

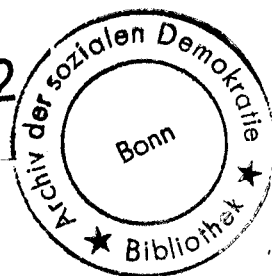
# **T**rade Unionism In Nigeria: Challenges For The 21st Century

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## PREFACE

The Nigerian trade union movement has a rich tradition to protect and advance the fate of Nigerian workers and contribute to national development efforts. I understand that the first union was founded in Nigeria as far back as 1912 when Nigeria had still to live for a few decades under colonial rule. And we have to remember that it was the trade unions which fought in the forefront in the struggle for national independence. Unionists proved their dedication to the Nation and demonstrated patriotism.

These facts seem to be forgotten. Today an independent government of Nigeria claims that trade unions are anti-nationalistic, non-patriotic and a hurdle on the path of economic development. Unions are constantly endangered to be proscribed. Labour leaders are threatened to be thrown in prison should they mobilize workers to fight for their rights. Today it is the military which has usurped the monopoly to be patriotic, the monopoly to advance Nigeria. Only military apologists are officially recognized to be dedicated Nigerians interested in the future of the country. Really there is a fundamental change with respect to Nigerian Unions: In former times the movement was widely respected by the people and also by the authorities of the country.

During the past weeks the Nigerian press over and over again celebrated a number of favourable economic data released by the Ministry of Finance. It has indeed to be acknowledged that Nigeria's fiscal and monetary policy has succeeded to lower the rate of inflation, to keep the external value of the Naira stable and to show a substantial surplus of Government's income over its expenditure. These data seem to be established facts, established positive facts.

But still Nigerian workers and their elected representatives have in my opinion every reason and all the rights to ask in which way the dependent labourer, the

Nigerian worker, is benefiting from these positive economic aggregates. I even

think it to be the duty of a unionist to ask whether a worker can buy today more for his pay than a year ago. It is his duty to ask whether more employment opportunities have been created. It is his duty to ask how Government has spent taxpayers money. And it is certainly the duty of the trade union to demand that the fiscal and monetary policy of Nigeria is benefiting the Nigerian worker. The question must be asked why Nigeria's per capita income is nowadays five times smaller than 15 years ago. Oil prices have by far not fallen as steep as the pay of the Nigerian worker. Questions after questions are coming to the surface. Who should ask them if not the labour leaders of Nigeria?

In the middle of September, 1996, more than 300 exponents of the Nigerian economy gathered in Abuja to discuss the economic future of the country. Policy makers met at the Economic Summit, scientists, lawyers, bankers and industrialists. I ignore, however, whether Nigerian workers were represented. It is needless to repeat the claim that it is imperative in a civilised country of the 21st century that workers are respected as equal social partners. It is imperative that he has a say in vital topic of national planning. It is on him to co-decide how the income of the nation is distributed.

But I would not wonder if trade unions played only little role at the Abuja summit -if they should have been invited at all. The labour movement has lost a lot of strength in recent years. You need only to walk through the building of the headquarter of the government administered Nigeria Labour Congress. There are no activities! Hardly any office is occupied. The building is dirty. Dust piles up everywhere. The NLC does not give the impression of a dormant organisation. It rather gives the impression of being stone-dead. The congress certainly does not look as being administered at all, administered either by the unions or by the Government. Could that have been the intention?

We should, however, remember that we do not have to concentrate on the past or lament extensively over the present miserable situation of the Nigerian

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worker and their elected representatives. The conference, "Trade unionism: in Nigeria, Challenges for the 21st century", organised by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, aimed in a modest way to restore their power and efficiency. A bold, frank and open discussion of issues took place.

In my opinion this discussion should not stop at the door step of the unions themselves. An open and critical appraisal seems to be of dire need. It should also include orientations of union leaders and thier behavior pattern. It is not enough for them to be serious when handling union funds but at least equally important that they are mentally honest should they look for a mandate from the worker. We would deceive ourselves when we would not recognize that many workers believe nowadays that union leaders run elsewhere toseek a mandate. Also this fact, this rather unpleasant fact should be addressed. It is in this regard that the Foundation decided to publish the Keynote Address delievered at the Conference by Comrade Hassan Sunmonu, Secretary-General, Organisation of African Trade Union Unity, Accra, Ghana, with the hope that it will provoke further discussions, especially among those interested in the well-being of the Nigerian Trade Union movement.

Gerhard Wendler- Resident Representative- Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation.  
Lagos, October, 1996.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION:**

I wish to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to the Friedrich Ebert Foundation for hosting this important conference, and the kind invitation to me to deliver this keynote address. It is a matter of joy for us in the Organization of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) that organisations such as the Friedrich Ebert Foundation are contributing greatly to the strengthening and capacity, building of civil society, particularly trade unions in many African countries, through seminars, workshops and conferences such as the present one. This is the best example of practical solidarity, worthy of emulation by other development partners of Africa.

