) addressed the issue of “*Reviving and strengthening the Labour-Civil Society collaborations. The motion specifically mandated the Congress NEC to “take a report of the review of NLC-Civil Society relations and how it can be strengthened...”*” (See *Report of the National Leadership Retreat of the NLC: 2015*; p.110).

At the Tinapa Retreat of the National leadership of NLC in August 2015, one of the presentations to the Retreat by Y. Z. Ya'u entitled; “Rebuilding Labour-Civil Society Collaboration: Challenges and Opportunities,” elicited very lively contestation by both NLC leaders involved in the prosecution of the strike and the representatives of the Civil Society who were invited to participate in the retreat.

Comrade Kiri Mohammed, Deputy President of the Congress, in the

Omar's administration, who also returned as Deputy in the February-March 2015 Congress Delegates Conference, was vehement that the NLC did not betray its allies in Civil Society during that protest. He asserted that the:

Civil Society Organisations that collaborated with the congress...also always claimed that the protest was called off in their absence, but this is absolutely not true. (ibid. p.52).

Comrade Kiri Mohammed further contested that the meeting that took place at labour house where the strike was called off had Dr Dipo Fashina and other civil society people in attendance.

This position was hotly denied by Dr Hussein Abdul, former Country Director of Action Aid Nigeria, and current Country Director of Plan International. He stated during his contribution immediately after Comrade Kiri Mohammed's contribution thus:

In some of the initial meetings that took place with President Jonathan, our colleagues were there. But that last meeting leading to the call off of the protest, we were not invited; we were cut off. Even Comrade Dipo Fashina was totally abandoned in his hotel; he was not in that last meeting; and when he met the NLC leadership as I stated earlier. We were not happy, and we made our case very clear to the Acting General Secretary of the NLC, Comrade Owei Lakemfa, that we were not happy with how things went. (ibid p...)

In his reaction to the debate generated by his presentation on the suspension of the January 2012 strike and protest, Comrade Y.Z. Ya'u said right from the beginning, he wanted a frank and honest discussion about it. For him, however;

...it was not about whether it was right or wrong, ...but I think it was necessary to come to terms with it for us to agree; how was it addressed, what lessons can we learn from it, rather than keeping our distances and allow us to drift apart. (Op. cit. p.57).

The current Congress leadership under Comrade Ayuba Wabba has since the 2015 retreat, held some consultations with the Civil Society leadership in order to renew relations and rebuild closer collaboration, and to draw appropriate lessons from the event of 2012.

The lessons of engagement with Civil Society Organisations over the years is one that indicate that for a lasting partnership, trust needs to be continually built on both sides. Once trust breaks down, as with many things, years of painstaking effort to build bridges are burnt and the process has to start all over again. This needs to be strenuously avoided. For lasting relationship, allies in the labour movement should not take one another for granted.

CHAPTER EIGHT

NLC AND INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Introduction

If anyone is in doubt about the central importance of workers international solidarity then they must be oblivious of the world we currently live in. Our world is becoming increasingly unequal. A very small percentage of the world's population now own, or control vast amounts of wealth, while the overwhelming majority of the world's citizens own very little indeed, and are in many parts of the world experiencing chronic impoverishment. The old adage of 'the rich keep getting richer, and the poor keep getting poorer' has never been more apt. This is reflected in our beloved Nigeria too, where those with wealth are able to live flamboyant and ostentatious lifestyles, while all around them are workers, the unemployed, and those in rural areas who scratch a living together in order to survive.

One of the supreme approaches of those who control investment is to employ divide and rule tactics. If workers in one country demand a living wage, and a greater portion of the profits that their labour has produced, the employer's first reaction is to threaten to move production to countries where labour is considered cheaper, and more docile, and this usually means that unionisation either is weak or does not exist.

What employers, especially those controlling multi-national corporations and financial institutions, love to see, are workers from different countries competing against one another for foreign direct

investment, and doing all that they can to lure it into their domain. This is in the mistaken belief that workers will benefit, and that there is no alternative but to compete. This however overlooks the fact that the employers always benefit far more from such competition. When workers in different countries compete against each other, only the bosses win!

The historic clarion call of the workers movement has been 'Workers of the World Unite' and we are right to ask ourselves if this slogan is still relevant to our needs today. Thankfully, the NLC has embedded the notion of the need for international solidarity deep into its culture.

In a world where maximum flexibility through technology allows billions of dollars to be shifted around the world in an instant, and when the value chains of the increasingly concentrated and integrated capitalist network ensure that production shifts from one part of the globe to another can take place with relative ease, a countervailing force to demand social justice, fairness and for an end to super exploitation has never been more needed.

Many trade unions in different parts of the world have virtually surrendered to the dictates of multinational corporations, and have effectively adopted the economic policies of their own governments. They have abandoned any notion of a radical restructuring of the economy to meet the needs of the working class and the poor as a priority. The mantra that there is no alternative to globalised neo-liberalism has rendered many trade union movements immobilised and unable to see beyond the immediate, and that the best that can be done is to arrive at a compromise where at least some concessions might be afforded. The fundamental difficulty with this approach is that it demobilises the very social forces that are capable of fighting for change, the workers movement, and once that occurs, levels of

exploitation will increase, as the pursuit of profit can now continue unhindered.

Every active trade unionist knows that unless you fight for your share of the profit, or government allocation, you will be ignored and eventually discarded. That is why we have to develop a greater understanding amongst workers for the need for domestic and international solidarity. Solidarity should not be on the basis of region, nationality or even continent, but on the common experience of workers who are subject to exploitation.

The emergence of globalisation has enabled both domestic and multinational employers to have unparalleled access to markets anywhere across the globe. What we have to do, as the workers movement, is to build and strengthen our own networks, not based on the pursuit of profit as the employers do, but on workers-to-worker solidarity. The power of the employers is not without its weaknesses however, and especially when the bosses also face pressures to maintain high levels of profit. These weaknesses can be exploited by the workers movement to force the employers to focus on the living conditions of the workers they employ.

What all this means in practice is that we have to popularise the notion that workers in different parts of the country, or indeed in different parts of the world, have more in common than they could ever have with their employers. If dock workers in Chile are able to increase their pay and conditions by taking action, it will make it easier for dock workers in other parts of the world to also improve their conditions! If textile workers in Nigeria can fight against retrenchment, and demand that government protects its industrial base by ensuring that profits are ploughed back into the industry, instead of being wasted in conspicuous consumption by the elite; that will also strengthen the resolve of textile workers in Bangladesh to do likewise.

But we also need to take this notion of solidarity further. If workers in one country are involved in a struggle against their bosses, for example for higher pay, and their bosses also have plants or going concerns in Nigeria, we should also find ways of pressurising the employer in our country to concede to the demands of the workers in another country, and pay fair wages that allow for a decent standard of living. If a victory is achieved, it will make the case for a more generalised increase in pay for all workers that fall under that particular employer all the more powerful!

This is why we have to cement the linkages between different workers in the same sector across the world, and why the NLC supports its affiliates being actively involved in the most appropriate Global Union Federation.

Our concerns as workers are not just on bread and butter issues either. We know that workers have more to gain if they live in a democratic society where they can exercise their rights. When the NLC was under siege from the various military elites that dominated Nigerian politics for so many years, many trade union movements across the world realised that unless Nigerian workers could freely express themselves; could organise without hindrance; and be relieved of repressive actions; then the NLC would not be able to grow and fight for workers needs more effectively, and in the process, contribute to a stronger workers movement, regionally, continentally and globally!

Those pledging solidarity understood that if the mighty NLC could be freed from the shackles of military rule, it would be more capable of defending the interests, not just of Nigeria workers, but workers everywhere! This is the meaning of internationally solidarity, and under today's conditions, it is more relevant, more needed, more essential than ever before. We must not be distracted by the

divisiveness of the employers, or indeed our own governments, who would prefer us to see the workers of other parts of the world as competitors and not comrades of the working class!

International Dimension of NLC Engagements

This chapter therefore seeks to briefly reflect on the international dimension of NLC's trade union engagements since its founding and the ramifications of those engagements for the Congress as a working class organisation, for its members and the global working class collective. This reflection, will therefore, be done only in the context of engagements, at least for the purpose of this brief history.

The *Policy Document of the NLC* clearly articulates its concept of solidarity in both national and international contexts. Naturally, the NLC defines solidarity strictly from the prism of trade unionism, to imply “strengthening the joint capacity of workers and their unions across industrial and geographical boundaries to engage employers and government with the objective of eliminating/minimizing exploitation and repression.”

The high premium accorded internationalism by the NLC must be understood in the context of the role international solidarity played in the ideological consciousness of Nigerian labour leaders with many of them, and their immediate successors, groomed and capacitated in labour colleges and training schools outside the country. This, in addition to the conventional education they got, further deepened their knowledge, understanding and dynamism on industrial relations issues apart from a rapid grasp of the ramifications of socio-economic and political issues.

As the brief review of the early history of the Nigerian labour movement shows in the early chapters of this reflection, the period

before political independence saw a lot of contestations on an ideological basis, often rooted in cold war politics in the movement. The cleavages and divisions along the pro-West International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the Pro-East World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), after the split in 1949 of the former from the latter had substantial following in Nigeria.

The Sunmonu and Chiroma leaderships of NLC in all their years operated under the constraints of the statute forbidding the NLC and affiliate unions from affiliating with international trade union bodies except OATUU, and OTUWA. The Bafyau leadership of NLC however succeeded in getting the Babangida administration to repeal that prohibition law from the Trade Union (Decree) Act of 1973.

Early in the administration of Comrade Oshiomhole in the NLC, a 2-person delegation was mandated to go to Brussels, headquarters of the ICFTU, for exploratory discussion on the possibility of affiliation. Soon after the delegation returned from Brussels, the NLC applied for membership, and it was granted in time for a delegation of Congress to participate at the Durban World Congress in 2000, in South Africa.

On the side-lines of the World Congress, top leaders of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), the Dutch FNV, COSATU of South Africa and NLC met on how to strengthen the already strong relationship between the four centres, and to play a more active and progressive role in the ICFTU.

At the continental level, the NLC began a bilateral relationship with COSATU. It hosted the leadership of all COSATU-affiliated unions at a formal bilateral meeting in Abuja in 2001 where it was agreed on the necessity for the two centres and their affiliates to exchange

educators and organisers. It was also, among other things, agreed that the two centres should play an active part in the ICFTU-African Region, in order to bring about reforms and changes in the way the continental organisation was being run so that it will be better placed to serve the continent's working force more. In 2002, COSATU played host to the NLC leadership and the leadership of its affiliates. Subsequently, Ghana TUC joined and it became a trilateral alliance of like-minded comrades.

NLC affiliate unions have been active in the global unions since the restructuring and the mergers which had followed the 2006 merger convention in Vienna, Austria, between the ICFTU and the World Council of Labour (WCL) which gave rise to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). The Africa regional body of ITUC held its inaugural conference a year later in Accra, Ghana in 2007.

Beyond the ideological consciousness and deepened understanding of national and global political economies that come with internationalism is equally the courage and commitment that international solidarity and exposure imbued in the character of trade union leaders. These come through education and trainings designed to build cadres for trade unions. It is through such training and conscientisation that trade unionists develop fully their working class consciousness.

To underscore the importance attached to this type of education, some of the centres that existed before the current NLC had their own labour colleges, one of which was the ULCN's Labour College on Association Avenue, Ilupeju, Lagos, which was operated in collaboration with the AFL-CIO, and was pre-occupied with training workers for the centre. Another was NTUC's defunct Patrice Lumumba Labour Academy, located at Montgomery Way in Yaba, Lagos, which it used to train its cadres.

This perhaps underlines the aggression of the state, particularly the military dictatorships, in their determination to cut off the Nigerian labour movement from international trade union affiliation on the notion that the activism of Nigerian trade unionists was the result of foreign indoctrination. Thus, the state put trade union leaders under perpetual watch and generally repressed trade unions from taking full advantage of the vast opportunities that existed through international trade union solidarity. The suppression of national solidarity between students, trade unions and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) on the ground that lecturers were “teaching what they were not paid to teach,” or that they were indoctrinating labour leaders, is also attributable to the phobia for working class activism by the state.

Notwithstanding the disposition of the state with regard to the role of international solidarity in the radical nature of the Nigerian labour movement or its unrelenting approach to struggles, the NLC sees its engagements with its counterparts at the international arena as a strategic objective that enables it to share experience in the world of work to, as stated in its Policy Document, “enhance its capacity to participate in a multiplicity of alliances and platforms to agitate and advocate on various issues that affect workers and the Nigerian people.”

These engagements cut across many international bodies; from national federations to sub-regional, continental and global unions – International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), OATUU, ITUC-Africa, OTUWA and national trade union centres in Africa and globally, as well as sectoral unions as represented by global unions.

The NLC has tapped into these relationships to the advantage of Nigerian workers in its struggles both at the level of industrial

relations (collective bargaining and decent work programmes) and in the course of its socio-economic struggles, particularly during the military administrations and that of Obasanjo in his second coming to power as civilian president and his determination to de-radicalise and if possible deregister the NLC.

NLC Engagements with the ILO

The ILO to which Nigeria, as a member of the United Nations Organisation, is a signatory, has served the NLC well in a number of struggles apart from being a platform through which Nigerian labour leaders have made their inputs to the workers of the world by serving in various structures of the body including the highest decision-making organ, the Governing Body.

As the foremost United Nations body for regulating working conditions globally, the ILO gave moral backing to NLC's resistance to neutralise government's offensive. Beyond the moral power that interventions from the ILO brings to bear on struggles of national centres like the NLC, its capacity to mobilise reach is global and therefore potent in bringing goodwill and support in times of need, and that has often been the case with Nigeria, either during the military dictatorship or under democratic governance.

During the period when the military was in power in Nigeria and it intervened directly in the affairs of the NLC by imposing a Sole Administrator, both in 1988 and in 1994 under Generals Babangida and Abacha dictatorships respectively, the ILO through the activities of the workers group of the Governing Body acted as a constant source of pressure on the Nigerian regimes to hands off NLC and trade unionists. After the death of General Abacha in 1998, it was a few days to the visit of an ILO contact mission to the country in

August 1998 that the General Abdulsalami regime repealed the two decrees enacted by the Abacha regime that shackled NLC and the oil unions – NUPENG and PENGASSAN. ASUU and NASU also suffered proscription by decrees as part of the infamous legacy of the General Abacha era in the trade union arena.

Even under civilian dispensation, the ILO also came in handy in the Nigerian workers struggles for better working conditions. For instance, during the June 2004 ILO conference, the NLC delegation not only made representations to the Workers Group over the armed invasion of the NLC Secretariat during a general strike, it also used the ILO forum to vigorously campaign against the then proposed amendments to the Trade Union Act through which President Obasanjo plotted to deregister the NLC. As a result of the protestations from the NLC, the Governing Body of the ILO in November 2006 declared that the Trade Union Act “violates established Freedom of Association principles on strikes, essential services and the right to organize.”

In its NEC Report to the 9th Delegates Conference held in Abuja from February 15-16, 2007 on the theme: ***“Deepening and Defending Democracy and Guarantee Jobs, People's Welfare and National Unity,”*** the NLC gave a detailed account of the interventions made by the Governing Body on the Trade Union Act as follows:

ii. Criminalization of Protest Strikes over Socio-economic Issues

ILO notes that Section 6 of the new Act limits legal strikes (and) excludes any possibility of a legitimate strike action to protest against Government's social and economic policy affecting workers' interests.

ILO recalls that organizations responsible for defending

workers' socio-economic and occupational interest should be able to use strike actions not only to support their positions regarding better working conditions but also in the search for solutions posed by major social and economic policy trends that have a direct impact on their members and on workers in general.

Therefore, the committee requests the government to amend Section 6 of the new Act so as to ensure that workers' organizations may have recourse to protest strikes aimed at criticizing government's economic and social policies without sanctions as well as in disputes of interest.

iii. Right of workers and workers' organizations to picket

the Governing Body also upholds the right to picket, which section 42(1)B of the Act has infringed upon. Accordingly, the ILO pronounced that “picketing and firmly, but peacefully inciting other workers to keep away from their workplace cannot be considered unlawful.

iv. Right of workers in essential services to organise and go on strike

The ILO took a strong view of the expansion of services designed as essential under the Trade Union Act 2005 and other previous enactments.

The ILO upheld that “any law banning strikes in essential services should limit the definition of such services to its strict sense, i.e. to services the interruption of which would endanger the life, personal safety or health or the whole or part of the population”.

The effect of this is that workers in the aviation sector have

a right to strike. Currently, the situation is that the Trade Union Act 2005 classifies the sector as an essential service.

v. Paramilitary workers have a right to organise and the right to strike

The Governing Body also took a negative view of Section 11 of the Trade Union Act (1973) under which a broad range of workers are denied the right to form unions. These are officers and men of the Nigeria Customs, Prisons and Immigration Services as well as workers of the Central Bank and Nigeria External Telecommunications. The ILO pronounced that “the functions exercised by employees of customs and excise, immigration, prisons and preventive services should not justify their exclusion from the right to organise on the basis of convention 87 and the Freedom of Association and Right to Organise.”