In the present era of globalization, the civil society has to be strengthened and empowered to counteract forces that constitute stumbling blocks to democracy and sustainable development. Trade Unions, as part of the civil society, which is well organised and structured, have to wake up to their historic responsibilities, otherwise, they will be marginalized and become irrelevant.

Globalization has thrown up new actors into the world stage, whose power and influence have superceded those of governments, whether in developed or developing countries. They have become the “new superpowers” that can hardly be controlled by governments. They wield considerable influence on governments, and International Financial Institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and also the newly established, World Trade Organization (WTO). For those who are still in doubt about the new actors I am talking about, they are none other than the Multinational Corporations. They are the “new superpowers” that workers and trade unions all over the world have to contend with, bargain with, and at times dispute with. They are going to be part of the challenge of the 21st century for workers and trade unions throughout the world. I hope that in the course of my address, and during this conference, we shall be able to define the tactics and strategies that workers and trade unions can devise to rise up to the challenge of the 21st century.

As requested by the hosts of this conference, I shall structure my address on the

7 themes to be discussed at this conference. Let me, from the start, state that I have not come to this conference to lecture the distinguished delegates and participants, but rather, to share experience with all of you and to drink from the fountain of your rich experience too.

## II. TRADE UNIONISM- HISTORICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Britain is credited to be the origin of trade unionism. The Industrial Revolution that started in Britain about 1760 provided the conditions for the growth of trade unions. Although before that time, there existed craft unions, such as those of the hatters, tailors and printers, and shoemakers (cordwainers). These crafts established local trade unions or clubs in various towns, but they were generally small and scattered. It was the growth of factories through the use of water power, and later steam power that trade unionism, as we know it today, began. Factory employment began to grow and cottage industries began to dwindle. Villagers had to move into towns which were sprouting up around a factory or group of factories in search of employment.

These groups of workers, men and women, as succinctly put by Victor Feather in his book, "The Essence of Trade Unionism", "slaved night and day for a meagre livelihood. Children became wage earners at five years of age, and were carried to work by their parents to toil twelve hours a shift, day or night. In thousands of cases, homeless and orphaned children worked, ate and slept on the factory premises; if they died at work, as many did, their bodies were thrown into lime-pit kept open for that purpose". The same happened in the newly-opened coal mines, and in the steel works.

This was the situation that led to the growth of trade clubs, which were small and local and confined to one trade or occupation. It was difficult for members to meet, but they used to meet in each others houses, ale houses or on hillsides out of town. Their discussion centered on wages, hours of work, conditions of work, benefits, etc.

They initiated sick and burial funds to help those of their members in need.

Gradually, these "trade clubs" began to link up with their counterpart organisations in the other areas leading to the formation of loose federations. This culminated in the formation of a national federation by the hatters in 1771.

First, the employers, and later successive governments became apprehensive of this trend as the federations developed and became stronger. In 1799, the British Parliament passed the Combination laws banning trade unions, and making it illegal for any group of workmen to combine together for any purpose relating to employment. In order to give the Act of 1799 an appearance of fairness, according to Victor Feather, "there was a similar ban on employers, but it was easy enough for two or three employers to meet socially without causing any comment, and there reach a "gentleman's agreement" about wage rates and then impose these rates without fear of resistance from their workmen, as organisation was unlawful".

In spite of the law, workers protested and resisted. Many of them were prosecuted and given stiff prison terms. Long hours of work, rising prices, low wages, bad housing, degrading living and working conditions, demotion of skilled craftsmen to unskilled workers, etc. led to strikes, lockouts, resentment and violence. Widespread strikes took place in textile industry in 1808, and in the mines in 1810. The Combination Law were consequently repealed in 1824, after 25 years of its enactment. In 1825, another Act was passed in parliament which gave legal recognition to the right to combine for collective bargaining and the right to strike, and the right to pay union dues (check-off dues). The year 1825 marked the beginning of the legal history of trade unions in Britain.

Here in Nigeria, trade unionism began in 1912 through the formation of trade union by some workers of the colonial civil service. The colour discrimination in the colonial civil service, low wages and poor conditions of service were the main reasons for the formation of the Civil Servants Association, the predecessor of the present Nigeria Civil Service Union. In those early colonial days, no Nigerian, however qualified could rise to a Senior Service position in the colonial administration. Even those who qualified in medicine with their

white counterparts in the same universities could rise only to the post of Assistant Medical Officer.

It was thanks to the struggle of the pioneer Nigerian trade unionists of those days that the improvement of the conditions of service, took place.

It will be seen from the two examples of the origin of trade unionism in Britain and Nigeria, that trade union were born out of struggle of the workers to improve their conditions of service, stop exploitation, and to be treated with respect and dignity. In conformity with the saying that "nothing ventured, nothing gained", trade unions cannot expect "manna to fall from heaven" unless they mobilize their members to struggle for the improvement of their conditions of employment.

Another important lesson that we can learn is that "unity is strength". Individual workers, no matter how strong or intelligent, acting alone cannot successfully win against the employers. Coupled with unity is "solidarity", which is the actual essence of trade unionism. It is solidarity that makes, to one worker, "injury to all workers". If unity and solidarity are removed from trade unionism, there will be nothing left of it.

### III. TRADE UNION STRUCTURE AND ORGANISATION

The structure of any trade union is determined by

- The history of its formation;
- Its membership and coverage
- Its nature, i.e. whether it is craft, industrial, professional or general union.

For example, the National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives and Nigeria Union of Journalists are professional Unions. Only those qualified in Nursing and Midwifery and journalism can belong to the two Industrial unions. Unions like Agricultural and Allied Workers Union of Nigeria, are general unions, while unions such as National Union of Textile Garment and Tailoring Workers are industry- based unions for workers of textile and clothing industries.

The highest organ of any trade union organisation is its congress, which elects the leadership of the organisation (the executive committee or board). It amends the constitution and gives the policy direction of the organisation.

The Executive Committee or Board supervises the day to day administration of the union secretariat or headquarters which, in most cases, is under the Secretary-General or Executive President of the union. The Secretariat or headquarters coordinates the administration of all the regional, state or zonal branches of the union, as the case may be. Also at the union Secretariat or Headquarters, there are Departments such as Administration, Education, Research, Finance, Economics, Information, International, etc .depending on the strength and spread of the union. These departments are headed by full-time trade unionists, with committees made up of elected members directing and supervising the activities of the departments. The role of the committee members of the different departments (who are worker members of the union), is very crucial, as they guide and recommend policies to the Executive Committee or Board, depending on his own good judgements alone. The committee method of running trade union departments leads to better internal democracy within the trade unions, and I strongly recommend it . Departments, such as Education, Finance, Economics and International, should have committees. This will encourage popular participation, empowerment and acquisition of experience by the members of the union, which will prepare them for future leadership of the union.

The African Charter on Popular Participation in Development (Arusha 1990) is also applicable to trade union democracy. The charter embodies:

- Popular Participation;
- Empowerment of the People;
- Accountability;
- Social and Economic Justice;
- Respect for Human and Trade Union Rights and the Rule of Law.

For trade union democracy to thrive, there should be participation by worker members and their empowerment in the running of their unions, while their elected and appointed leaders should be accountable to the union. In addition, the union should ensure fairness and equity to all its members, whether elected or appointed, and all of them should uphold the constitution of their union.

Lest I be misunderstood, I would like to make it crystal clear that the principle of popular participation does not encourage dichotomy within the trade unions - elected and appointed officers of trade unions are all members of the unions and belongs to the union. Active and effective and loyal members and elected officers more often end up being appointed full-time officers of the Union, in recognition of their excellent services to the union. That is how most of us became full-time appointed officers.

Workers should reject any attempt to introduce dichotomy within the union movement. In the spirit of popular participation, no trade union position should be closed to any member of the union. Also, trade unions, especially those in Africa should make special efforts, such as "affirmative action" to encourage the participation and empowerment of women workers in all the rungs of the trade union ladder. It is lamentable that women are under-represented in trade union leadership in most African countries including Nigeria.

#### **IV. TRADE UNIONS AND THE POLITICAL PROCESS**

Having regards to the facts that exploitation and injustice were the main reasons that led to the formation of trade unions, and the fact that human beings are political animals, there is no question that workers and their trade unions, one way or the other will be involved in politics. It is a right, universally acknowledged that every adult citizen of a country has inalienable right to participate in politics. Since all workers are adults, they have every right to participate in politics.

A lot of heat has been generated in the debate as to whether or not trade unions should be involved in politics. There are two types of involvement of trade unions in politics:-

#### **Partisan, and -Non- Partisan involvement.**

Trade unions, as parts of the civil society have inalienable right to participate in the politics of their countries. Social, political and economic decisions of governments affect all the citizens of their countries. So, all the citizens of a country have the right to participate effectively in all decisions that affect their lives.

As to the question of trade unions in partisan politics, that will depend on the objective conditions and realities of the country. However, a few examples outside and within Africa can give us a guide.