The ILO accordingly “requests the Government to amend Section 11 of the Trade Union Act (1973) so that these categories of workers are granted the right to organise and to bargain collectively. (P. 55)

There is however a critical observation that we can draw from our own experience, and of that of the movement in South Africa in relation to the ILO and that is the following. In both cases, the fight against a predatory military dictatorship, and a brutal apartheid regime, was significantly enhanced by the work of the ILO (and many other organisations) but it was also essential to have a thriving, demanding, mass based movement in each of our countries to successfully pressurise from within, and also to be able to ensure that international solidarity was being actively applied. Without a mass

movement working on the ground, inside Nigeria, and South Africa respectively, it is very likely that the pressure for change would not have been regarded as urgent, or would even have been realised. What this means is that while international institutions like the ILO can prove to be very helpful, unless there is a formidable force on the ground, governments will find ways of delaying the process of change, or more specifically, will use all at their disposal to frustrate and undermine processes towards democratisation. Movements on the ground are one way of ensuring that commitments made by employers and governments are respected and acted upon effectively. Sadly, there are many instances where workers movements have been unable to apply pressure from within their own countries even when the ILO has embraced action against undemocratic regimes, and many of these cases return to the ILO year after year without real progress being made.

Apart from the ILO, the NLC had, and continue to, engage with many trade union organisations and entered into partnership or collaboration for training and capacity building of Congress affiliates. In addition to this, there were a number of programmes that the NLC had partnered with other organisations to execute, such as decent work, health and safety and HIV/AIDS, among others all of which have served the interest of not only the NLC and its affiliates but the country at large, in terms of manpower enhancement and productivity. There were such collaborations at one point or the other with national centres such as, LO-Norway, TUC-UK, CLC of Canada, FNV of Netherland, LO-Sweden, among others.

In terms of continental solidarity, the trilateral collaboration between NLC, Ghana-TUC and COSATU has, apart from developing common position on a number of trade union issues,

become a platform for mobilisation against the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with the EU due to the dangerous implications they will have on the economy of respective African economies. Also as a key continental player, the NLC continues to play a critical role within OATUU and providing leadership for the continental body for over two and a half decades consecutively.

In the West African sub-region, the Congress has championed the revival of OTUWA, the sub-regional body that became dormant due to a number of challenges. The NLC has played host to the organisation since 2016 after the revival conference resolved to relocate the headquarters of OTUWA to Abuja from Abidjan, by providing office accommodation and footing the salary of the Executive Secretary and a couple of staff since January 2016.

NLC, Anti-Apartheid Struggles and Solidarity with Western Sahara

The Congress leadership since 1978 has been in the vanguard of campaigns for dismantling of Apartheid in South Africa, both nationally and at the global levels. At the national level, working with progressive academics, the national students' movement, the NLC had consistently given massive support to the official Nigerian government's position which made it an honorary frontline state in the struggle to dismantle Apartheid and colonialism in Southern Africa.

It maintained a critical voice in the National Committee Against Apartheid (NACAP), the official anti-Apartheid body. The Congress's support for the ANC as the leading organisation in the South African people's struggle against Apartheid often put it at odds

against some bureaucrats in government's agencies leading with the anti-Apartheid struggle.

For instance, in the late 1980s, these elements in government contrived to have the Chief Representative of the ANC, Comrade Victor Matlo (his struggle name while in Nigeria) withdrawn on the spurious excuse that he was fomenting radicalism among Nigerian youth (students) and the labour movement. Comrade John Odah, who had represented the NLC at the NACAP meeting, reported this development to the NLC leadership, and Dr Lasisi Osunde, the then General Secretary of Congress, not only officially took up the matter, he addressed a press conference expressing NLC's anger at this development. Comrade Odah was subsequently declared a "security risk" for exposing the situation. George Nene was eventually brought in from the Lusaka headquarters of the ANC to replace Comrade Matlo.

The Congress in 1988 organised a massive anti-Thatcher protest in Lagos and Kano, when the then British Prime Minister visited Nigeria, shortly after returning from a visit to the Apartheid enclave. The Congress led the demonstrations to protest the British government's support for the Apartheid government. It collaborated with the Nigeria-ANC Friendship and Cultural Association (NAFCA) and other progressive mass organisations in the country. NAFCA was formed to garner support for the ANC in Nigeria. It was populated by former activists from Nigerian universities and other tertiary institutions, who had earlier been in the Youth Solidarity on Southern Africa in Nigeria (YUSSAN), some of these activists having been recruited to work in the NLC in 1987.

Despite the ban on the NLC against international affiliation, the Chiroma leadership of NLC used the Commonwealth Trade Union

Council (established in 1979), and on whose steering committee Comrade Chiroma was to channel substantial resources for the work of the South African trade unions inside the Apartheid enclave.

In recognition of NLC's strong support for the liberation struggle in Southern Africa, when Mandela visited Nigeria as part of his tour of countries after his release from 27 years of captivity, the then NLC President, Comrade Paschal Bafyau, was appointed into the federal government's official reception committee.

Like it did during the anti-Apartheid struggle, the Congress has continued to channel its energy and resources to maintain a strong solidarity support for the liberation of Western Sahara from the stranglehold of Morocco which till date is occupying the country illegally as a force of colonial occupation despite the declaration of Western Sahara as an independent country by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which latter transformed into the African Union (AU).

The Congress has not only provided an office accommodation for the Saharawi Solidarity Movement in Nigeria, Comrade Abdulwahed Omar, as Congress President led a high powered Congress delegation to the liberated area of Western Sahara and spent days with his delegation, sleeping in camps in the liberated area to experience first-hand life in the Western Sahara.

At international trade union fora, the NLC along with its South African counterpart, COSATU, and other progressive forces, have consistently articulated the need for international support to end Morocco's occupation of the territory.

Similarly, on Palestine, the Congress has over the years remained firm in its support for the struggle of the Palestinian people for an independent state.

Successive leadership of Congress since the 1978 re-launch of NLC had campaigned for an independent homeland for Palestine in national, continental and international fora that NLC participated in and the issue of Palestine are raised. The NLC treats the Palestinian independence question as it did on the issue of Apartheid and the pre-eminent position of the ANC in that struggle. We constantly related with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and its leadership whenever the opportunity provided itself.

The Congress supported the Oslo Accord between Palestine and Israel which aimed to facilitate a mutually acceptable solution to the decades long crisis; under the Accord, Israel would take West Jerusalem and Palestine would take East Jerusalem in the context of a two-state solution.

The US President decision to unilaterally recognise Jerusalem as Israel capital therefore created much confusion and is a major set back to a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, and a negation of the two-state solution based on the 1967 borders and in line with UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338.

NLC at the Sub-regional Level

At the West African level, the NLC kept its historical relationship with the Ghana TUC. The NLC played host for many years to one of the leaders of Ghanaian labour movement, Comrade A.M. Issifu, during the difficult days of the Rawlings military dictatorship in Ghana. The Congress, working with the Commonwealth Trade Union Council in the late 1980s, campaigned for the release of a young trade unionist, and Head of the Political Department of the TUC. He was fingered for a critical TUC position against the

Rawlings ruling military junta. For this, he was thrown into detention without trial for over two years. The comrade in question, Kwasi Adu-Amankwah, came out of detention to lead the Ghana TUC years later. In the last ten years, he has served as General Secretary of ITUC-Africa. This is a vindication of the foresight of the Congress in investing time and resources in campaigning for his release from Rawlings jail house.

The NLC has over the years also kept in close touch with developments in the trade union scene in the rest of the West African sub-region, especially in the English speaking countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Gambia. Apart from the common origin of trade unionism in these countries as a result of common colonial heritage (with the exception of Liberia), the fact that Sierra Leone migrant workers were in the forefront of championing the formation of the first trade union – The Southern Nigeria Civil Service Union in 1912 – attests to the common bond that binds the workers of Nigeria and other countries in the sub-region.

CHAPTER NINE

CONGRESS EDUCATION AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the educational and training programmes of the Nigeria Labour Congress from a historical perspective. It discusses the evolution of training methodology for trade union education in Congress and shows how the methodology has influenced the various Congress's educational programmes. Attention is also drawn to the fraternal collaborations and support which indeed assisted in provided technical and fiscal requirements for the programmes. The challenges confronting these programmes are discussed and recommendations to deal with them are suggested.

At inception, education and training of workers was handled by the Department of Education and Training of the Congress. It was a major department because of the premium which Congress put on the workers training. The broad objectives of the department were among others to superintend over the broad education and training activities of Congress aimed at developing the working class consciousness. It was similarly charged with the responsibility of advising the leadership on scholarship for workers training and education and the development of materials and books on the history and evolution of the labour movement.

In the first decade of its existence, Congress' educational activities

were carried out using the traditional reliance on experts in industrial relations mainly from universities and other labour specialist who used the lecture format to address issues affecting workers and the nation. The leadership of Congress led by Comrades Ali Chiroma and Lasisi Osunde made it a point of duty to expose staff to various trade union education courses. Thus within the first year of joining the service of Congress in 1987, the four student activists who were recruited into Congress after the 1986 national students uprising – Chom Bagu, Issa Aremu, Chris Uyot and John Odah, were sent to various worker-related courses oversea. Within the first one-year, Comrade Odah who had been assigned to the education and training department, participated in a 7-week Trade Union Education course in the area of Audio-Visual Aid Technology in ILO Turin center, and an 8-week Train-the-Trainer course also at the Turin Centre in Italy. These programmes expanded the knowledge base of the staff who had been entrusted with the huge responsibility of trade union education delivery for the Congress and its affiliates.

Evolution of Training Methodology for Trade Union Education in Congress

After the exposure to the courses in the ILO International training center in Turin, Congress commenced the use of the modular method of training which was the dominant method used for training at the Turin Center. The modular approach to trade union education involve the use of modules developed on a particular subject. This method combines “explanation by the teacher, of self-contained subject to be analyzed in class, individual study of the subject by the students, and group exercise”. *“Using Trade Union Education to Promote Women’s Participation in Trade Unions: The Case of the Nigeria Labour Congress” in ILO Labour Education journal No. 95-1994/2.*

The methodology for trade union education delivery got a great boost in 1987/88 when the NLC started collaborating with the Commonwealth Trade Union Council (CTUC) with headquarters in Congress House in London. The Active Learning method used in the United Kingdom's adult education programmes helped the NLC educational programmes tremendously. The Congress Trade Union Education Handbook which was an adaptation of the CTUC Publication Learning by Doing, ensured that all trainers involved in the Education Programme go through a thorough training using this educational method.

The Active Learning method is a general term used to describe a teaching method which actively engages teaching methods that engages participants in the learning process, as opposed to more traditional methods which rely on formal lectures. Under this method:

- The learning process starts from the experience of the participants and builds from this experience;
- Educational activities are designed so that participants can share their experiences and learn from each other;
- Active learning allows important trade union skills to be practiced, such as chairing meetings, public speaking and collective decision making.

It is crucial to note that this methods have greatly shaped the training methods of Congress' educational programmes although innovations had been integrated over time. The next section examines the educational programmes that were developed and delivered using the delivery methods discussed above. .

Congress Educational Programmes

Over the years, Congress Educational Programmes were tailored towards meeting the needs of its affiliates and workers generally. These programmes which Congress has ran in the past are as follows:

- (i) Monthly Lecture Series
- (ii) Educators Forum
- (iii) Rain and Harmattan Schools
- (iv) State Level Leadership Programme
- (v) Study Circle and the
- (vi) 4 months Certificate course on Labour Law and Labour Relations

Monthly Lecture Series

This education programme was designed to bring a mass of Nigerian workers to attend a monthly lecture on topical issues of the moment. The primary goal of the series is to help raise worker's consciousness on a range of national and international issues. While the NLC was in Lagos, the Programme held at the Imoudu hall. When the headquarters was moved to Abuja, the Programmes held at the auditorium of the NLC headquarters in Abuja.

A major challenge in the sustenance of this form of worker education is it's irregularity over time, even as the series was quite popular with the workers. The Pre- May Day lectures also falls within this category of popular education.

Educators Forum

One of the main pillar of Congress' educational delivery was the Educators Forum which comprised of Education Officers of Industrial Unions and the Congress Education Officer(s) whose responsibility it was to formulate, design and deliver Congress education programmes and activities. This forum dates back to the late '80s and in the '90s before the 2nd ban on the Congress Leadership by the Abacha regime in 1994.

When the Industrial Unions reclaimed the Congress from the government appointed Sole Administrator, the revival of the Congress educational activities that was hinged on the resuscitation of the Congress Educators Forum took place. As part of the NLC/FES/EU 2-year project on “Rebuilding the Nigerian Trade Union Movement” a South African Trade Union Educator Bobby Marie was appointed as Consultant to help revive the NLC Education activities, plan and hold series of preparatory educational activities which culminated in the Congress Educators Conference from 2nd to 4th August 2000.

The Education Conference which held in Jos provided the basis for the formulation of the Congress Education Policy; it went through various stages of validation, and was finally adopted as Congress Policy by the 8th Delegates Conference of Congress held 28th to 29th February 2003. **(The Education Policy is attached to this chapter as appendix I).** Comrade Salihu Lukman, a former President of the National Association of Nigeria Students (NANS) who was drafted from the Textile and Garment Workers Union to manage the One Million Euro NLC/EU/FES Programme on rebuilding the trade union movement in Nigeria worked closely with Comrade Bobby Marie and the other Educators after the landmark Jos Education

Conference to push forward the frontiers of workers education not only in the country but built an extensive network of educators across West and Southern Africa. Comrade Lukman was subsequently absorbed into the Congress staff as head of its Education department at the end of the two year programme which he managed successfully.

When Comrade Lukman left the services of Congress to pursue new challenges, Comrade Valentine Udeh, took over as acting and later head of Education and training department of Congress and continued implementing the educational programmes of the organization.

The main planks of the Policy revolved around NLC and Industrial Unions Education officers providing the personnel for the implementation/delivery of the outlined Programmes. They include the following:

- (a) General Principles
- (b) Proposal on Affiliate Union education Structures
- (c) Proposal on Funding and Cost efficiency
- (d) Proposal on Women and Gender Education
- (e) Proposal on Education Networks
- (f) Proposal on Education Programmes
- (g) Proposal on Membership Education
- (h) Proposal on Shop Stewards Education
- (i) Proposal on Union Management and Staff Education
- (j) Proposal on Education Development and Funding
- (k) Proposal on Organizing and Staff Development
- (l) Proposal on a labour college

- (m) Proposals on state level Leadership Education Project
- (n) Proposals on National Level Leadership Education Project
- (o) Proposals on Information and Education for Student and Youth
- (p) Proposal on the Informal Sector.

As the congress seeks to renew its education delivery capabilities, there will be need for the officers concerned to go back to these proposals as there are a number of important components of these proposals that are yet to be fully explored and implemented.

(The proposals on 16 areas of Trade union education and funding from the Jos Conference is attached to this chapter as Appendix II).

The Policy anticipated the re-launch of the Education Endowment Fund which was first launched in April 1991 at the National Arts Theatre Lagos under the Presidency of late Comrade Paschal Bafyau. Over 10 million Naira was raised then, and put in a fixed deposit account towards the establishment of Congress Labour College.

The 2nd Sole Administrator of Congress when Uba Ahmed was Minister of Labour, squandered this fund along with other funds of Congress that he met.

On Congress Labour College

The proposal on an independent labour college and what our relationship should be with the Michael Imoudu Institute of Labour Studies (MIILS) came out of the report to the conference that the Paschal Bafyau Leadership of Congress opted to establish a worker owned labour college after his leadership failed to convince the Ibrahim Babangida regime to handover the MIILS to Congress to

run, as a result of concerted resistance by the Federal Ministry of Labour who saw the Institute as one of its parastatals that should remain as such. Though the NLC had two representatives on the board of Mills from Inception-Comrade Salihu Mohammed and Late Dr. Kolagbodi and others followed till date, it became clear that the Ilorin Institute though named after our Labour Leader number one, could not serve our purpose of developing a conscious working class movement.

At the 2003 Delegates conference of Congress, it was resolved that the NLC should establish its own labour college in Jos. Subsequently a committee headed by Comrade Hassan Sunmonu with Comrade Paschal Bafyau as his deputy was set up to actualize this resolution of conference. The committee had a few of meetings, one of which held in Jos to follow up on the promise by the state government during the Jos Education conference to donate a parcel of land for the Labour College. Unfortunately, the deteriorating security situation in Plateau State subsequently became a stumbling block to the realization of this policy.

In the meantime, the Akwa Ibom state government had built a lecture/classroom block within the state council secretariat in Uyo and donated it to the NLC for its Rain school structure. Congress had moved the venue of the Rain school from Calabar in Cross Rive State, where the school started in 2003, to Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, after the national secretariat of Congress had problem with the leadership of the Cross River State Council.