#### **GREAT BRITAIN**

In Great Britain, the British Trades Union Congress has always supported the British Labour Party. This has been in spite of the fact that British workers as individuals, support the party or parties of their choice, i.e. The Labour Party, The Conservative Party, the Liberal Democratic Party, and other smaller Regional Parties in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales. Majority of British workers have traditionally supported the Labour Party. A number of the British TUC affiliates contribute directly and regularly to the Labour Party. Prominent among this group of unions is the powerful Transport and General Workers Union. It was only recently that the big block votes controlled by the unions within the Labour Party was broken through the adoption of a constitutional amendment. The same influence workers have within the Labour Party, they do not have within the other British political parties.

British trade unions have therefore played a very good role within the British Labour Party. That is why a number of British trade union leaders have served in the cabinets of Labour-led governments in Great Britain. The tradition and political culture of Great Britain allow the participation of British TUC, in partisan politics in that country. In every endeavour, there are positive and negative sides. For the British TUC, the positive side of its partisan politics with the labour Party include pro-worker legislations by Labour-led governments and ministerial appointments of leading trade unionists. On the negative side, the Conservative-led government (since the past 16 years) have always enacted anti-union legislations, which have weakened and reduced the influence of trade unions.

In fact one of these negative effects is the loss of membership of the British TUC from over 12 million members some few years ago to just over 7 million members today.

### **GERMANY**

In Germany, the Federation of German Trade Unions, the DGB has also traditionally supported the German Social Democratic Party, in spite of the fact that German workers belong to all shades of political opinion in German, i.e. The Conservative Parties and the Greens Party (The Environmental Party).

Like in Great Britain, the DGB also benefits from pro-labour legislation and other benefits when the Social Democratic Party is in power in Germany. Even when Germany was divided into East and West Germany from 1949 to 1989, the trade union Federation of Communist-led governments of the former East Germany. With the conservative-led coalition government of Germany for the past 12 years, the DGB has not been enjoying the same rapport it used to enjoy with the Social Democratic Party-led government. However, it enjoys considerable support from the German workers which has earned it respect from the German people and government.

### **UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

In the United States, the AFL-CIO has traditionally supported the Democratic Party in spite of the fact that American workers have different shades of political opinion. The conservative Republican Party in the United States is known for its pro-business sympathies, although a smaller percentage of American workers also support it. The AFL-CIO has a Department that liaise with the U.S. congress to lobby congressmen and Senators to support pro-labour legislations. The AFL-CIO and most of its affiliates also contribute money for the election of Democratic Presidents, Senators, Congressmen/Women, State Governors, State Assemblymen/women, State Senators, and at the local level, Mayors, etc.

### **AFRICAN COUNTRIES**

The founding President of the Republic of Guinea, the late President Sekou

Toure cut his political teeth from the trade union movement. When in 1958, the French promulgated the law to give the opportunity for its French African colonial territories to decide either to have immediate independence or still continue to stay with France until gradual attainment of independence, Sekou Toure chose immediate independence for Guinea. In 1958, the French gave immediate independence to Guinea but withdrew all the French administrative, professional, teaching and technical personnel from Guinea in retaliation. Guinea survived the French blackmail, but Sekou Toure took Guinea down the road of one party dictatorship. The Confederation of Guinea Trade Unions (CNTG) became the trade union wing of the ruling party, until about 6 years ago.

Under the circumstances the Guinean government and peoples found themselves from 1958 onwards, perhaps one can consider the circumstances for one-party dictatorship extenuating, but the gross abuse of power, wanton violation of human rights and the extra-judicial murders, detentions without trial, corruption, etc. coupled with the abject poverty of the Guinea peoples were inexcusable for a Pan-Africanist like the Sekou Toure.

### **GHANA**

The workers and trade unions of Ghana participated and were actively involved in the struggle for Ghana's independence. It was their strike that brought Dr. Kwame Nkrumah out of the colonial jail into the Legislative Assembly that brought self-government to Ghana in 1949. The party led by Kwame Nkrumah, the Convention Peoples Party (CPP), actively involved the Ghana Trades Union Congress in the struggle for Ghana's independence.

In appreciation and gratitude for this unparalleled support of Ghanaian workers

and TUC that at independence on 6th March, 1957, the then Secretary-General of the Ghana TUC, Mr. John K. Tettegah, now Ghana's High Commissioner to Nigeria, was made Ambassador Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Ghana Government, in addition to building an imposing 6-storey Building (Hall of Trade Unions) in the heart of Accra for the Ghana TUC and its 17 affiliates.



This pre-eminence enjoyed by Ghana TUC under Nkrumah's Government made it to play a decisive role in the formation of ALL-Africa Trades Union Federation (AATUF) with John K. Tettegah as Secretary-General, in 1961. The AATUF and the AFRICAN Trades Union Confederation founded in Dakar in May 1962 were the predecessors of the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) founded in Addis Ababa, in April 1973. After the overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah's Government by the Ghana Armed Forces in February 1966, the Ghana TUC had a rough time with the military dictatorship. When Dr. K.A. Busia came to power in the late 1960s, his government also attempted to divide the TUC in reprisal for its support for the CPP. Although bruised, the Ghana TUC maintained its unity and survived the political onslaught. It wisely decided to be politically non-partisan. The massive workers education programme that the TUC and its affiliates invested human and material resources was perhaps, the singular reason Ghana workers and TUC survived attempts by successive military and civilian governments to destroy it.

## **MALI**

Mali's independence from France in 1960 was not without problems. The founding and first president of Mali, the late Modibo Keita asked France to withdraw its military base in Mali. France duly complied, but in reprisal, it withdrew its financial assistance to Mali. A Pan-Africanist to the core, Modibo Keita turned to Ghana's Nkrumah for assistance. Nkrumah obliged, and the friendship led to the formation of Ghana-Guinea-Mali federation.

It is believed in official circles that the French masterminded the military overthrow of Modibo Keita's government by Colonel Moussa Traore in 1969. He immediately imprisoned Modibo Keita, who later died in prison some few years later.

The Malian workers, under the umbrella of the National Union of Malian Workers (UNTM) supported the patriotic government of Modibo Keita, whose social programmes in education, health, and housing coincided with the aspirations of the Malian workers and trade unions.

After the overthrow of Modibo Keita's government, the Malian Workers and Trade Unions decided to maintain their independence. It was a cat-and-mouse game between them and the military dictatorship. However, the strike of Malian Teachers over pay and conditions of work in March 1991, which was supported by Malian students, who had a protest march on the main streets of Bamako changed the political landscape of Mali for good. The Malian dictator, General Moussa Traore ordered his troops to fire on the defenceless student protesters. About 200 students were killed and several hundred wounded.

The National Union of Malian Workers under the able leadership of Bakary Karambe, the Secretary-General, mobilized the Malian Trade Unions to ask the blood-soaked Moussa Traore dictatorship to quit. The Malian civil society, assisted by patriotic elements within the Malian Armed Forces, led by Colonel Atumani Toure eased the dictator, Moussa Traore, out of power and put him under arrest.

A transition Government of National Salvation was set up under the Chairmanship of Colonel Atumani Toure with the Trade Union leader Bakary Karambe as Vice-Chairman. The Transition government organised within 12 months, the least expensive Constituent Assembly in Africa, that took 2 months to draft a new democratic constitution for Mali, then organised both Legislative and Presidential Elections that saw President Alpha Konare democratically elected and sworn in by April, 1992.

Bakary Karambe has now retired as Secretary-General of the UNTM. The OATUU, in appreciation of its contribution to democracy in Mali and the development of trade unionism in Mali, Africa and internationally, honoured him with an award at the 6th Ordinary Congress of OATUU in Accra, in May 1995. It is a well-deserved honour to a veteran African Trade Union leader who risked his life so that his country can be free and democratic.

## **ZAMBIA**

The struggle for Zambia independence was led by another veteran trade unionist who cut his political teeth in the trade union movement. He is none other than the President Kenneth K. Kaunda. He was the leader of the Teachers union in

former Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), who had to battle with the racist white supremacy government of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyazaland (now Malawi).

The party led by Dr. Kaunda, the United National Independence Party (UNIP) won independence for Zambia. However, like what was in vogue in Africa from the middle 60s to the middle 80s, Kaunda also turned Zambia into a one-party state under the slogan, "One Zambia, One people, One Government, One Party".

The Zambian workers, under the umbrella of the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions and under the leadership of Frederick J. Chiluba (Chairman- General of ZCTU; as no other Zambian can be elected president of any organization, since only President Kaunda can be president in Zambia), led the Zambian civil society's struggle for multiparty democracy in Zambia. During the struggle, the three main leaders of the ZCTU, namely Frederick Chiluba (Chairman-General), Newstead Zimba (Secretary-General) and Chitalu Sampa (Treasurer-General) were detained for several months and their passports seized. One of my first major assignments when I was elected as OATUU Secretary-General in October 1986, was my mission to Zambia for the release of the passports of Chiluba, Zimba and Sampa by President Kaunda in May, 1987. My mission was successful.

The struggle of the Zambian civil society led by the ZCTU for multipartism and democracy in Zambia was successful. Kaunda's single-party government was forced to concede to multipartism. The ZCTU led an amalgam of civil society organisations to form the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) adopted Chiluba as presidential candidate in October 1992, and he defeated the incumbent President Kenneth Kaunda in the Presidential elections and became president of Zambia since October, 1992. Today, Chitalu Sampa is Zambia's Home Affairs Minister, while Newstead Zimba is Minister of Labour. How time changes !! "No condition is permanent".