Rain and Harmattan Schools (National Schools)

After the Jos Educators Conference in 2000, it was decided that we should hold two National Schools yearly modeled after the Canadian

Labour Congress Summer and Winter Schools. This was largely the influence of a five-year West African Trade Union Education for Democracy Project which was run for the four English speaking Commonwealth countries during the period of the government ban on NLC from 1994-1999. The project was funded by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and supervised by the Commonwealth Trade Union Council (CTUC). It was coordinated by Comrade John Odah who was reporting to the committee of 29 Industrial Unions. Part of his schedule was to take union leaders and educators from Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and the Gambia for study visits to Canada during which these comrades participated in CLC's flagship educational Programmes – which are the Winter and Summer Schools. A number of the in country Programmes were held in Ghana and the Gambia for participants from the four Anglophone Countries

During the Congress 40th Anniversary in 2018, Paul Puritt (retired CLC international officer) and Steve Faulkner (former Education officer of CTUC) were honored for the role they played in the sustenance of Congress Education Programmes over the years, before, during and after the ban on Congress in 1988 and 1994 respectively. We will review in some details later in chapter the National schools.

State Level Leadership Programmes

The Congress State Level Schools which held once a week for the 10 weeks' duration of the programme took off on March 7, 2006 across the 36 States and FCT with uniform modules. The objective of this Programme was to provide continuous basic trade union education to workers in the states to develop the working class skills

competence and consciousness at the state levels where the NLC has state branches. This programme which had produced seven editions, held until 2012. Only the Ondo state continued till 2017 after the Congress stopped sending support on state level schools to the states.

Study Circle

The Congress joined the Study Circle project in 2000 after the NUT had been involved in the PANAF supported Education Programme for several years before then. A number of study circle manuals were developed over the years in line with continuous challenges.

4-Months Certificate Programme on Labour Law and Labour Relations

A 4 month (September – December) Programme in collaboration with the Department of Political Science, University of Jos for Certificate Course on Labour Law and Labour Relations was developed jointly between Congress and the University and it was rolled out from 2005.

The objectives of the Programme which had 30 participants in each year include strengthening the capacity of trade unions to influence effectively the social, economic and political conditions under which their members live and work. It was also to strengthen the knowledge base of participants on issues of Labour relations among others. The Course content of the Programme included the following:

- (a) Communication / Computer Skills
- (b) Basic Concepts in Social Science
- (c) Introduction to Political Economy

- (d) History of Trade Unions
- (e) Labour Laws in Nigeria
- (f) Administration of Labour Laws
- (g) Labour Relations in Nigeria
- (h) Skills in Collective Bargaining
- (i) Trade Union Organizing
- (j) Introducing Gender in Labour Relations
- (k) Labour and Social Change

After five years of continuously holding Programme, the insecurity crisis in Jos forced the Congress to stop the Programme. An attempt to revive the Programme was made by Comrade Ibrahim Khaleel led Education Committee under the Comrade Ayuba Wabba Presidency of the Congress but this again had to be put on hold as a result of the relapse of the crisis in Jos and its environs.

As indicated earlier, when the NLC reclaimed its independence with the swearing in of the new leadership under Comrade Adams Oshiomhole's Presidency, the Congress played host to an 11-person international Trade Union delegation, who came in Solidarity with Nigerian workers after four years of NLC been banned by the military administration in Nigeria. They also said they were on a fact finding mission to identify ways in which the international movement could be of assistance to the new NLC. The Programme of activities presented to this team later formed the basis for the two year NLC/EU/FES Programme for rebuilding the Nigeria Labour movement. The new FES Country representative Comrade Sven Schewezensky working the Education department helped to put together the draft Project Proposal, which the EU Headquarters in Brussels approved.

The Project whose duration was from 2001-2002 brought together a

core of educators who mapped a strategy for developing NLC Education programmes.

In the background to the Evaluation Report of the NLC 1st Harmattan School which held in November 2002 in Bauchi, it was stated:

“The Harmattan School is the outcome of a long journey to rebuild Trade Union Education in West Africa...

Many West African Trade Unionists visited the Canadian Union Schools and brought back new ideas but more importantly developed their own vision on where they would take their organization. More recently, COSATU and NLC set up a bilateral and laid the basis for the solidifying of two largest and best organized union federations on the continent. This was the context in which NLC Education developed a stronger programme of sharing with DITSELA, the education and development institute set up and led by COSATU and other Federation in South Africa” (NLC 1st Harmattan School, November 2002, Bauchi Evaluation Report. P.3.)

The Congress National Schools were established to provide among others:

- Intensive specialized training to trade unionist in the focus area.
- Assist NLC affiliates and their officials develop new skills and methods of addressing members' problems in the respective areas.

- Utilize the joint training as basis for understanding union challenges as well as basis for new form of unity and solidarity among unions.

Courses in the National Schools

The first Harmattan School held on the basis of the following five course:

- Ø Educators Education or Train-the-Trainers
- Ø Training on Integrating women and gender in Trade Unions
- Ø Workplace Representatives
- Ø National Level Leadership.
- Ø State level Leadership

After the first school and on the basis of evaluation by both Participants and facilitators, the course was restructured into the following:

- Organizers
- Facilitators
- Management skills (development)
- Leadership
- Advance women leadership.

In February 2004, there was a National Trade Union Evaluation Conference in which further restructuring of the two schools were recommended. Due to logistic difficulties that trailed the schools, the harmattan school courses were reduces to four namely:

- Educators
- Advance women leadership
- Leadership
- Organizers.

The Harmattan School has since then been run on the above four course structure.

The Rain School like the Harmattan School made its entrance to our Educational delivery in May 2003 in Calabar on the premise of the objectives earlier outlined. It held on the basis of the following three courses:

- Management skills for Trade Union Leaders
- Leadership Development
- Women Leadership.

On the basis of the 2004 National Evaluation Conference, the Rain School was restricted to focus on thematic issues with emphasis on National Policy issues and challenges of globalization. The Harmattan School was to retain the focus on roles of union officials. The restructured courses were:

- Leading the Union in the Era of globalization
- Organizing is Building Workers Power
- Transforming Union Organization for Gender Equity.

The Course structure in the Rain School subsequent stabilized as follows:

- Leadership Course

- Organizers Course
- Gender Course.

Other Activities in Schools.

Apart from the course, a number of other activities were organised in the two Schools. They include: plenary sessions, campaign, evening cultural activities and the production of the Schools' Information Bulletins.

Both Schools have plenary sessions where participants of all courses come together in a joint session. With respect to campaigns, specific campaign activities do take place during the sessions. They are gender and HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns. These campaigns involve the display of posters, banners, leaflets and flyers among others. The evening activities include cultural and variety nights. To share information on happenings within the sessions and other important information relevant to the working class, each of the Schools developed information bulletin, which comes out each day. The Harmattan School Bulletin is called the *Daily Wind*, which highlights the events in the school, while the Rain School runs a *Daily Rain*.

All Leaders of Congress since comrade Adams Oshiomhole during whose Presidency the bulk of these programmes began, have endeavoured to ensure the continuity of these education programmes. Both Comrades Abdulwahed Omar and Ayuba Wabba leadership of Congress, have also sought to continue the culture of regular reviews and evaluation of the educational Programmes so that they maintain their relevancy to the NLC and its affiliates. In this respect on 28th-29th June 2016, a curriculum review workshop for the National Schools held in Uyo Akwa Ibom. Veteran Unionists and

Pro-Labour intellectuals that were invited to that meeting to meet with the NLC educators included Comrades SOZ Ejiofoh, Teye Olorode, Dipo Fashina, Pam Dung Sha and John Odah. Comrade Peter Ozo-Eson, then General Secretary of Congress presided over the review meeting. Just before the 40th anniversary of NLC, Congress President, Comrade Ayuba Wabba inaugurated an expanded education committee to look at the Congress educational Programmes and advise on new areas that need to be included to our Trade Union education. The Congress education committee which had Comrade Khaleel Ibrahim, Congress National Treasurer as chairperson, had veterans and activists such as Comrade Salihu Mohammed, Dipo Fashina, Abiodun Aremu and John Odah brought into the committee to carry out this particular assignment.

Fraternal Collaborations and Support.

Over the last four decades, the Congress and its education department have collaborated with a number of fraternal organizations for its educational programmes. Initially our cooperation was limited to working with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Organization of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU). Later in the late '80s, the Chiroma and Bafyau leadership fought to open up areas of international cooperation and the then Commonwealth Trade Union Council (CTUC). Through the CTUC, our collaboration with the TUC of Britain, the Canadian Labour Congress and the FNV of Netherlands assumed increased importance in our educational programmes.

Under Comrade Adams Oshiomhole's leadership, the NLC joined the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and with it our collaboration expanded. Our support expanded to include

the FES, AFL-CIO and its Solidarity Center, LO Norway, the Danish Trade Unions and LO Sweden and several others.

Before the collapse of the soviet bloc in 1989/90, the Congress and a number of its affiliates benefited from short and long term trade union training programmes ranging from one to several months in the old Soviet Union, Cuba, Bulgaria, East Germany, among others. The ideological foundation of many cadres of the labour movement had its origin in those trainings.

Lessons and Challenges of Congress Educational Activities / Programmes:

The successes recorded in the implementation of these educational programmes were possible because of a number of reasons. The growth of a politically conscious leaders of the trade union movement helped in shaping the educational programme and giving them a direction. Second, the conscious recruitment of politically conscious cadres from the working class as well as from the radical students' movements also made the educational programmes qualitatively strong and ideologically clear. Third, trade union investments in political education has helped in reproducing class conscious cadres in the affiliates who have on a daily basis conducted the 'battles' to protect their members and the general public. Fourth, the support from allies within and outside the country in supporting the educational programmes is another lesson. The support from universities and other educational centres were instrumental in the success of the educational programmes.

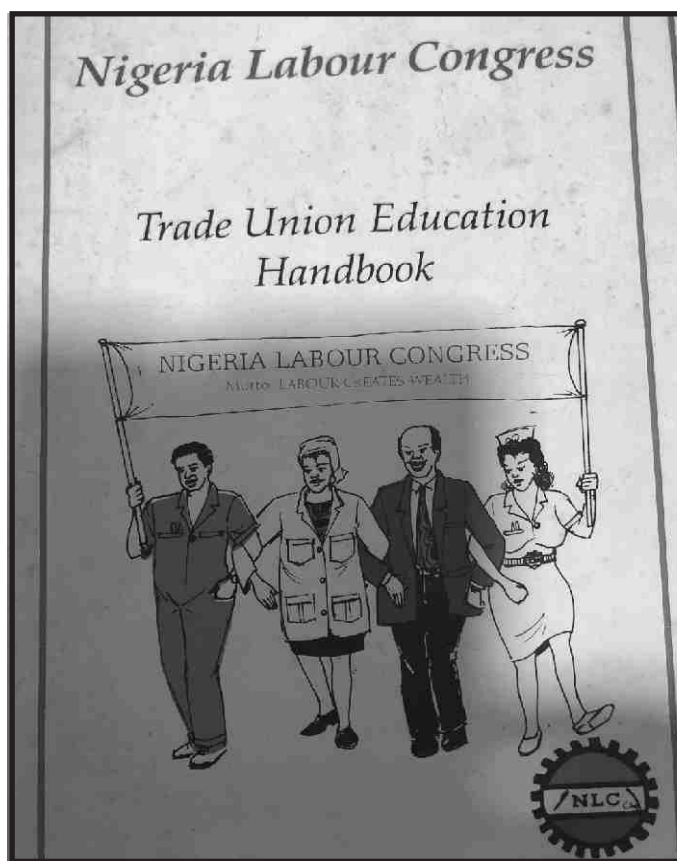
There are also lessons derived from the challenges experienced during these years of running these educational programmes.

- (a) One key challenge in the last 40 years is the absence of a Labour College infrastructure for trade union education to be institutionalized. The realization of the importance of this has been there since the 1991 launch of the Congress education endowment fund by the Paschal Bafyau led executive of the NLC. Again, the idea was reechoed at the 2000 Education Conference of Congress during Comrade Adams Oshiomhole's leadership. This was followed by the 2003 resolution of that year's National Delegates Conference on the urgency of the need to establish a Congress Labour College. Several years after, this issues has continued to be an unresolved challenge thereby causing both Congress and its affiliates to spend more annually on ad-hoc education and training programmes largely in hotel environments. There is need for Congress to retable the matter for the College to be established from some location pending the establishment in a permanent location.
- (b) A second challenge is that Congress educational development programmes has over the years been anchored on a complimentary development of the industrial unions educational development. It has been based on the Congress education officers and their industrial unions' colleagues leading the charge. Unfortunately, many education departments of Congress affiliates' have not developed in the pace that would provide for these programmes trained and skilled facilitators on a regular basis. Up till now, despite the explicit demands by the Congress Education Policy endorsed by affiliate unions for almost two decades now, many unions are yet to establish full-fledged education departments that are appropriately staffed and trained. Instead there are a number of unions personnel charged with worker's education that are

multitasking. This means that they also have responsibility for other tasks within the unions, hence they pay less than full attention to the important work of union education in their unions. For some of these Comrades, education work is marginal to their schedule. They are therefore not full-fledged professional educators as anticipated in the education policy which placed a lot of expectation on them for the development and delivery of Congress educational activities for itself and its affiliates. The educational programmes in the affiliates should be reinvigorated. An incentive structure should be designed and put in place in order to train cadres.

- (c) Thirdly is the issue of financial sustainability of our educational programmes. Even though Congress and affiliates have contributed substantially to the sustainability of the National Schools through affiliates and Congress financial contributions, the fact still remains that the benchmark set for educational funding is hardly ever met by both Congress and the affiliate unions. There need to be a conscious effort made to meet the annual education budgetary target needed so that both affiliates and Congress can forge ahead with worker's education independent of support from fraternal organizations. This requires continuous building of a strong and sustainable financial base of trade unions to support trade union education programmes.
- d. The recruitment process of cadres from the Universities and other institutions have been made impossible because of the happenings within these institutions. The have affected fundamentally the content and the quality of the persons who will qualify to become cadres in the labour movement. In addition, the perennial crisis confronting these institutions has

also weaken the production of cadres. There is need to deepen the ideological foundation of trade union education. This is important so that our union officials at all level can effectively counter the neo-liberal arguments which constantly seeks to short-change the working class. Since our tertiary institutions which used to produced class conscious cadres for our movement are in themselves in perennial crisis, we need to develop a strategy to produce our own class conscious cadres. Developing a curriculum to actualize above rests squarely within our education and training mandate.



Appendix I

NLC Education Policy

1. General Principles

- 1.1. NLC Education must seek to build political awareness among the working class and must be geared towards attaining social change that deepens democracy and build a more equal society.
- 1.2. NLC Education programmes must prepare unions to adapt to new challenges. It must in addition be a tool to build organisational capacity and a way of mobilizing members.
- 1.3. NLC education programmes must provide workers with leadership training for trade union and societal responsibilities.
- 1.4. Education should promote internal democracy, transparency and accountability within union structures. Education events should be a forum in which members could freely express their opinions.

Affiliate Union Structures

- 1.5. Affiliate unions must be encouraged to show a strong commitment to union education, provide a budget, staffing and clear structures to develop and implement educational programmes.

Funding and Cost Efficiency

- 1.6. NLC affiliates must strive to run education programs, which are sustainable financially and organisationally. In order to realise cost effectiveness in the funding of education, unions

must use their own facilities as well as those available in friendly institutions.

- 1.7. To ensure sufficient funding for education, unions should be encouraged to set aside at least 10% of the union's budget for education annually.
- 1.8. Some percentage of resources will be committed to women's education, which will take into account the ratio of men to women.
- 1.9. The NLC education endowment fund will be re-launched.
- 1.10. All educational programmes of NLC will be jointly funded with the affiliates. Women and Gender.
- 1.11. Gender issues should be integrated in all educational programmes and activities.
- 1.12. Exclusive education programmes must be provided for women members.
- 1.13. Women should make up at least 30% of participants in all 'non women exclusive' education activities.

Methodology

- 1.14. Education courses should be designed so that the learning process is centred on the experience of the learner as an important source of information and knowledge. Active learning methods should be encouraged.

Education Networks

- 1.15. The NLC will promote the development of a network of educators within the union nationally and internationally.

Evaluation

- 1.16. There must be a process of regular evaluation of education programmes by the Educators Forum and reported to the Annual Education Conference

2. Policy for the Revival of the NLC Educators Forum

The Role and Activities of the NLC Educators Forum Policies and Programmes.

- 2.1 To formulate proposals and provide advice to the National Administrative Council (NAC) of NLC on education policy for the NLC based on the needs of the affiliates.
- 2.2 To assist the NLC and affiliate union executive structures when adopting policies on education.
- 2.3 To draw up a national education calendar as proposal to NAC.
- 2.4 To advice on the development and assist in the implementation of an annual NLC education conference to evaluate the progress of union education and plan for the year ahead.
- 2.5 To advice on and assist in the organisation of massive worker education campaigns Education Programmes.
- 2.6 To propose to NAC a functional trade union education curriculum that is gender sensitive and class biased.
- 2.7 To assist in the development of education courses and training materials Educators.
- 2.8 To assist in the training of union educators.
- 2.9 To be a forum where educators share experiences and give each other support. Women

2.10 To promote the use of education to encourage women's participation in the union at all levels

Affiliate Unions

2.11 To help unions identify and determine their needs and make recommendations to unions on how they could develop their programmes.

2.12 To assist industrial unions to set up functional education departments.

2.13 To assist in updating unions' knowledge of modern techniques.

2.14 To participate in union seminars and workshops as resource persons.

2.15 To create and sustain awareness among union leadership on the importance of education.

2.16 To assist unions to locate sources of funding.

Composition

2.17 The forum will gather active union educators and women educators..

Appendix II

1. Proposals for the Revival of the NLC Educators Forum

This proposal sets out guidelines for the establishment and operation of the NLC Educators Forum. The NLC is required to endorse this proposal.

The Role and Activities of the NLC Educators Forum.

Policies and Programmes

- 1.1 To develop and co-ordinate the implementation of an NLC annual education programme.
- 1.2 To formulate education policy for the NLC based on the needs of the affiliates.
- 1.3 To get the NLC and affiliate union executive structures to adopt policy on education.
- 1.4 To draw up a national education calendar.
- 1.5 To set up an annual NLC education conference to evaluate the progress of union education and plan for the year ahead.
- 1.6 To organise massive worker education campaigns.

Education Programmes

- 1.7 To develop a functional trade union education curriculum that is gender sensitive and class biased.
- 1.8 To develop education courses and training materials

Educators

- 1.9 To develop union educators
- 1.10 To be a forum where educators share experiences and give each other support.

Women

- 1.11 To use education to encourage women's participation in the union at all levels.

Affiliate Unions

- 1.12 To help unions identify and determine their needs and make recommendations to unions on how they could develop their programmes.
- 1.13 To assist industrial unions to set up functional education departments.
- 1.14 To update unions' knowledge of modern techniques
- 1.15 To participate in union seminars and workshops as resource persons
- 1.16 To create and sustain awareness among union leadership on the importance of education.
- 1.17 To assist unions to locate sources of funding

Composition

- 1.18 The forum should be made up of active union educators and women educators.

Meetings

- 1.19 The forum should meet regularly according to need and practicality

- 1.20 In 2001 the forum should hold two evaluation and planning workshops
- 1.21 A Second Educators Conference should be set up in the last quarter of 2001 to evaluate the progress made in policy, structure and education and training programmes with NLC and its affiliates as well as plan for 2002.

Co-ordination

- 1.22 The NLC education department will co-ordinate the operation of the Forum and be the link to the formal structures of the NLC. **

2. Proposals on Affiliate Education Structures.

This proposal is intended to define the role that the NLC Educators Forum will play in developing structures within the NLC and its affiliates.

- 2.1. The NLC Educator's Forum should advise and give support to affiliate unions to set up appropriate internal educational structures, which should include education departments and education committees.
- 2.2. The NLC educators' forum should develop a set of guidelines suggesting how NLC and its affiliate unions could set up basic democratic education structures that will allow for popular participation. These guidelines should be presented to the NLC and its affiliates for adoption.

3. Proposals on a Labour College.

The conference accepted in principle that a labour college should be set up but there was a difference of views on the issue of sustainability and whether NLC should seek to take over MILLS.

- 3.1. NLC Educators Forum should undertake a systematic study to define clearly the NLC need for a Labour College, what form a labour college should take if it is to be established and what NLC position should be with regard to MILLS.
- 3.2. The findings of this study should be the basis of systematic discussions towards an NLC policy.

4. Proposal on Building Africa wide and International Linkages.

This proposal is based on the NLC commitment to building international solidarity links and in particular to unite unions on the African continent. It is also reflecting the realization that NLC education can gain much from establishing working relationships with union educators from other countries.

- 4.1 The NLC Educators Forum should actively pursue the setting up of direct links with union educators particularly on the African continent for the purposes of establishing joint training courses, sharing of education materials and experiences.

5. Proposals on a Membership Education project.

This proposal identifies union rank and file members as a target group for information and education. While education of members

must be a responsibility of affiliate unions, NLC education is called on to give support and assistance to affiliate unions in this area.

The proposal in particular calls on NLC to set up a mass membership education campaign in the weeks prior to the annual May Day celebrations.

- 5.1. The NLC Educators Forum must develop and disseminate basic information to union members. This information should include issues such as the policies, structures and operation of the NLC and its affiliates, what the rights of members are etc. The information should be presented in appropriate media such as pamphlets, posters, newsletters, information booklets, audio and videotapes.
- 5.2. NLC Educators Forum must assist affiliate unions to develop basic membership information material. These materials should include information on the policies, structures and operation of NLC and its affiliate unions as well cover issues on the economy, the political situation and general social issues.
- 5.3. Women and youth must be targeted as an important part of union membership.
- 5.4. In implementing all of the above, the work of affiliate unions must be taken into account.
- 5.5. That the NLC educators' forum should explore the possibility of setting up a mass membership education campaign in the preparation for the May 1, 2001 celebrations.
- 5.6. NLC education must assist and encourage members to acquire basic education skills.

6. Proposals on a Shopstewards Education Project.

This proposal identifies union representatives or shopstewards who are based at the workplace level and are responsible for representing members and building the union, as a target group for education and training. While education of shopstewards must be a responsibility of affiliate unions, NLC education is called on to give support and assistance to affiliate unions in this area.

- 6.1. The NLC educators' forum should set up a shopstewards education project aimed at developing education programmes for worker representatives/shopstewards at the workplace level.
- 6.2. The project should develop systematic basic education materials for the training of shopstewards,
- 6.3. The project forum should train trainers/facilitators within affiliate unions who will be able to run shop stewards training courses
- 6.4. The project should identify and encourage the development of a delivery strategy for shopstewards training.
- 6.5. The project should encourage a systematic approach to shopstewards education and discourage ad-hoc approaches. The project should build on experiences of best practice in shopstewards education.

7. Proposals on a State Level Leadership Education Project.

This proposal identifies state level leadership (i.e. members of SAC, SEC, and the women's committee) as an important target group for NLC education.

- 7.1. NLC Educators Forum should set up a project aimed at providing basic education for all SAC/SEC members and women's committee members of the NLC.
- 7.2. This project should be seen as both delivering education for NLC state structures as well as developing a model, which affiliate unions could use to build their own state level leadership education projects.
- 7.3. The education programme should include the following topics in the 2000-2001 programme:
 - NLC's new policy direction (after the completion of the agenda setting process).
 - The popularisation of the NLC constitution to include the structure and operation of the NLC.
 - Basic organisational skills (e.g. running effective meetings.)
 - The basics of collective bargaining, negotiations, and organising members and handling strikes.

8. Proposals on a National Level Leadership Education Project.

National leadership of NLC as well as its affiliates requires information, education and training to support them in their leadership of the union and in the process of policy formulation. The leadership of the NLC and affiliates are asked to endorse this proposal.

- 8.1. That the NLC Educators Forum should help set up a series of "Leadership Retreats" aimed at giving leadership an opportunity to reflect on key policy and organisational issues and develop their understanding and skills in these areas.
- 8.2. That NLC education should prepare regular information packs for leadership comprising of publications and other documents of relevance.

9. Proposals on a Union Management and Staff Education Project.

Union Management refers to national senior appointed and elected officers who are responsible for decision making on issues such as administration, staff and the control of resources. While the training of union management is a specialist task, it should be located within the principles of union education.

- 9.1. That the NLC educators' forum should be involved in the design and monitoring of all activities on management development in NLC
- 9.2 The forum shall identify the specific training needs of the two categories of management i.e. national full time and elected officers.
- 9.3 The forum should ensure that courses in modern financial management, information technology, democratic management practises personnel management etc. should be integrated into the training programme.

10. Proposals on a Union Organiser / Field Staff Education Project.

Union organiser and field staff are full time employees who are responsible for building the structures of the union, developing strategies to resolve members' problems and representing and negotiating on behalf of members. The training here is seen as being more intensive and at an advanced level as compared to other union education.

- 10.1. The NLC education forum should set up a systematic and intensive education and training programme for organising/field staff of the NLC and its affiliates that will help them develop both practical organisational skills as well as theoretical perspectives.
- 10.2. This programme should consist of intensive national courses and shorter regionally based workshops on specific issues.
- 10.3. A research project should be set up to develop a detailed profile of current organisers and field staff and understand what their work related needs are so that an appropriate training programme could be designed.
- 10.4. The dissemination of regular publications to organisers and field staff to keep them informed of developments on political socio- economic and trade union issues locally and internationally.

11. Proposals on Educators Development Project.

The Training of educators involves both "classroom" work as well as fieldwork. It is envisaged that that the training programmes will use

the projects on membership, shopstewards, state level leadership as well as women activists as areas for practice. The educators will be drawn from the NLC and affiliate unions. This project is a direct assistance to the development of affiliate union education.

- 11.1. The NLC Educators Forum should set up an educator development project.
- 11.2. The project should be designed such that it includes both "classroom" work as well as practice in the field.
- 11.3. At the national level at least 3 persons from each union (at least one of whom must be a woman) should be trained in the design of education materials, facilitation skills and in the planning and management of education programmes.
- 11.4. At the state level at least 4 persons from each state (at least one of whom must be a woman) should be trained in basic facilitation skills and the use of education materials.
- 11.5. The NLC educators' forum should assist national educators network with educators across Africa and other parts of the world.

12. Proposals on Women's Education Project.

The proposal on women's education includes the setting up of a structure at NLC secretariat level and the creation of a post. This requires a decision from the NLC.

- 12.1. The NLC should set up a women's education project aimed at developing materials and training facilitators. This project should exist within the larger project to train union educators.

- 12.2. The NLC Educators Forum should develop a guideline on how all NLC courses could be made "gender sensitive".
- 12.3. The NLC Education Forum should ensure that women make up at least 30% of all education activities.
- 12.4. The women's education project should link its activities with the work of other women's structures within NLC and its affiliates.
- 12.5. The NLC and its affiliates should create a Women's Desk at the secretariat level to be headed by an experienced female activist.

13. Proposals on Information and Education for Student and Youth.

The proposal on student and youth reflects NLC's commitment to building alliances with other organisations of civil society.

- 13.1. The NLC educator's forum should develop and publish relevant information resources and material that explains the basics of trade unionism and the role of students and youth in the struggle of workers. The resource material should be distributed at the beginning of each session during students' orientation period.
- 13.2. The NLC educators' forum should invite selected youth and student organisation leaders to attend educator development courses for union educators.
- 13.3. The NLC Educators Forum should use the media and other channels to reach out to youth/students in the un-organised sector.

14. Proposal on the Informal Sector.

This proposal is a request for NLC to clarify its strategy on links with the informal sector. This clarification will help the Educators Forum define what education activities should be directed towards this sector.

- 14.1. The NLC should set up a research and education project to clarify how it should develop its relationship with the informal sector. This project should draw on the experiences of unions elsewhere in West Africa, the continent and internationally.

15. Proposals on Education Funding.

The Conference noted that NLC and its affiliates have limited funds and are dependent on the support of external funders. In some cases, funders carry assumptions about what is needed, which does not relate to what NLC have identified as its needs. This proposal requests that the NLC always take into account its own needs and education programmes when negotiating funding. **

- 15.1. The NLC must make strong efforts to mobilise local funds for education.
- 15.2. This conference has defined a programme for NLC education. The NLC should use this programme as the basis for negotiating funding for educational activities with funders.



L-R: Carol Inyang (Textile Union), Bobby Marie and Issa Aremu (Textile Union).



NLC celebrates Pa Imoudu's 100th Birthday in 2002 at Sabon-Gida, Irrua, Edo State.



L-R: Chris Uyot, Tina 'Iron Lady' formerly of Textile Union, Salihu Lukman and Comrade Bright Anokworu.



Sultan of Sokoto, His Eminence Abubakar III flanked by past and current Labour leaders after chairing a Congress Peace Summit in Abuja.



L-R: Comrade Abdullahi Shehu of Nubifie, Salisu Lukman and Bobby Marie at a Leadership Education Workshop.



Cross section of participants at 1st Gender Conference in Bauchi, September 2003.



Standing left is Comrade (General) Kasongo. Behind him is Valentine Udeh and Emma Ugboaja. Next to Kasongo is Dr. Comfort Oko, Ladi Iliya, unknown Comrade, Lucy Offiong and Rita Goyit, all of the National Women Commission.



Comrade Salihu Lukman at a Women Education Workshop.



Group photo at the 3rd National Gender Conference in Kaduna in March 2008.



L-R: Comrade Bright Anokworu, Sister Annie Watson (TUC, UK), Comrade. Comrade Iliya is sitting next to John Odah at an Evaluation Conference in Ibadan, 2005.



Group photo at the 2nd National Gender Conference at Ibadan, September 22 2005.



Anthony Jones of Solidarity Centre posed with NLC Women participants at a Gender Conference in Plateau Hotel, Jos in 2000.



Comrade Festus Iyayi delivering the 30th Anniversary Lecture.



Omar, Chiroma, Bafyau and Dangiwa at the celebration of NLC at 30 in Abuja.



Ladi Iliya, Chairperson of National Women Commission and Congress Vice President delivering a solidarity message at the NLC @ 30 celebration. Comrade Chiroma is sitting to her right.



Comrade Eskor Toyo at the “Iwu Must Go” NLC Rally at INEC Headquarters in Abuja.



Labour leaders sit-down protest at Government House Enugu on its Tripple National Campaign to end Fuel price increase, new Minimum Wage and Electoral reforms.



Labour leaders leading from the front in its National Campaign for a better Nigeria.



L-R: Comrade Peter Ozo-Eson and Ayuba Wabba, General Secretary and President of Congress respectively.



President Ayuba Wabba addressing a May Day rally at Eagle Square, Abuja.



Cutting the Cake of NLC @ 40 at the International Conference Centre Abuja on 28/2/2018.



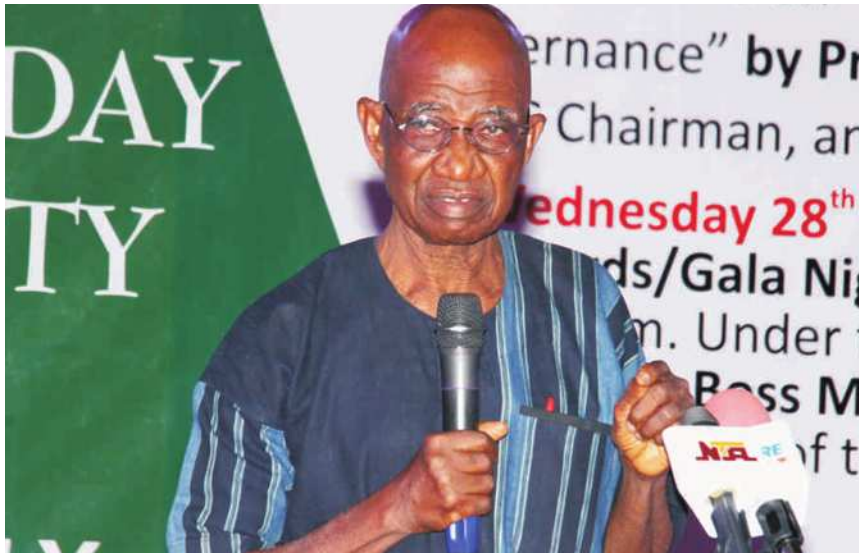
Congress Protest Campaign outing in Auja.



President Wabba leading others in a Congress Protest rally.



A Congress Campaign outing.



Prof. Olorode delivering the 40th Anniversary Lecture.



Prof. Attahiru Jega making his presentation at the 40th Anniversary Lecture.



Vice President Osinbajo addressing May Day rally at Eagle Square, Abuja.



L-R: Minister of Labour Dr. Chris Ngige and Congress President, Ayuba Wabba.



L-R: Congress former Treasurer Stevenson Oshidipe, Steve Faulkner and Paul Puritt at NLC @ 40 anniversary in Abuja.



Norwegian and Cuban ambassadors among other international guests at Congress May Day celebration in Abuja.

CHAPTER TEN

CONGRESS ON WOMEN AND TRADE UNIONISM

“The NLC affirms its belief and respect for equal opportunities for all Nigerians regardless of gender. The NLC recognizes the peculiar nature of women's roles as affecting their ability or inability to participate effectively in the public sphere. Empowerment of women should therefore begin from a reexamination of the place of women within Nigerian society. The NLC is, therefore, committed to building a world where gender justice reigns, which recognizes that change for women within the labour movement demands an internal restructuring; complemented by external working partnerships. Gender justice, as a cardinal principle of Congress, shall mean equal access to employment opportunities, absence of discriminatory practices against both genders and recognition of the productive and reproductive roles of each gender”. (the Gender Clause of NLC, Gender Equity Policy P.9).

Preamble

The journey to the adoption of the above Gender Clause in the Congress Gender Equity Policy, which was adopted at the February 2003 National Delegates Conference of NLC was indeed a long struggle of Nigerian Women Workers. The Nigeria Labour Congress in 1982 decided to establish Women's wings in the State Councils of Congress. The first Councils to take up the implementation of this

decision were Lagos and the old Anambra State. The Lagos council had activists like Cecilia Olajumoke of National Union of Banks, Insurance, and Financial Institutions Employees (NUBIFIE) (who went on later to become the first female General Secretary of an industrial union), Comrade Wey of Metrological Department of the Aviation Ministry; and member of the then Civil Service Technical Workers Union of Nigeria (CSTWUN) and Comrade Palmer of the same union. Comrades Raliat Daniju of the National Union of Food, Beverages and Tobacco Employees, Bissong of CSTWUN, Susan Prince of NUPENG and others were among the pathfinders.