## **SOUTH AFRICA**

The world-wide struggle against apartheid in South Africa has made the contribution of the black workers and trade unions of South Africa to be grossly understated. In any struggle, the one from within counts more than the external support, for the final victory. The racist white apartheid regime was economically and financially strong, and it armed to the teeth the white-led South African Defence Forces (SADF), which it effectively used as instruments of state terror against the defenceless black African frontline states.

The racist regime has imprisoned most of the black South African leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Govan Mbeki and outlawed black political organisations, notably the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC), the South African Communist Party (SACP). The black political leadership that were not imprisoned were in hiding or in and out of detention within South Africa (such as Mrs. Winnie Mandela), or in exile outside South Africa.

The white-led trade unions under apartheid were supporters and beneficiaries of apartheid. After decades of struggle for the right to establish trade unions and to be recognised, black workers through strikes and demonstrations won the right to establish trade unions. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) emerged in 1985 as the umbrella of black South African trade union that also has white and coloured workers among its almost one million members. COSATU now has 1.5 million paid-up members and it is still growing). COSATU, led then by Jay Naidoo as General-Secretary, and with strong and militant affiliates such as the National Union of Mine Workers (NUM) led by lawyer Cyril Ramphosa as General-Secretary, with other powerful National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA), etc combined trade union struggle with political struggle to free South Africa from apartheid and social injustice. It is this combined struggle that has annealed the majority black South African workers and trade unions, which has made them organisers, mobilizers, negotiators and patriots per excellence. These are the qualities that assisted them to make apartheid too expensive for the South African racists, and which eventually led to its inevitable collapse, and the emergence of democratic government, led by President Nelson Mandela in April 1994.

The South African workers and trade unions have a lot of lessons to teach their counterparts in the rest of Africa as they too would also learn from them. The OATUU is proud of the fact that COSATU is one of its affiliates, of which it is very, very proud.

## **NIGERIA**

In spite of trade union-bashing that is now the vogue in Nigeria, nobody can deny the enormous contribution of Nigerian workers to the independence and economic and social development of Nigeria. As a Nigerian, and trade unionist, I am proud of Nigerian workers and trade unions. As the saying goes, "if those who excreted forgot, those who cleared the mess will always remember". If some politicians whether in "agbada" or "uniform" find it convenient to forget, we the Nigerian workers and our trade unions will never forget the immense contribution of Nigerian workers and trade unions to the independence and socio-economic development of Nigeria.

Was it not the struggle for the cost of living allowance (COLA) that led to the 45 days strike of railway workers in 1945, led by Nigeria's Labour Leader No.1, our father, the octogenarian and inimitable Dr. Micheal Imoudu? Was it not the strike that triggered the nationalist struggle for the independence of Nigeria?

Was the slaughter in 1949 of the 21 Enugu coal mine martyrs not the whistle that blew the start of the race for the demand for independence? Were trade union leaders such as Pa Imoudu and late Alhaji H.P. Adebola not among the pioneers of the NCNC? (National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons, later changed to National Council of Nigerian Citizens). Did late Malam Aminu Kano who led NEPU (Northern Elements Progressive Union) not start the independence struggle via the trade unions? The political strikes against the British colonial masters were carried out by Nigerian workers and they suffered the attendant persecution, harassments, imprisonments, dismissals and bannishment with patriotic zeal and fortitude.

The valiant role Nigerian workers played during the struggle for independence was conveniently forgotten by Nigerian politicians immediately after independence. That is why the politicians had no moral courage to call for the support of Nigeria workers and trade unions when the Nigerian military began their treasonable overthrow of democratically elected government in January 1966 and since then.

It was the reason why, at the founding of Nigeria Labour Congress in February 1978, NLC leaders decided to be non-partisan in the political process that was unfolding for the return to civilian rule by October 1979. Instead, NLC decided to concentrate on Workers Education, as part of human resources development of Nigerian workers, which alone, could empower them, and facilitate their active involvement and participation in the political and development process. We, the leaders of the NLC at the time believed, and still believe that "Education makes a people easy to govern but difficult to enslave". When the ban on political parties was lifted by the Obasanjo's military regime, some of our trade union colleagues that wanted to go into politics were given leave without pay. They were not happy with the NLC, but NLC leadership felt that it was premature for the congress to engage in partisan politics, since congress was less than 2 years old then, and had not sufficiently consolidated itself on the ground. Events later proved right, the position of the Congress, because in spite of the non-partisan position of the NLC, the civilian administration that emerged victorious in October 1979 at the Federal level led by the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), set up a Labour Committee of the party with the sole aim of destabilizing the NLC. I know what I am talking about because, as President of the NLC, I was given copies of minutes of the NPN Labour Committee within 1 hour of its production. May be I should reserve some of the details for a more auspicious occasion!