In the old Anambra State, Comrades Cecilia Onyeka and later Charity Okoromaduka were among those that inaugurated the women's wing in the Eastern part of the country. Both Onyeka and Okoromaduka were also of the Civil Service Technical Workers Union of Nigeria. In the Northern axis, we had Comrade Rifkatu Sabo from old Kaduna State, who was of the Civil Service Typist and Secretarial Workers Union, and Hajia Azumi Bebeji of NUBIFIE, who held sway in the old Kano State.

In the late 1980s, some of the young women activists who were in the then Women Wing were identified and trained nationally and internationally as Women Trade Union Educators. They used trade Union education to train and mobilise women into the trade unions. These women and gender activists include: Rhoda Goyol of Medical and Health Workers Union; Stella Peters of Civil Service Technical Union, Rita Goyit of RATTAWU; Comfort Umanah of NUJ. Other women who also featured prominently during the women struggles include:

Elizabeth Sobande

Glory Kilanko

Nike Oguntuase

Esther Obasi
Glory Ogbonna
Philo Umogbai
Deborah Salawu
Vicky Makanjuola
Rose Ugba
Esther Eubagharu
Alice Ocohogwu
Mary Ikeri
Asabe Malgwi
Christy Dodo
Maria Tikyaa
Jola Otafuwa
Esther Humbe
Folashade Sanni
Regina Upkong
Grace Ansa
Joan Ogu
Ego A. Eduo
Patricia Okafor
Christine Adebajo
Cynthia Yinusa
Keji Daodu
I.L. Amaseimagha

At the beginning of 1987 when four former student activists were engaged as staff of the NLC, the one deployed to the Education Department – Comrade John Odah was given the huge assignment by the General Secretary, Dr. Lasisi Osunde to use the instrumentality of workers education to mobilize and organize

women into active participation in the trade unions. Subsequently Congress educational work involved holding specific women education programmes.

From the above, it can be argued that from the late '80s the immediate origin of the NLC women's education programme can be traced to a programme entitled "Women's Participation in Trade Union Activities" done as part of a 'Train-the-Trainers' course at the International Training Centre in Turin, Italy in 1988. The project which was jointly authored by the NLC Education Officer and two others from Botswana and Lesotho National Trade Union Centres, sought to explore how trade union education could be used to increase the participation of women in trade unionism (an account of this is given in an article for ILO Labour Education Journal No. 95-1994/2).

After the Turin course, the NLC obtained assistance from the ILO workers Education Programme to organize a five-day National workshop for women in April 1989 using the ideas generated during the Turin project. The review of the 1989 workshop was convened in April the following year with financial support from the ILO. In continuation of this programme, another two-week women's workshop was held in 1991 to develop educational materials for women. The materials produced at this workshop were eventually revised and edited into a 67-page NLC Women's Education Handbook published in January 1992.

Initial Successes

As recounted in the piece done by the Education Officer of Congress for the ILO Labour Education Journal, within the period (1988 and 1991), considerable progress had been made in mobilizing women

through the instrumentality of Trade Union Education to become actively involved in Trade Union activities. By the time the NLC/ILO Women Education Workshop held in April 1989, only seven of the twenty-one states then in existence, had established women's wing of NLC. At the end of the follow-up workshop in April, 1990, all but two states had established their own women's wings. By 1991, all the state councils of Congress had setup their women's wings.

Within this period also, the women's wings accounted for about two-thirds of all independent initiatives to organize educational workshops at the state level. The women's wing of one of the state councils (Lagos State under the Chairperson of Glory Kilanko) in 1991 raised over one hundred thousand Naira (N100,000) to start running its Daycare Center at the Congress Headquarters in Lagos. The fund raising was chaired by Chief MKO Abiola of blessed memories.

In the area of providing leadership for other women organizations in the country, leaders of the women's wing of Congress emerged in leadership positions at both state and national levels of the radical women organization called Women-In-Nigeria (WIN), through the decade of the nineties, when the organization was most active. Also with regards to leadership, a participant who came to national limelight following her participation in the 1989 NLC/ILO women workshop rose to become a Commissioner in the 2nd biggest state (Kano state) with the return to civil rule in the states in January 1992. She (Hajia Azumi Bebeji) went on to represent her federal constituency in the Federal House of Representative at the dawn of the 4th Republic in May 1999. Many industrial unions now witness increase women interest in taking up leadership positions in the executives at Branch, State and National levels.

Constitutional Development

A number of the initial successes of the women involvement in trade unions took place during the period of Comrade Paschal Bafyau as President of Congress. However, the struggle to make women structures recognized in the constitution of the NLC took a longer period to materialize. Mid way into the leadership of Comrade Bafyau, the women's wings were changed into women committees.

Two years into the leadership of the Adams Oshiomhole Presidency of Congress, at a meeting of the Congress organs in Umuahia, Abia State, the state chairperson and secretary of the women committee confronted Comrade Oshiomhole and the leadership and accused the Congress of paying lip service to the development and empowerment of women in trade unions. They asked for the women structures to be recognized in Congress Constitution and its organs. Comrade Oshiomhole promised that the leadership would take steps to reflect them in the Congress organs and structures. This commitment eventually gave rise to the establishment of the National Women Commission of Congress.

The NLC over the years had grappled with how best to achieve the integration of women workers into the mainstream trade Unions. During its 2nd Congress – the 1981 Triennial Delegates Conference, the Congress approved the setting up of a Women Affairs Department. It was in 1982 as earlier noted that Congress established women's wings for State Councils of NLC.

With his legal and institutional framework put in place, the Oshiomhole leadership began the process of rebuilding the women structures of Congress. The Congress started this by developing a gender policy. The NLC Gender Equity Policy was adopted at its 8th Delegates Conference in February 2003.

Among the key points in the Congress Gender equity policy was the affirmation on the necessity for the “adoption of a Gender Clause.” Accordingly, item 3 of the policy stated thus: “A strategy for the greater inclusion of women within the NLC shall begin with an amendment of the constitution of the NLC and all existing trade unions in the country to include a definite gender clause. The basis of this is founded on a genuine desire to mainstream women and ensure their participation at all levels of the NLC. This principle of the Gender Clause shall permeate all actions, policies and activities of empowerment within the NLC. The content of the Gender Clause shall also be reflected in the NLC. Mission Statement.” (Gender Equity Policy of Nigeria Labour Congress. P.8-9).

The 8th Delegates of February 2003 in a way was a watershed event in the Campaign to mainstream and institutionalize gender and women issues in trade union activities. Not only was the Gender Equity Policy adopted at this conference, the Congress constitution was also amended to provide for the National Women Commission, whose chairperson was to become a Vice President of Congress, and member of all Congress organs.

Following these giant steps, the conference directed the National Administrative Committee (NAC) to work out bye-laws, i.e. constitution of the National Women Commission and the State Women Committees, to determine the objectives, number of posts, relationship with organs of Congress, funding, programmes and tenure.

The first women conference of the National Women Commission held in Bauchi, seven months after the delegates' conference from September 8-9, 2003. At this point the Congress had worked out the key objectives of the National Women Commission as follows:

- Execute Congress policy on ensuring active and full participation of female workers in trade unionism.
- Execute Congress policy on gender equity in union activities and empowerment of women workers.
- Carryout educational programmes approved by Congress aimed at achieving above two objectives.
- Mobilize female members to participate fully in national trade union campaigns, agitations and actions.
- Represent Congress in all national and international fora based on congress policies towards such organizations and report back appropriately.
- Raise funds with the approval of NAC of Congress for programmes aimed at financing projects, which shall be part of general Congress programmes for the year.
- Represent women views in all organs of Congress
- Advise NAC and National Secretariat on women workers issues.
- Liaise with women committees of affiliate unions constantly, under the guidance of NAC, with a view to broadening participation and expanding empowerment of women.
- Receive reports of activities of state women committees, through the state administrative council of Congress and advice accordingly
- Carry out joint activities with State Women Committees as may be approved by NAC of Congress. (see “Mainstreaming Gender in Trade Unions: NLC's Gender Strategic Plan and Report of Activities: 2003-2007 – A Report to the 9th Delegates Conference, 15th-16th February 2007”).

The first Women Conference with the theme “Build Women, Build Nations” had as its main objectives the election of a leadership for the National Women Commission (NWC) and articulation of ways of implementing the Gender Equity Policy of Congress which had been adopted earlier in February 2003. Delegates were drawn from the 36 states of the Federation and the FCT, with their chairpersons as Conference delegates representing each state; industrial unions had 90 representatives ranging from a minimum of two to a maximum of 10 delegates for the biggest affiliates. International participants were drawn from the Ghana Trades Union Congress (GTUC), Sierra Leone Labour Congress (SLLC) and Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU). Fraternal partner organizations operating in Nigeria that participated in the conference includes Oxfam GB-Nigeria; American Centre for International Labour Solidarity and Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FEF). Top Government Officers from the State Government to Federal Ministries of Labour and Women Affairs Participated as invited guests in the opening ceremony and presented goodwill messages.

The Pioneer leadership of the National Women Commission were as follows:

- Ladi Iliya – Chairperson (from NASU)
- Lucy Offiong – Deputy Chairperson (from NCSU)
- Funmi Elesho – Vice Chairperson (NUTGTW)
- Comfort Umanahu – Vice Chairperson (NUJ)
- Florence Ekpebor – Vice Chairperson (NANNM)
- Martha Danboyi – Vice Chairperson (AAWUN)
- Cecilia Akanu – Vice Chairperson (NUT)
- Busola Olorundipe – Vice Chairperson (MWUN)
- Rita Goyit – Secretary (NLC National Secretariat)

More Progress on Gender Initiatives by Congress

To cap the progress made at the 2003 delegates conference with adoption of the gender equity policy and the amendment to the constitution providing for the National Women Commission, in the election that followed, Comrade Esther Cookey of the National Union of Banks, Insurance and Financial Institutions Employees (NUBIFIE) was elected into the National Administrative Committee (NAC) of NLC. It is crucial to note that earlier in November 2002, the Congress Gender Officer, Comrade Rita Goyit, took up her appointment at the Congress Secretariat.

The officer had served as NLC Plateau State Women's Wing Secretary and Later Chairperson. She was part of the women activists that had also undergone many train-the-trainers training and was therefore equipped as a trained educator. She brought these experiences to her new position.

The signing of the cooperation agreement between the NLC and OXFAM GB consolidated the collaboration amongst them. OXFAM made significant financial contributions to the hosting of the Bauchi Gender Conference and facilitated an exchange programme between the COSATU Gender Coordinator and her NLC counterpart lasting four (4) weeks each. The COSATU Gender Coordinator Mami Jaffta came to Nigeria and worked with the NLC Gender officer for 4 weeks. While in the country, she co-facilitated a Strategic Planning workshop for the new National Women Commission, which was tasked with drawing up a workplan for the implementation of the NLC Gender Equity Policy. She also participated in an Advance Women Leadership training and visited Gender Officers of affiliate unions. The collaboration with OXFAM GB similarly assisted Congress to undertake a survey and analysis of the position of women in Nigeria.

In return, the NLC Gender officer and her Research counterpart, Comrade Hauwa Mustapha were supported to undertake an exchange visit to COSATU for 4 weeks where they had trainings, visits and meetings organized by COSATU, DITSELA and NALEDI. While in South Africa, their programme included the following:

- Bilateral meetings
- COSATU National Gender Committee meeting
- COSATU Gender Studies
- DITSELA Educators Development Course
- Workplace visits and
- Visit to COSATU affiliates and Gender officers of affiliates of COSATU.

By the February 2007 the 9th National Delegates Conference of NLC, the Congress had done lot of work on the area of Gender mainstreaming, that it compiled a 95-page report to the Conference entitled “Mainstreaming Gender in the Trade Unions: NLC's Gender Strategic Plan and Report of Activities – 2003-2007 to the 9th Delegates Conference.”

Despite these strides and visible progress made, by the time Comrade Adams Oshiomhole was preparing to handover the mantle of leadership after his 8-year tenure, it became visible that not a single woman was in the various slates canvassing positions into Congress leadership. The Congress secretariat drew the attention of senior leaders of the movement like Comrade SOZ Ejiofor, and after behind the scene consultations, a resolution to this potential embarrassment was devised.

The 2007 conference created two ex-officio positions which were to be immediately filled by two female Comrades. This was to be extended to all the State Councils, which were to be two ex-officio positions in the State Administrative Council (SAC) to be filled by female Comrades.

The Mid-Term National Gender Evaluation Conference with the theme: “Gender, Globalisation and the world of Work” held in Ibadan from 13-14 September 2005. Among international solidarity organizations that were represented at the conference were those from the organization of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU), Ghana Trades Union Congress, NALEDI of South Africa, ICFTU-AFRO, Trade Union Congress (UK), Sierra Leone Labour Congress and Congress of South Africa Trade Unions (COSATU). Partner Organizations Operating in Nigeria that were represented at the Conference include Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) Oxfam GB Nigeria, ActionAid International, Nigeria and Solidarity Centre. Senior Government Officers at both State and National level attended the conference opening and closing ceremonies.

Delegates to the conference included Chairpersons of all state councils and FCT women committees; and representatives of industrial unions and Congress National Secretariat.

The Resource Pack for the Conference included among others papers on:

- (a) Women in Informal Sector in Nigeria by Dr. Dung Pam Sha.
- (b) Globalization and the world of work: Gender implications by Prof. Bola Akanji.
- (c) “Beijing + 10 and UN MDGs: Impact on Nigerian Women” by Ngukwase Surma.

- (d) Gender, HIV/AIDS and the world of work.
- (e) Draft NLC HIV/AIDS Policy Document.

The conference concluded with a General Meeting in which the National Women Commission received and deliberated on reports from the State Women Committees (SWC) and the National Women Commission Report of activities.

The 2nd National Gender Conference of the NWC held from 10-11 March 2008 in Kaduna on the theme: “Enhancing Women Participation in Leadership Positions of Trade Unions”. The Conference was attended by 30 Chairpersons from the 36 State Councils' Women Committees; while 108 delegates from industrial unions, took part in the conference with NUT having the highest delegates of 11, followed by Medical and Health Workers with 7 delegates, NASU, NUCSSW, NUCECFWW and NURTW had five delegates each. Others had three representatives each at the Conference.

International guests came from Sierra Leone Labour Congress, the Ghana TUC and the International Trade Union Confederation, African region (ITUC-Africa). Fraternal partners included the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the American Centre for International Solidarity. As in previous programmes, State and Federal Government Officials attended the opening ceremony and delivered fraternal messages.

Two papers “Enhancing Women Participation in Leadership Positions of the Trade Unions” and “Funding Gender Equality” were presented by Comrade Ngozi Iwere and Ngukwase Surma respectively. The extensive discussions of these presentations dovetailed into the NWC General Meeting during which the report of State Women Committees (SWC) were received and discussed.

Reports were also taken from women structures of industrial unions and the National Women Commission itself.

The positions into the various offices of the NWC were conducted and the following emerged as officials: Comrade Ladi Iliya of NASU was reelected unopposed as chairperson. Lucy Offiong of NCSU was also reelected unopposed as her deputy. Two vice chairpersons - Funmi Elesho of NUTGTWN and Martha Danboyi of AAWU were similarly elected unopposed as vice chairpersons. Stella Peter of AUPCTRE, Oby Eze of MHWUN, Achi Agbor of NULGE and Funke Adediran of NUPENG, were elected newly as the other Vice Chairpersons.

The 3rd NLC National Gender Conference was held during the Presidency of Comrade Ayuba Wabba from 8th-9th March 2017 in Abuja. The theme of the conference was “Consolidating the Gains of Gender Mainstreaming in the Trade Unions”. The keynote presentation was done by Prof. Hauwa Bui on “How Women can benefit from Trade Unions”.

At the end of the conference the following officers were elected for the NWC.

- Mercy Okezie - AUPCTRE - Chairperson
- Salamatu Aliu - NUT - Deputy Chairperson
- Hadiza Kabir - SSANU - Vice Chairperson
- Mario Umar - NCSU - Vice Chairperson
- Manubia Jubril - NANNM - Vice Chairperson
- Sylvia Dagui - MHWUN - Vice Chairperson
- Olukoga Aina - NULGE - Vice Chairperson

- Charity Abosedede - NUCECFWW - Vice Chairperson
- Iyabo Kolapo - NASU- Ex-officio
- Roselyn Uba-Anarah - NUPSRW - Ex-officio
- Salami Adedamola - NURTW - Ex-officio

At the 10th Delegates Conference of Congress, at the end of the first tenure of Comrade Abdulwahed Omar as President, in March 2011, further progress was made when the conference decided that the Deputy Chairperson of the National Women Commission should also become an automatic member of Congress Central Working Committee (CWC) and National Executive Council (NEC).

Earlier, Comrade Ladi Iliya the Pioneer Chairperson of the National Women Commission had broken the Glass Ceiling by also becoming the first President of a major Industrial Union in the country when her union-the Non-academic Staff Union of Universities and Associated Institutions (NASU) elected her as President during its 2006 Quadrennial delegates Conference.

Between 2004 and 2006, with support from Annie Watson, former Director of the defunct Commonwealth Trade Union Council (CTUC), Congress we secured funding for a 2-year Project on Promoting Women Participation in Trade Union Activities in Nigeria. As a part time staff with the TUC (UK) thereafter, Sister Annie Watson worked with Congress for the implementation of the project and its successful completion.

In the forward to the report of the first year of the project, (September 2004 to March 2005), the Congress General Secretary stated:

“The project conceived to last for 2 years is intended to enhance the capacity of Nigerian Trade Unions under the NLC to reflect concerns

of women workers in our daily work and thereby improve their working conditions. The project also targets more recruitment of women into leadership positions in the unions.

The intervention could not have come at a more opportune time. The Commencement of the project soon after the constitution of the leadership of our National Women Commission and the adoption of Congress Gender Equality Policy meant that the women had ready resources to begin to translate their vision into reality.” (Forward to Report of NLC/TUC (UK) Women Development Project on Promoting Women's Participation in Trade Union Activities in Nigeria. First year Report-September 2004 – March 2005. P.4).

Among the activities carried out by the Congress Project Team led by Comrade Maimuna Akusu who was seconded from the Textile Union as the Programme Officer, include the following: A strategic planning workshop; networking meeting with civil society organizations; sub regional networking workshop with Comrades from Anglophone West African Countries and their national centres – namely Ghana TUC, Sierra Leone Labour Congress, the Gambian Labour confederation and NLC, together with the two continental trade union bodies – ICFTU-AFRO and OATUU; gender training workshops; gender awareness workshop for leaders of affiliate unions; national-wide campaign activities on the international women Day; and Advanced leadership training workshops, to cite some of the series of activities carried out under the Project.

Other national centres which Congress collaborated with to promote women education activities within this period include the FNV of Holland, the Canadian Labour Congress, LO- Norway and the AFL-CIO solidarity center. Congress similarly worked with the Friedrich Ebert foundation for our gender mainstreaming activities.

As we indicated earlier, the Congress gender mainstreaming programmes can be said to have recorded a number of achievements. These include the acceptance of Congress and its affiliates to implement a number of affirmative actions which have led to increases in the involvement of women in the leadership structures of NLC and its affiliate unions. There is also the recognition by most within the labour movement on the importance of involving women in decision making process even if progress made in this respect has been uneven. Similarly, most affiliates of Congress currently have structures in place for gender work, designed to ensure participation by women at the state and national levels.

In line with the NLC Gender Equity Policy, some unions have continued to carry out women specific programmes as well as Gender Conferences. Some of these unions include:

- Medical & Health Workers Union (MHWUN);
- National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives (NANNM);
- National Union Local Government Employees (NULGE),
- Radio, Television & Theatre Workers RATTAWU;
- National Union of Chemical, Footwear, Rubber, Leather and Non-Metallic Employees (NUCFLAMNPE);
- National Union of Civil Engineering, Construction, Furniture and Wood Workers (NUCECFWW);
- Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU);
- National Union of Electricity Employment (NUEE);

- National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers NUPENG;
- Senior Staff Association of Nigerian Universities (SSANU);
- Nigeria Civil Service Union NSCU;
- National Union of Textile, Garment and Tailoring Workers of Nigeria, (NUTGTWU);
- Amalgamated Union of Public Corporation, Civil Service Technical and Recreational Services Employees (AUPCTRE);
- Nigeria Union of Agriculture and Allied Employees (NUAAE);
- Maritime Workers Union (MWUN); and
- National Union of Hotels and Personal Services Workers (NUHPSW).

Challenges

There are a number of challenges women still face in their bid to be integrated in the trade unions and be active. They include generic socio-cultural beliefs and practices such as the patriarchal nature of society, which associates leadership with masculinity. Patriarchy and its related practices which are prevalent in the trade unions constitutes major impediments to the full integration of women in the trade union movement as well as the wider Nigerian society.

In the same vain, women's inadequate participation in the workplace is attributed to a prevalent tendency to transfer gender roles into the workplace. The participation of women in the labour market is quite low compared to their male counterpart, and this is as a result of various historical, economic, social, cultural and institutional reasons. Similarly, the percentage of women engaged in the formal wage sector is low compared with women who are in the informal sector, which is usually not unionized and highly unprotected.

Other reasons include the structural and attitudinal discrimination against women by the dominant male trade unionists, who intrinsically fear the threat of power bloc which could emerge from women trade unionists' solidarity. It is also a fact that even unions where women have advantage of being in the majority like in the teachers' union and their nurses and mid-wives counterpart, such unions are yet to fully embrace the principle of proportional representation as such women are still under represented in their leadership structures.

It is therefore important to continue to push and encourage unions to fully implement the Gender Equity Policy of Congress including the initial target of 30% women representations in leadership positions. In the same vein efforts must be made to enforce at least 30% women delegates to Congress and affiliate delegate conferences as was implemented during Comrade Oshiomole's leadership leading to the 2007 NLC Delegate Conference.

The creation of the female Ex-officio as NAC members by the Congress is very strategic in increasing the representation of women especially in top leadership positions. This should be replicated in the affiliate unions to help strengthen the women structures as well as create synergy for the effective participation of women in the trade unions. Also the two female ex-officio members in the

Congress NAC and SAC are currently not fully integrated into the structures of the NWC and State Women Committees. Steps should be taken to ensure that this is done.

It will be recalled that the State Women Committees created in 1982 provided the platform for mobilizing women into the trade unions. It is therefore important to adequately recognize the State Women Committees to function as integral part of the National Women Commission. It is not enough to receive reports from State Women Committees at meetings of the NWC, the State Women Committees should have representation in the leadership of the NWC.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

NLC 11TH DELEGATES CONFERENCE AND EMERGENCE OF COMRADE AYUBA WABBA AS PRESIDENT:

“RETURNING TO OUR FOUNDING PRINCIPLES?”

“We believe that the sure way we can build and consolidate our independence as a trade union centre is to carry on activities and programmes which will strengthen the faith of our members in our ability to defend and protect their interests and aspiration. Our desire is to ensure that we are strong enough to stand on our own and take instructions only from our members, based purely on the founding philosophy of our movement”.

(From the manifesto of the Redemption Team for the 2015 NLC Election entitled: “A Return to our Founding Principles”).)

The Redemption team lists 22 unions as belonging to it. It's candidate for President was the outgoing Treasurer of Congress, Comrade Ayuba Wabba, who was also outgoing President of the Medical and Health Workers Union of Nigeria. Comrade Joe Ajaero, General Secretary of National Union of Electricity Employees, and outgoing Deputy President of Congress eventually became

Comrade Ayuba Wabba's main challenger for the position of President of Congress. This was because Comrade Igwe Achese, President of National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas (NUPENG), and outgoing National Trustee had stepped down and teamed up with Comrade Ajaero to contest the position with Comrade Wabba.

At the rescheduled conference to elect officers of Congress at the Eagle Square, the Redemption team led by Comrade Ayuba Wabba emerged victorious. The three deputy presidents, Comrade Peters Adeyemi, from the Non Academic Staff Union of Education and Associated Institutions (NASU), Comrade Kiri Mohammed from the Nigeria Civil Service Union, and Comrade Najeem Yasin from the National Union of Road Transport Workers, all claimed the Redemption 2015 heritage. So also the Vice Presidents – Lawal Dutsinma of National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives, Comrade Lateef Adelekan of the National Union of Food, Beverages and Tobacco Employees and Comrade Solomon Adelegan of the Amalgamated Union of Public Corporation, Civil Service Technical and Recreational Services Employees. Comrade Amechi Asugwuni of the Construction, Civil Engineering and Wood Workers Union was also elected vice president based on support of the Redemption team.

Comrade Ibrahim Khaleel from the Local Government Union was elected unopposed. Comrade Boniface Isok from NUCFRLANMPE was elected National Trustee on the Redemption team ticket. Similarly, Comrade M.D. Safiyanu of Air Transport Workers Union, elected National Financial Secretary and the three National Auditors, Leke Success of Hotel Union, Simon Anchaver

of Agric and Allied Employees Union and Yemisi Bamgbose of RATTAWU, all ran under the Redemption Team. Comfort Oko of NAAT came in as Ex-Officio under the same platform.

Content of the Manifesto

In a 32 page pamphlet which communicated the manifesto of the “Redemption 2015 Group”, as the programme was signed, the Ayuba Wabba group traced the recent history of Congress from the period NLC recovered itself from the crunches of military rule after General Abacha's death in 1998 and the delegates conference of Congress which ushered in the Adams Oshiomhole leadership of NLC in January 1999. It asserted that the NLC kept the activist orientation of the Oshiomhole era. Continuing the manifesto contended “the NLC kept the momentum and campaigned against corruption, fuel price increases, for a reformed and transparent electoral system, built NLC-Civil society structures; among others. Then came March 2011 and the 10th Delegates' Conference of NLC. The crisis that followed the Conference distracted our direction and forward-march some bit. The perception of NLC as a fighting organization and defender of the common good took a significant hit. The good news is that we are entering the 11th Delegates' Conference of NLC with all industrial unions affiliated to NLC now fully back in the fold and active (P. 23)

Then manifesto then pledged to ensure that the mistakes and acts of omission and commission which led to the crisis are not allowed to repeat themselves. The group further stated that they would go about the campaign with decorum, devoid of character assassination and

slander, and called on other contestants to equally commit to these principles.

The group went on to identify two types of challenges facing the Congress and its affiliates. These are internal and external challenges.

Under the internal challenges, they chose ten (10) critical ones, which they said if concrete actions are taken to address them will have a very beneficial effect on Nigerian workers. The challenges identified include: organizational unity, strengthening the operations of industrial unions, funding, organizing in all its facets i.e. organizing non-organised workers, taking action to combat casualization, outsourcing and contract work, etc.; union education, internal democracy, union investment, research and documentation, restructuring and merger of industrial unions, and administration of NLC State and Local Government structures.

The programme outlined for each of the ten challenges identified above were punchy and targeted. For instance, on internal democracy, the programme posited as follows:

“we will ensure that the vibrancy, dynamism and the culture of critical debate and thorough interrogation of issues, which used to be hallmark of our deliberations in organs of NLC, are restored. This way, all shades of opinion will be canvassed before critical decisions affecting our members and organization are taken. What is ultimately envisaged is to entrench and utilize the principle of internal democracy to make the governing process inclusive based on the collective views expressed at organs meetings of Congress” (P.10)

On organizing the unorganized to become union members the programme acknowledged that this was one of the toughest task union officers face globally. It however went on to posit that “our leadership will ensure that we set up task team on a nationwide unionization drive across all sectors, which annually will climax with a weeklong campaign, in a time to be chosen by the leadership, after studying the report of the task team. We will ensure that we commit adequate human and material resources to the campaign. Infact, affiliates will be required to contribute to a fund which will be dedicated to the prosecution of the organizing drive” (P. 15).

On union investment, while pleading to avoid the pitfalls of “Business Unionism”, it promised to ensure that the Congress will establish an investment trust to consolidate and streamline all NLC investments. The aim of this is to ensure that our foray into this area is guided by a social investment philosophy. This way, while we strive to make additional revenue for the NLC, our investment do not mislead or misguide us into the pitfall of “business unionism”. We must also ensure that our investments uphold all labour laws and standards”. (P.11).

On Research and Documentation, the programme contended that over the years Congress and its affiliates hadn't been able to benefit from a competent research outfit which provides regular and methodical enquiry into topical socio-economic issues. It acknowledged that previous leaderships of Congress had recognized that this is a problem which needed to be addressed. In this wise, it said there was already a roadmap available to be put into practice. The programme then committed the group to take steps to “actualize

the vision of transforming congress research department to a research institute with a board made up of serving unionists and researchers who have working class orientation in their intellectual pursuits”. (P.12).

On administration of Congress state councils and local government structures, the programme set a timeframe within which fulltime state secretaries would be appointed for state secretariats and would be given appropriate targets in terms of reporting on the situation in the states as well as raise the revenue of Congress through effective collection of NLC's 10% Check-off dues at source from states. The programme similarly committed the Congress to reactivating and setting up local government structures of the Congress in all 774 LGAs in the country.

On Education and Training, after acknowledging its importance for building working class consciousness and the development of the right cadre as well as practical and professional skills development, it also said Congress trade union education activities should promote core trade union values such as internal democracy, transparent and accountable leadership.

The programme called for a comprehensive review of Congress educational activities in order to strengthen it. It also said it will carry forward the 2007 Congress Delegates Conference resolution to establish a Labour College before the expiration of the tenure of the leadership.

On voluntary mergers and restructuring of industrial unions, the programme indicated that after the 1996 exercise which reduced

Congress affiliated unions from 41 to 29, it was now time to engage on another voluntary mergers of industrial unions. According to the manifesto:

“Given the massive retrenchment of workers that had taken place in both the public and private sectors of the economy in the last one and half decades, and with unions making minimum progress in unionizing new members, some unions have had their membership reduced so drastically that they have just a few thousands as their members. In this wise, to avoid extinction eventually, there is wisdom to start looking at the desirability of mergers”.

External Challenges

The programme of the Redemption Team identified a number of external challenges which combine to affect negatively the lots of Nigerian workers. These include the poor state of the economy, weakened labour-civil society alliance, unclear objectives of the framework of Labour in politics, disregard for collective bargaining and agreement, especially in the Public Sector, but also in the private sector, massive unemployment, massive corruption in our public life, and the shrinking public sector.

Other issues addressed in the programme included women in trade unions, youth development in NLC and international solidarity.

The programme of the Wabba Redemption group, like the internal challenges, outlined measures or ways to tackle these challenges.

Tinapa National Leadership Retreat of NLC

The congress leadership decided to convene an all embracing leadership retreat from 25th-27th August 2015, barely 5 months after the March 12-14 rescheduled elections of the 11th Delegates Conference. This retreat brought together 123 participants comprising of Congress national leadership, the leadership of Congress secretariat, presidents and general secretaries of all affiliates of Congress, representatives of veterans of the labour movement, civil society allies and the media, to brainstorm on the state of the Labour movement and chart a way forward against the background of the recent conference.

The theme of the Retreat: **“Returning to our Founding Principles: The Nigeria Labour Congress and the Challenges Facing it”**, underscored the determination of the new Congress leadership under Comrade Wabba to regain lost grounds and rebuild the confidence of Nigerian workers.

Altogether seven (7) presentations were made over the three days on carefully selected thematic areas namely:

- (i) Reviving trade union values and Ethics: the way Forward;
- (ii) Organise Labour and the National Action Plan on Employment Creation;
- (iii) The Necessity for Political Consciousness Among the Nigerian Working Class;
- (iv) Rebuilding Labour-Civil Society Collaboration: Challenges and Opportunities;
- (v) New Pension Operations and Administration;

- (vi) Labour Movement and Socio-Economic Challenges in Contemporary Nigeria; and
- (vii) Implementing the Document “Returning to Our Founding Principles, and the Motions and Resolutions of the 2015 Delegates Conference.

The presentations after exhausted discussions on them at the plenary was followed on the third day with group work on the current state of the Labour movement – around issues of Internal Democracy within Trade unions; Trade Union leadership, Values and Ethics; and causes of intra and inter union crises. Another group handled the topic on organizing/membership drive. A third group discussed Labour-Civil Society alliances, while group four worked the programme: **“Returning to our Founding Principles”**.

The report of the national leadership retreat was published into a 168 pages book with the same title. The presentation on the programme of the Redemption Group and the Motion/Resolutions of the 11th delegates conference, identified 14 broad issues which the leadership needed to work on implementing in the course of its tenure of office in Congress. The issues include:

- 1) Tour of industrial unions and state councils of Congress;
- 2) Leadership Retreat at national and state levels;
- 3) Constitution of local government chapter of NLC;
- 4) Funding and appointment of full time state secretaries for all 37 state councils of Congress;
- 5) Education and training/permanent structure for union education (Labour College);

- 6) Organizing the unorganized;
 - 7) Voluntary mergers and restructuring of industrial unions;
 - 8) Research and documentation;
 - 9) Union investment;
 - 10) Contributory pension and the plight of pensioners;
 - 11) Labour-civil society alliance;
 - 12) Congress and labour party;
 - 13) Job creation/employment initiatives;
 - 14) Campaign for good governance/against corruption.
- (see P.99-132 of Report)

CHAPTER TWELVE

REFLECTIONS ON THE NLC:

Interview with Congress President, Comrade Ayuba Wabba, mni

Excerpts from the interview with NLC President, Comrade Ayuba Wabba, by the editorial team led by Comrade John Odah.

Comrade John Odah: *You ran for the Congress President in 2015 on a programme of bringing back the NLC to its founding principles and values. Three years down the road, how has your leadership tried to achieve this?*

Comrade Ayuba Wabba: Thank you very much. Certainly as you are aware, we actually sought for the support of our colleagues in an election with a very clear agenda of returning the Congress to its founding principles; principles of respect for the rule of law; principle of defending workers' rights; principles of standing by the truth and above all, respecting of our ideology; the working class ideology.