After the end of my tenure in February 1984, and the end of the tenure of my immediate successor, Alhaji Ali Chiroma in December 1988, the NLC

leadership that emerged, judged the timing appropriate and decided some time later that the NLC was matured enough, to be involved in partisan-politics, and even, to float a political party, the Nigerian Labour Party. The analysis of that judgement, and what went wrong should be appropriately done at this conference, time permitting. I have discussed with Comrade Pascal Bafyau and other leaders of the NLC my own analysis of that decision. If I can share a few thoughts with you my distinguished colleagues, they are the following:

1. Those who represented the NLC at the political level in the SDP into which the Labour Party merged were attending meetings of the SDP as if in their personal capacities they were not taking instructions officially from the NLC nor reporting discussions within the SDP officially to appropriate organs of the NLC. So when the other leaders of the SDP knew that those comrades were actually representing themselves as individuals and not the NLC, they did not take them serious within the party.
2. Before a trade union organisation like the NLC decides to support or be part of a political party, the basis of such relationship should be clearly established and documented. It was not done in the case under reference. A trade union organisation is not a Boys Club. It is a very serious organisation.
3. In the decision of such magnitude, trade union democracy should be strictly respected. It should not be like what Napoleon was reported to have said "L'etat, c'est moi" (i.e. "The state? I am the state"). Nobody can claim that within the trade union movement.

#### V. **ASPIRATION AND EXPECTATIONS OF UNION MEMBERS**

The motivation of a worker that makes him/her to join a trade union, is above all, the protection and defence of his/her rights and the overall improvement of

his/ her condition at the work place. By and large, Nigerian trade unions have met this principal aspirations of their members. Difficulties have arisen which have made it impossible in certain circumstances for trade unions to fulfil their own side of the bargain. The most important cause of these difficulties are the implementation of the orthodox structural adjustment programmes of the IMF and the World Bank by many African countries, including Nigeria. The aspects of the orthodox SAPS which have negative effect on Industrial Relations and the Collective Bargaining process include:-

- Massive devaluation of the National Currencies, which reduces the take-home pay of the workers and lower their standards of living;
- Withdrawal of government subsidy on social services like Education, Health, Housing, Water, Electricity, etc. which prohibitively raise their prices.
- Massive retrenchment of workers without due process of Collective Bargaining Agreement.
- Privatization of public-owned enterprises which further leads to massive retrenchment.

Also, the lack of democracy in the country gives way to the violation of trade union rights in flagrant violation of ILO Conventions 87 and 98 on Freedom of Association and the right to Organise, and the right to Collective Bargaining. Added to these, is the globalization process of the world economy, which is encouraging, among other things, the casualisation of labour. This is a phenomenon that is world wide.

If one says that the above three problems are beyond the control of Nigerian trade unions, can one say that there are no other problems within their control?

Yes there are some few. These includes:-

- the complacency of trade union officials in promptly dealing with workers problems because of the automatic check-off

received regularly from their members. In business, no customer is so treated because he/she has a choice. We too, in the Nigerian trade union movement should treat our members with courtesy, prompt services and dedication.

- The need for attitudinal change from reactive to proactive by Nigerian trade unions. In other words, we should not just be reacting to situations as they arise; we need to apprehend situations before they arise.

There is an urgent need to conduct an evaluation by Nigerian trade unions themselves of the assessment of Nigerian workers on the work of the trade unions. This will make it possible to know what Nigerian workers need, and how they want those needs to be satisfied. For the continuous strength, vitality and vibrancy of the trade union movement, there is need for continuous assessment by its members.

## VI. LABOUR LEGISLATIONS

Any legislation or law that wants to command respect and strict implementations should be just. Any unjust law risks the disdain of the public and will be difficult to enforce. Labour legislations should involve all those actors of Industrial Relations, Government, Employers and Workers, in the spirit of Tripartism, from conception and legislation to implementation. With the existence of the National Labour Advisory Council (NLAC) in Nigeria, where all the tripartite partners are well represented, all labour legislations should be processed by the NLAC before they are enacted by the legislative authority of the country. The furore caused both at home and abroad over Decree 4 of 1996 would have been avoided, and Nigeria would have been saved the embarrassment. What should be avoided in the future is what one of our proverbs says, "shaving somebody's head in his absence".