Despite the fact that we came through a very difficult process, which nobody can dismiss the fact that it was very difficult, people even thought that we won't be able to move forward and deliberately there were attempts to draw us back and make sure that we were not able to have the focus to address those issues, I can say clearly that we have

within the prevailing circumstances tried to offer leadership and some of the issues you mentioned; the anti-corruption and good governance campaigns, that we have done are truly in line with our founding principles. Our founding include saying the truth as it is, and defending the interest of workers in all circumstances without giving any excuses. Clearly, we emerged at a time that the situation was really, really challenging. At the time we came in, you are aware that 22 states were not able to pay salaries as and when due; pensioners were not paid for many months too.

But in all of these circumstances, we had tried to engage the process. It was through our engagement that the discourse about bailouts to states emerged because we made it a very topical issue. At every opportunity we will condemn, we will fight and we will also visit the states, to put pressure for those accumulated salaries to be paid workers.

We also had very difficult engagements. You remember the engagement we had in Nasarawa State where we lost two workers. We remember the engagement because it was a different system all together. The engagement we had in Oyo State; engagements in Oyo and Kogi states and all other engagements were very difficult and in some circumstances even the media was manipulated. In Kogi State, we had to go with the journalists from Abuja because the press there refused to report the side of the workers. So, in all circumstances, I can tell you authoritatively that with the prevailing circumstances, we had been able to offer leadership as we intervened in a lot of issues.

In fact, even the 2015 fuel price increase and our 3 days general strike; if not because of our sheer determination and the fact that we wanted to be consistent with our tradition, we would have chickened out because you also know as a matter of fact, there many efforts from all angles to sabotage the action. Despite the overwhelming odds we struck to our tradition. We said well, let us do our best and let

us, in conformity with our tradition, do what is right and also defend the interest of our workers. Secondly, you remember, one of the early decisions we took was to organize a national Retreat to try to look at what are the challenges? Where have we derailed and how can we be able to march forward? I am happy to tell you that the entire recommendation from that has been approved now for implementation which is in progress. We have identified who and who will do what. On the issue of establishment of the local government branches of NLC, I have already commissioned some local government branches of NLC. There is also the issue of employment of state secretaries across all the states; all these approvals have been made. We also had the issue of retreat for the state councils to make sure they are able to conform with our norms and standards.

About the Labour College which we promised; the project is in progress; we have been able to commission the Education Department to give us a building plan. The first one, I think we are trying to commit about N300 million to build an edifice which will contain some apartments; that also the organs have given us the mandate to work on it. Importantly also is the fact that the way we try to run the business of this organisation is also to try to make sure that we don't in any circumstance try to jeopardise the interest and integrity of the movement. It is one of our founding principles that we should not also go into any endeavour that will actually jeopardise all our interests. We have looked at many endeavours in the past that had jeopardised and undermined the interest of Congress, so in all our dealings, we try to also ensure that those standards that we have set for ourselves, including dealings that we think are not necessary and can undermine our interests, we will try to do away with them.

We have visited virtually all the unions affiliated to Congress to find out their priority issues and discuss with their leadership how best we can address issues and challenges they are facing collectively. I think that perhaps only three unions or so are remaining for us as Congress leadership to pay visit to, and this will happen soon.

As NLC leadership we have been able to be very visible in all circumstances despite the difficulties; there is no week that will pass that the NLC will not be able to be seen somewhere; wither addressing an issue affecting workers or talking about national issues not minding who is actually affected; we said it is; I think that is part of the well-entrenched tradition of our movement; we say it very clearly, even where other people and our civil society allies and partners are trying to shy away from saying what is right; I think it is better to say what is right. So, clearly speaking, these are some of the things that I think returning to our founding principles entail; those are some of the key principles that have made our organisation very visible; that have made our organisation very respected. In fact, of recent, and I can say clearly, I have received many, many favours from all sorts of quarters, because of the fact that people recognize what we are doing, and say yes, you did well; in this circumstance, you have done well and therefore I have seen that severally. So, I think this is the path we need to take to build a strong institution.

We have engaged in addressing congress staff welfare. When I came, we had backlog of promotions where workers had been complaining; we did all the promotions; everybody have been paid up to date. We take up all the other issues that will come about and meetings have been held as and when due and we also returned to our principle of debating matters; not just carry-go. I told my colleagues clearly that I don't believe in that. In fact, during a recent organ

meetings, the CWC, somebody rose and said; well, he is surprised that we have now returned to the principle of discussing and engaging issues and the debate, to him, is very lively. So, to me, that is part of returning to the principle. If a CWC member will actually stand at a CWC meeting to make such a remark, I think to me it is a revival.

We have similarly looked at cases of alleged injustices and I can say clearly that all cases of injustice, including those in courts, you can give us the credit; that we tried to resolve them out of court. Anybody that had payment issues to resolve, once I am satisfied, I will drive it to the best of my intention and everybody has been paid, and therefore part of returning to the founding principle is also not to do things with impunity; it's also to look at whatever wrongs that had been done in the past because our movement is anchored on unity, solidarity and respect for the rule of law.

I thought we should draw a line and try to also look into the future but also looking at any injustice that had been done. That I think to the best of my knowledge; there are many people we paid; some ten, five years problems; they will write to you; you will look at it - if it is true, let's pay them and we paid; including payments that could have been done many years ago. I think this is part of the returning to our founding principles.

Comrade John Odah: *President, what have been the main challenges/obstacles in your leadership quest to accomplish the refocusing of the NLC and its affiliates to reclaim the glory of the labour movement?*

Comrade Ayuba Wabba: Well, there are a number of challenges; first, is about the commitment of all our affiliates to the same cause

because they have role to play. You can see clearly that from the protest that we had been able to carry out, only few unions have been able to mobilise their members consistently. This is a serious challenge. I remember in years past when I was in the state council and which you can attest to, in my state, if there is any action to be carried out, the least number of workers you can see is 15,000 workers. That is the leadership; I knew that even at the level of my state; I think people have testified about this, and this is what we know.

I want to give you this from the context of what I have been able to also come about in the course of this job. There was a time we went to Kaduna; the first time we went to Kaduna when he came out with this idea of making sure that workers fill forms to authenticate the unions they belong to. In fact, we were in Kogi when we heard that information and so from Kogi we came and we asked Kaduna workers to call for a congress of workers, and then their meeting. At the congress, I was surprised; many workers didn't even know the unions they belong to. The starting point for us to have a cadre is the fact that every worker must know the union he or she belongs to. It is not about check off dues; it's about making sure that we service these workers and therefore, if there is a wakeup call, workers because they are enlightened, they know what is due for them; they will actually come up and fight this battle.

So we had to start from the basics in Kaduna to say every branch official, go to your branch; hold congresses and tell the workers the unions they belong to, so that we can fight this battle and that's how we fought that battle; in fact, I made it a point; somebody was asked, where is your union, he said NLC; his union is NLC because that's the name he knows, he doesn't know his union. So, that is a major

major challenge. If we don't build cadre and there is a disconnect between the unions and the membership, then it will be a very serious challenge and therefore our campaigns and contestations in the future, we will be doing it only on the pages of newspapers as some others are doing.

So for me it's a great challenge because our organisation is a mass movement. We can only succeed if we have a connect with our mass base. Without the mass base, we will then be like civil society individuals that will be operating from their briefcases as an individual with no membership. So, this is clearly one fundamental issue that I think we need to address.

The second one is the issue of impacting education. It is related to the first challenge because it's when you educate workers that they will be able to have the consciousness of the working class that they will be able to fight for their rights.

The attitude of many of our colleagues and comrades in not building a conscious working class cadres will affect our movement very badly in the near future, if it is not already with us. In the past, we don't pay workers to come for programmes of our movement. Now, to guarantee adequate participation in programmes such as campaigns and protests, you have to make contingency plans to pay transport allowances. In a conscious setting, despite the harsh economic situation, this should be so.

The third issue which you which you are aware of is the issue of resources. You cannot plan the affiliates are not on the same page of paying their affiliation dues; therefore, from also the point which we are coming from, which has been a very long issue and challenge; it's the fact that the same traditional unions are those that are funding the

Congress. So, this clearly I think is a serious challenge because truly for us to assert our independence as an organisation, we need to do that, and that had been a problem in the NLC for a very long time. Today, I am not sure outside the Trustfund and maybe the Labour City Transport, NLC has investment anywhere. All over the world, what has kept our organisations thick and strong is the level of our financial base. Today, you can count a lot of unions around the world; their membership has dwindled. There is challenge of organising but because they have strong financial base; they have investment; they are able to cope; so it is a challenging issue but we are trying our best but even for you to go into investment, you must be able to have resources first to be able to now invest.

So, I think at the period we had all the goodwill; we have not been able to utilise such opportunity. So, for me those three areas; whether now or in the future; it is going to be a serious challenge that will affect, because from the way things are going, it's not likely that these characters in the political circle, our political elites, will change for the better. In fact, every day you can see attacks on workers' rights; attack on workers' interests from different dimensions and these have been on the increase and clearly speaking; it is on the increase; even the issue of payment of salaries, which is a fundamental right. You can see, nobody had imagined that even the issue of payment of salary as and when due will be an issue or pension will be an issue; now it's an issue and therefore, this is a clear challenge that we need to respond to.

What we need going forward is to look at ways and means of investing; the only other investment I think we have is in treasury bills and those are not secured investments because I think if there is anything with the economy today nationally, it will affect the value

of the bills. Government has been living on borrowing; the borrowing is through treasury bills; they have been using that to take loans from banks to do all sorts of recurrent expenditure. So, clearly speaking, that is also an area where we will need to pay attention to. We need to have clear investment strategy which I think in most of our unions, the consciousness on investment issues is very low very. Many unions from 1978 till today, are still living in rented apartments. For some, it's just few years ago that they were able to get permanent offices. In facility terms, I'm not sure that those that have their offices are up to 50% permanent offices; at least in Abuja, in the context of Abuja. This is where the challenge is and I think the starting point is for us to look at those challenges and moving ahead is to now also look at these challenges as our priorities so that we can be able to have at least on other source of income apart from the check off dues.

Lastly, I think there is the issue of human resource; it's important. No organisation can excel if the human resource we have are not enough or the competency is also not high. I say so within the context of some of the organisations that we have related with.

We can't do much in this digitalised world, if we do not have a knowledgeable and competent workforce we need to add to the pool of human resource we have; we must be able to have quality staff in different fields including strengthening our research department to be able to do quality research for Congress and its affiliates. I have been trying to do that but it has been very, very difficult because of our tradition and possibly also because of what we were also not able to do in the past. Those are part of the issues I think are very very germane and will help build us a strong organisation that can defend our interests and rights. Those are some of the areas there are challenges and going forward we will try to respond to them.

Comrade John Odah: *Against the background of some of the reverses that the labour movement had suffered in some states like Kaduna recently, how will the Congress work to curtail the pernicious influence of people like Governor El-Rufai from spreading to other states in the federation in its determination to reverse the gains of unionism and stop centralised check off deduction in the state?*

Comrade Ayuba Wabba: Thank you very much. As you can see, we are using every means both from the legal angle and on the street contestations. Whatever is legal we are going to deploy to make sure that such individuals don't have the upper hand to undermine workers' interests, and reverse gains workers have enjoyed over the years.

The second leg is also the political. If you have listened to my speeches recently, I said clearly, any governor that has not been able to do well for our workers, we don't see any reason why workers should also support such governors. We can use our numbers to also vote them out. That is the campaign we have started. We will continue and certainly as part of our on-going efforts, we will be isolating some of those cases, particularly that of Kaduna, we have outlined some responses. First is the issue of stoppage of check of dues; it is a legal issue, which I think we are going to approach the court including seeking for a garnishing order which many unions had gotten in the past because the Kaduna State Governor has been deducting dues for seven months and he has not remitted; now he is violating a principal law in the Labour Act, Section 116(a), which provides that employers SHALL deduct check off dues and remit to the office of registered trade unions. This is a clear violation of the law which we are also going to approach from the legal angle.

Beyond the legal angle, because we also know that in this country, many of our elites don't respect the rule of law; they have violated a lot of court orders, processes and procedures, we will also do a kind of continuous contestation and protests till these illegal actions are redressed. We may also escalate it to protest so that everybody will be aware of some of the difficulties those workers are passing through. I think those are some of the structured approach to the issue.

Clearly speaking, the situation in Kaduna State is unprecedented; it is abnormal and it is an attack on the fundamental rights of workers, trade unions and even citizens' rights because you can see even beyond the issue of workers interest; he went and sent proposed law to the state assembly to ban protests and processions, even as he is hiring thugs to demonstrate for his illegal actions.

So clearly speaking, this is unprecedented and it is something that we have condemned in strong terms but beyond condemnation, we need to continue to engage the process so that those issues can be taken.

This is not the first time we have had some of this very upside down duels in our movement and I remember we had continuously engaged the process. I remember during my period when I was a state chairperson, two states stood out as the most worker unfriendly. You remember the case of Plateau under one of the governors and Kogi under Abubakar Audu, I remember at that time the issue was also similar to what is happening now; even in our Borno State, I remember at the time, check off dues deduction was stopped and when the Kaduna State people came here, I told them there is no alternative to organising. In my own time, you remember when check off dues was stopped; we had the congress of the workers and workers committed themselves; in fact, some took oath and said when they collected their salary, they were going to the registered

office of the union and pay, and we got 99% compliance, we defeated that ploy. So, there is no alternative way to organising. We can't be armchair leaders and think things will change; it's not going to work. So, when the leadership of Kaduna State council came here, I repeated the same story to them; I said let them go and find out; it's well documented that this was what happened in my time. But what we did was successful because we were well connected with the workers. It was easy for us to defeat them (in Borno State). In fact, the list of names of every worker that paid was placed on the wall; everyone wanted to see his/her name; 99% brought money by hand to pay to the unions; they were issued receipts and everybody was happy to show his or her receipt. When we call the congress, everybody was showing his receipt. Government saw that and they were destabilized and Malla Kachalla (then Borno State governor) said, "oh, we concede defeat". The next time, without soliciting, he brought back the check off dues. There are no two ways about it. Comrade John, it's about organising if our people do the needful. That is why I want to first meet with the unions. We can't be disillusioned under the circumstance. We have all those examples of how we had been able to succeed in the past. We have all the ideas but the problem is that we must not lose sight of the fact that we need to connect with the workers. For anything to change, we need to connect with the workers.

So, this is the real situation. It is a challenge but I think we will offer leadership in all circumstances and that's why even despite the challenge of last time, we were able to be there and we were able to defend the workers.

Comrade John Odah: *Okay. President, we are coming to the tail end of this interview. But before I ask the last question, when you were speaking about how you turned around Medical and Health*

Workers Union into a viable organisation, you gave a lot of example about how you insisted that things should be done properly and then there were sanctions for those who go against the rules of the union including sacking those that embezzled the funds of the organisation. Against the background of your experience, what can be done with respect to the situation in the NLC and appointment of state secretaries who would be directly controlled from the NLC headquarters and therefore who can be disciplined in case NLC (money) 10% is misappropriated or diverted? I said this against the background that cumulatively, why you have the current situation where the NLC payment from state councils is right 44/45% directly to the head office is because of the effort that was made from Comrade Adams Oshiomhole's last administration, Omar's time, and for this to be sustained, you need full time secretaries who you can then call from the headquarters here why is a b c d not being refunded and all of that? Do you want to share some ideas along this?

Comrade Ayuba Wabba: Yes, I think the issue of appointing state secretaries by the NLC, if I am not mistaken, I think it was actually a decision taken many years ago; if I am not mistaken, it is either at the 2007 or 2003. I recall that that decision was taken so that we will be able to monitor our resources. I remember a lot of incidences happened. You remember the issue before the conference – the case of Osun NLC Chairman from NUT who misappropriated N23 million. You also remember the case of the former Lagos State Chairperson of NCSU who diverted our money. All of these I still remember. Those were the reasons why I think we had to take a decision to allow for collection at the state level. But I think as you mentioned, the challenge has been that of the lack of accountability. Whereas money had been collected from unions in the public sector,

at the end of the day is not remitted completely and therefore, when it comes to accountability, those unions will always say that they are being surcharged. This has been the challenge and I think was the reason why a decision was taken for us to try to appoint state secretaries. Also, partially due to paucity of funds, that decision was never implemented from 2003 or 2007 to date. So, we are trying to see now to prioritise especially in states where we are collecting check off.

But beyond that, you are only talking of one sector, that is the public sector, and the argument has always been there that it is these resources that they use. So, I think we want a situation where all our affiliates will actually be responsible especially to respect the provision of the Labour Act in remitting their affiliation dues. If we do so, it will then become very clear that we will be able to plan; we will be able to budget and we will be able to carry out activities with proper planning and resources.

I quite agree with you that if we are to employ secretaries, certainly, the narrative has to change and since they are direct employees of the NLC, I am clearly of the view that we will be able to monitor and also be able to apply sanction because directly they are employees of the NLC. By so doing, we will be able to make sure that we put checks and balances in place similar to what I had been able to do when I became President of my union. That will be much easier and that way we will also be able to monitor them. Presently, that was the discussion we had the last time and it is even the issue of reporting. In most of our unions, every month, a secretary must send in two reports. One is organisational report and the second one is financial report.

Organisational report means all the activities you have been able to

carry out within the month and the challenges and any issue you want to bring to the notice of the secretariat. Then the financial report is to tell us how much you are able to generate, paid into our account within the month. We made that to be respected religiously in my union because that's the only way we can assess whether you are working or not. If you are armchair comrade, then we know that you are not good.