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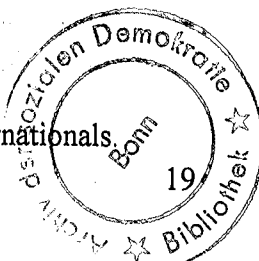
## VII. NIGERIAN TRADE UNIONS AND THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

As said earlier in this address, unity and solidarity are the essence, of the trade union movement. Nigerian trade unions have extended solidarity to trade unions outside the country and they themselves have been beneficiaries of trade union solidarity from abroad. During the apartheid era, Nigerian workers with the active support and encouragement of Nigerian trade unions willingly paid some 2.5% of their wages for several months as their contribution to the South African Solidarity Fund. They have sent solidarity support to other trade unions in distress and have played hosts to several delegations of trade unions from all over the world. They in turn, have benefitted from solidarity support of National and International Trade Union Organisations in their time of distress. Nigerian trade unions know and cherish trade union solidarity. Many Nigerian trade unions have benefitted from trade union education all over the world.

Prior to December 1975 when Nigeria used to have four National Trade Union Centres, namely:

- Nigerian Trade Union Congress (NTUC)
  - United Labour Congress of Nigeria (ULCN)
  - Nigerian Workers Council (NWC)
  - Labour Unity Front (LUF),
- three of them were affiliated to each of the three International Trade Union Organisations, i.e.
- World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU -founded in 1945),
  - International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU founded in 1949) and,
  - World Confederation of Labour (WCL)
- NTUC was affiliated to the WFTU
  - ULCN was affiliated to the ICFTU
  - NWC was affiliated to the WCL

It was only LUF that did not affiliate to any of the three Internationals.



Nigerian workers had a terrible experience of the role of some the three internationals played during our attempt to unite the Nigerian Trade Union Movement. It was the dogged determination of Nigerian workers to unite that triumphed over the dirty game played by some of them. It was because of the cold-war ideological politics that made the NLC both in 1975 and 1978 to include non-affiliation to International Trade Union Organisations, except the OATUU in its constitution.

Nigerian workers then and now believe in, and cherish unity and international solidarity. We believe in the need to have unity at the level of international trade unions in spite of some small difficulties still existing. We believe in unity in diversity. We know that there is more that unites workers than divides them all over the world. That is why Nigerian trade unions establish and develop good relations with trade unions all over the world from United State to Cuba, from Britain, Germany France to Russia, Czech and Slovak, from Asia to Latin America, from Israel to Japan, from China to Syria.

There has also been long standing good relationship between Nigerian trade unions and the trade secretariats of both the ICFTU and WFTU in particular. There has never been any moment when the Nigerian trade unions have been isolated. The diverse experience that has been gained by Nigerian trade unions and workers through associations and friendship with trade unions of all tendencies throughout the world, have greatly enriched us and our country.

In order to promote a better understanding of Nigerian workers and trade unions, let me advise international friends of Nigerian workers and trade unions what the Nigerian trade union movement would like to happen in the international trade union movement:-

1. Unity, just as the employer have only one Employers Organisation at the international level, i.e. International Organisation of Employers (I. O. E.);
2. The absence of hegemony;
3. The recognition of our diversity, culturally and otherwise.

4. The need for trade union democracy and transparency even at the international level .
5. Unity talks should involve all the trade unions organisations irrespective of ideology.

For the genuine seekers of international trade union unity, they can count on the Nigerian trade union movement.

### **VIII. TRADE UNIONS AND THE CHALLENGES OF THE FUTURE**

I have slightly changed the topic of this theme to highlight the challenges facing the Nigerian trade union movement in the future and the ways and means they can overcome them.

In my view, the first challenge is that of relevance. How can we make the Nigerian Trade Union Movement to be relevant? To be relevant, the Nigerian trade union movement has to be proactive and not reactive, as the case is at present. We need a "Trade Union Think Tank" to collect all the necessary economic, social, political and cultural data through questionnaires, interviews, seminars, workshops, etc. these data would then be processed and analysed by the "Think Tank" and presented to the leaders of the Nigeria Labour Congress for debate, decision and implementation.

The second challenge is that of human resource development and capacity building of the Nigerian trade union movement. To achieve this, there is the need for each affiliate of the NLC and the NLC itself to set aside 20% of their income for Workers Education and Research.

The third challenge is the wise investment of trade union funds in small and medium scale enterprises to create jobs and efficient services. To do this effectively, each union and the NLC itself should set up Economic Units or Departments and employ or train the experts that will advise on investment, good managers that will run trade union resources to establish Banks or Investment Companies, etc.

The fourth challenge is to link up and work closely with other organisations of the civil society, so as to strengthen the civil society and empower it to ensure accountability, social and economic justice, that will respect human and trade union rights, that will lead to sustainable development of the country.

This last challenge, if and when it is attained, will, forever make it impossible for any treasonable felons to take over power by force of arms.

The Nigerian trade union movement should be a force for change - change that will transform the lives of Nigerian peoples and Nigeria for better and for all time.