Your report will tell us that you had visited branch a b c d and you have x number of branches, these are some of their challenges, this is how you have been able to resolve them and this is how much you have been able to generate; every of that report comes to us and we analyse it and that's why in my office in Medical and Health, I have a chart, I remember you were in my office; there is a chart, state by state. So if for any reason before the 30th of the preceding month, if you don't send your report, it means I will issue you a query and everybody had been up and doing and that is what we use to now assess performance.

This can be replicated and these are very good examples of what we can be able to do and therefore I think it is part of the issues we will bring to our organs; we will look at and we try to implement. I think, part of the reason we actually want to employ the state secretaries as approved by the organs all these years is the fact we want to strengthen accountability, transparency and also make sure that we are able to service our state councils. Importantly also, is the need for us to have a two-way information sharing mechanism where we can be able to have first-hand information directly from them. That is why we must look at the criteria to employ people that will add value because we just don't want to employ people just to fulfil all righteousness. I have clearly told the establishment committee that

they have to look at the criteria of people that can be able to do the work and do it effectively.

Comrade John Odah: *Thank you very much Comrade President. What are your thoughts on the way forward for Nigerian trade unions ill the next ten years when the Congress will be celebrating its golden anniversary?*

Comrade Ayuba Wabba: Well, the way forward is better organising because the life and soul of any organisation is how you organise and especially on how to get more membership. It is very clear that most of our unions are losing membership. Without the membership base, there is no way we can be able to lead a proper mass protest or represent the interest of the workers and in organising, it's when you have members that also you can be able to have stable income. There is actually the challenge of dwindling resources but most importantly I think it is the dwindling membership of most unions because of a lot of policies going on which we have tried to look at: the issue of casualisation; outsourcing of services, and the ever present issue of privatisation.

Before now, we know of unions that used to be very strong and with a lot of membership. You remember the Nigerian Airways, the NITEL of this world; all of this is now history. So, we need to look at the diverse opportunities that are now very prevalent. Many opportunities are evolving but the issue is that in most cases we have not been able to unionise them; it should be our priority going forward. Even in the telecommunications industry alone, we have a lot of opportunities that are yet to be tapped; and importantly also are the small and medium scale areas because this issue of formalising the informal economy, I think we have to take it serious which is a core decision of the ILO a couple of years back.

So, for me I think going forward, if we want to remain relevant and continue to have the type of clout we have as an organisation, then the unions must redouble their efforts through the support of NLC to do proper organising. We have made some efforts to create a pool of organisers where every union I think donated about 30 organisers each. I remember during the last Decent Work Day, only few unions came out where we went to Abuja Environmental Protection Board and even MTN on unionisation drive.

You can see that much attention is not given to the issue of organising but I think going forward, it's for us to prioritise organising, do proper budgeting and allocate resources to organising and then also side by side with education. These are the areas that will take us to the next level because we need to raise a cadre of very conscious working class and pensioners that will be able to replicate what we had been able to do in the past. Without that, I think the issue of making progress will certainly be difficult.

Also, I think the issue of commitment is important. Without commitment, all these things we are saying will amount to nothing. It will be there but nobody will push. So, I have seen in the past people work as trade unionists because of the money. Seriously speaking, in the union, it is all about commitment. It is like a missionary work; it's just commitment. I can see clearly now that the commitment is reducing. I have said this several times, comrade, which you can testify.

When I was first elected a President of my union in 2004, I couldn't pay for hotel, I couldn't fly. I will enter a taxi from Maiduguri to Abuja and sleep in the office. There was a three-sitter on which I slept for more than one year; that is commitment because the union could

not pay for hotel. There was nothing. I couldn't fly, so I was entering a taxi, not even driving my car. One day I was coming from Maiduguri to Abuja via Bauchi and the car had problem around Bauchi; the engine knocked in Bauchi. So, from that period that was how we started using taxis and through sheer commitment we were able to build the union. But these days, it's enjoyment first before building the union. So, I think the issue is about commitment; it's about respecting our norms and tradition. It's gradual; life should be in phases. When you build an organisation as a leader, certainly you will benefit from it.

I think it's one clear area that we need to put emphasis on because there is a popular saying that effort is a measuring facility for success. When you don't put effort, there is no way you can get success and you will just be wishing and you will be complaining. But we have a lot of opportunities out there and we need to create time to do the job; not occupying the office; create time to do the job which is most important. When you create time, even if you don't have the knowledge and wherewithal, help will come from somewhere and you will be able to push the process.

So, I think part of what I can say I have, which I think I can recommend to everybody, is commitment. Nobody can do this job without commitment. You can have the best knowledge in the world but if you don't have commitment, you can't achieve nothing and that is why those issues have actually remained the way they are. I think one of the things that I have to say is the major ingredient that is required for us to change the narrative and build a very strong union and also return to the founding principles is commitment.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

The 40th Anniversary of an organisation is an important milestone which should also serve as an occasion for collective reflections on the challenges facing the organisation.

The NLC has considered these matters in a ground-breaking retreat, held in Calabar, Cross River State in August 2015, and the deliberations have been captured in a detailed report of the event. The report, which provides a comprehensive assessment of both the political and economic environment and the challenges and possibilities facing the NLC and those it represents, is an important document which the NLC would urge all comrades and friends of the movement to read.

This Anniversary undoubtedly provides an opportunity to remind ourselves of the challenges we face going forward to the next decade and towards the 50th Anniversary. This is also an opportunity to recommit ourselves to ensuring that the NLC not only survives, but is a leading force for fundamental social change. For there is no doubt that the depth of the challenges we face requires a response that is definitely not 'business as usual'.

The Labour Movement in the Era of Neo-Liberalism

In our country, and throughout the world, it is an existential reality that the working class and the poor are being driven into a survivalist

mode of living. Levels of inequality in almost every country are at unprecedented levels. Tiny groups of people own, control and enjoy vast fortunes while huge sections of our populations, the overwhelming majority of humanity, are being driven into depths of impoverishment that many thought would be inconceivable in the 21st Century.

The forces that pillaged and stole our natural resources in colonial times have actually accelerated their activities throughout the years of our political independence. Even at the present moment, they are planning still further ways to strip our continent further of the wealth that we dreamed about being the basis for our own development.

The instruments that they use for this may not be the slave drivers whip and chains, but are now contained in polite sounding trade protocols that are embraced and signed by our own political leaders, in air conditioned offices, often behind closed doors, and involving all manner of irregular payments. The secrecy that surrounds these 'deals' has in no small part provided the impetus for an endemic corporate corruption that has eaten into the heart of much of our national and global political institutions. The emergence of an untrammelled 'rentism' is further evidence of this.

If neo liberalism has had one resounding triumph, it has been to ensure that any alternatives to its continuing application are completely marginalised, ridiculed, and even demonised. This has been further entrenched by a compliant media that is owned by those associated with the rabid accumulation of wealth. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the undermining of any attempt at national self-determination, (and not just in the Global South but also in the Global North as the Greek people now know) the isolation through a relentless blockade of Cuba for 40 years, and which President Trump

is threatening to re-impose, underlines the measures that the world ruling class are prepared to go to ensure their continued domination of the world's resources.

However even these measures pale into insignificance if one considers the lengths the imperial powers have been prepared to go today to ensure that oil remains under the control of multinational oil corporations. Whole swathes of the Arab speaking world have been decimated, in the name of 'democracy', countless hundreds of thousands of lives have been lost, and whole populations have been dismantled, and effectively exiled. Of course those undemocratic regimes that do not present a threat to multinational accumulation are not targeted for 'regime change'. Clearly some tyrants are considered more tyrannical than others! This underlines the selective and contradictory ruthlessness of those who claim to be propagating good governance.

However, as a workers movement, we also have to question whether we are in any way responsible for this situation, if only to draw the lessons and prevent a recurrence.

How do we characterise the labour movement globally today? Sadly in many parts of the world the workers movement has been decimated both numerically and politically. In the main, this is because of catastrophic levels of unemployment, poverty and inequality, but there are also perhaps more subjective reasons, and it would be worthwhile to address them here.

On the occasion of our 40th Anniversary, let us now examine, not all of the challenges that we face, but perhaps those that we can address in practical terms now, to ensure that our movement enters a period of rebuilding workers power, and strengthening effective workers representation.

From Principles to Decisive Action

The NLC is rightly proud of the guiding principles it has developed and refined over the last 40 years and in particular those referring to democratic practice, accountability and transparency. During the reign of the military, the NLC became one of the only mass democratic organisations able to transcend ethnic, geographic, cultural, religious and even political divisions.

It was able to provide a living example of collective endeavour, agreed through a democratic process, for generations of activists. In short, it represented a microcosm of what a participatory democracy could be. The impact of this cannot be under-estimated. The election of representatives, membership involvement in the development of policies and mandates, holding those elected to account, and ensuring that there was openness and tolerance of differences, are all hallmarks of a participatory democracy. There can be little doubt that the democratic practice of the NLC and its affiliated unions at all levels, served as a vital antidote to rule by military decree. Literally thousands of activists were schooled in the practicalities of democratic organisation.

There is another very important observation to be made here and that is there can be little doubt, under each of the successive leaderships of the NLC over the last forty years, the workers movement was at its most powerful and effective, when it was also at its most democratic. When its leadership was prepared to lead by example, and engage the widest possible layers in both discussion to elaborate a counter strategy to those of the ruling class, and crucially to link arms with civil society to take campaigns onto the streets.

If they are fully revived, they can also serve to provide an alternative to the chronic limitations provided by our current political

dispensation, and the oligarchic tendencies of multinationals who are increasingly dictatorial and who consciously undermine even the limited effectiveness of existing democratic institutions.

It is with these considerations in mind that we now have to seriously think about what our principles mean to us in today's context.

We are pleased to report that the leadership is very aware of the need to revisit our guiding principles with a view towards ensuring that they do indeed serve as a guide for action today, but the challenges still remains. How do we embed these principles in the day to day work of the NLC and its affiliated Unions, and perhaps more importantly, how do we ensure that these principles are internalised by leadership at all levels, and are popularised amongst the mass membership?

Of course, it means that we need propaganda, educational materials and the opening of other avenues for our leaders and members to learn about the principles, and to adopt them as their own. But it is also of paramount importance that those who subscribe to the principles already, especially at senior leadership level, do not just reaffirm them rhetorically, but actually show **in practice** that they take them seriously, and act on them.

Principles Gather Meaning Through Action

This means that decision-making has to be opened up to membership participation and scrutiny. Report-backs to members have to be systematised and made a regular feature of activity not just when there is a crisis.

It means that conscious efforts have to be made to encourage women and young workers to actively participate in union meetings, so that

our meetings are genuinely representative, and especially new potential activists be offered training and opportunities to take positions of responsibility. It means that union finances cannot be kept a secret from members, and if difficulties arise, they should not be covered up but explained, and members reassured that matters are being dealt with properly and effectively.

Organising for Change

In almost all countries in the world, union membership has declined. This is mostly explained by rising unemployment and job insecurity, this of course appears to be irrefutable. Therefore, the need to campaign against unemployment and to argue for economic policies that create jobs must be a priority. However, there are other considerations too that deepen our understanding .

Many of our Unions have not only been unable to prevent job losses in their sectors, but they have also been unable to establish recruitment and organising initiatives. It can be fairly argued that many Union leaderships have as a matter of necessity spent an inordinate amount of time and energy defending the job security of existing members, and have not properly focused and committed human and material resources (if they have any) on reaching out to workers who are not unionised to replenish their membership base.

The NLC leadership have explored a range of options involving the development of sectoral recruitment plans, the possibility of mergers of unions in the same sector, and ways in which linkages can be made with the informal sector. All of this is to be welcomed and we look forward to the process for rejuvenation being implemented that emerged from the last NLC Congress. However, given the urgency of rebuilding and strengthening the Unions, there is another

aspect that requires our attention and that is the dilution of organising.

It would be instructive at this Anniversary to ask our veterans how they went about building unions when they were just being established. What universally emerges from their recollections is how they actually engaged workers on a face to face basis. Many of our veterans rose in the early hours, not for a few weeks, but for years, to meet and greet workers entering the factories, and offices, and not just simply to offer them a leaflet, but to **engage** in a discussion about why joining the union would be in their personal and collective interests. This is how unions were built. Sometimes a worker had to be persuaded over a long period of time, but there was an understanding of the 'multiplier effect'. If a worker who was initially reticent to join can be persuaded, there is a very good chance that she or he would become an ambassador for the Union in the workplace thereafter. The crucial term here is 'persuasion'.

Sadly in many unions the role of the organiser has been reduced to simply being a recruiter, and is often seen internally within the Union as occupying a low status position, to be escaped as soon as possible into a 'higher position'! We have to urgently revisit both the role and the status of our organisers if we are to enter into a meaningful turnaround strategy.

Given what we said earlier about the importance of practicalising key trade union principles, and establishing participatory democracy as the dominant and vibrant culture of Unions, organisers must have a vital role to play in promoting and facilitating its adoption, and especially at workplace and local level. Not just recruiting new members and including the securing of organisational rights, organisers must also focus on building a participatory democracy in our workplaces, local government branches, and at state council

level. This is where the notion of organisers becoming educator-organisers comes into being, and not to replace the responsibilities of branch officers, shop stewards and other local representatives, but to empower them to build and manage their own local structures so that there is capacity through organisers to focus on building and strengthening worker control of unions.

It is acknowledged that this is a radical departure, but given the depth of the crisis that we face, this approach to organising could break through the log jam of stagnation, the decline of membership involvement while at the same time providing an opportunity for rejuvenation.

Trade Union Education for Empowerment

The NLC leadership over the last 40 years has at regular intervals insisted that educational programmes should be developed to build class consciousness, to skills representatives, and to ensure that workers receive the representation they desperately require. The NLC should be proud of its past educational programmes. Compared to many parts of our continent, the NLC have been able to establish regular programmes such as the Harmattan and Rain Schools as well as other training programmes and should be congratulated for this.

One of the challenges however is that education is always at the risk of being curtailed or postponed whenever a financial or political crisis presents itself, and there is an ever present danger of both human and material resources being in short supply. In the past, an over-reliance on external funding also proved to be an obstacle preventing a more self-sustaining education delivery.

The decision to establish an NLC Labour College could well answer these concerns, and it is hoped that it will soon materialise, and begin to provide the highest quality trade union education that our workers deserve, an education that empowers and enthuses them to build the movement!

The question of the curriculum of all of our education work is not just a technical matter. What we hope our education will achieve is a vital concern for all of us. At this juncture, perhaps, we ought to ensure that our primary educational focus is on building and strengthening our Unions and the NLC. Of course, we want participants to develop their skills, their study methods, their reading and research habits, their technological capabilities, and to develop a thirst for further education. We want them to be exemplars of the principles of the trade union movement, and be ambassadors for our movement by embodying our democratic values, and showing by their day to day practice that they have internalised all that is best in our movement. We want them to leave our programme committed to building and protecting our movement and to encourage others to participate in education.

The Resource Crisis

In the sections above we have deliberately focused on the development and application of human resources implied in the way forward, in terms of reasserting our principles in practice, developing organisers, and ensuring that education takes place and is effective.

The ever present challenges of the shortage of material resources remains one of such over-arching impact that it really does deserve our fullest attention when we discuss the way forward.

Several NLC affiliates have made great strides in rectifying the weaknesses in their own subscription (dues) systems, and it is necessary that their approaches should be shared and if possible replicated wherever possible, bearing in mind that unions have distinctive membership and organisational features, and that 'one size fits all' might not be appropriate.

The sharing of financial management expertise of this type is to be encouraged among affiliates of NLC. Too often, unions 'hide' their finances for fear of exposing their material weaknesses to class enemies, and even from their own memberships, for fear of being seen to be mismanaging union affairs. Being open about the financial affairs of a Union is not only essential for internal democracy and accountability, but in also showing a much wider audience that unions work on mandates and not external financial influences.

In preceding paragraphs we have made reference to the trade union principles of accountability. Transparency and openness are particularly important when dealing with financial matters.

It is clear that many employers, including Government, do not often fulfil their legal obligations to ensure that check-off dues are undertaken and made available to unions. The holding back of members' subscriptions is often nothing short of theft, especially if un-transferred subscriptions are generating interest. Of course, it may be caused by administrative incompetence, but increasingly there is evidence to indicate that non-payment could be politically motivated, to starve unions of the vital resources they need to fulfil their functions and defend workers against exploitation. The recent decision of the Kaduna State government to stop deducting union check-off dues following NLC's engagement with the state government over the unlawful termination of the appointment of

over 30,000 teachers and other employees of the state government is a classical case in point.

The NLC will of course fight this illegal decision of the Kaduna State government, as it will of course stand up to any such authoritarian show of power. This matter relates to the fundamental purpose of unions, and the NLC will ensure that it follows it to its logical conclusion, even if this entails reporting this to the ILO and other bodies.

The NLC has also accelerated efforts to ensure that affiliated unions pay their subscriptions to the NLC as and when due. The sooner that the NLC is properly financed by affiliates the better. Not only does it make for an efficient NLC, but also it can inspire workers to support their union if they see that their monies are being put to good use, for the benefit of the working class as a whole.

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