

The Media, Democracy and Trade Unionism in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) has, since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999 been the platform for the Nigerian people to query government policies, actions and inaction, not only for the Nigerian working class, but the entire Nigerian peoples. There are, generally five major substantive issues which are at the heart of the workers' quest in uniting. These issues include: wages and other material remuneration; working conditions; job security; working time and; respect and dignity. Trade unionism is the drive that quest for improvements in these substantive issues. Considering the situation of the Nigeria democratic government, trade unions as well as press freedom and media practice in Nigeria, this paper investigates the activities of the Trade Unions in Nigeria. It also examines the conditions of the media practice under Nigeria democracy vis-à-vis press freedom and fundamental human rights of freedom of expression and of the press.

Keywords: Media, Democracy, Trade Unionism, Challenges, Prospects.

1. Introduction

All over the world, trade unions had always represented the vanguard of the working class' interests against capitalist exploitations. In the contemporary times however, especially in the developing countries, trade unions have come to assume roles that transcend the traditional role of protection of workers' welfare and class liberation. For over a century and a half, trade unions have fought for the right to decent pay and conditions for men and women at their place of work and for improved social welfare through, for example, health care, education and social security. In Nigeria, trade unions fought against colonial rule and exploitation of the Nigerian State during the colonial period. The activities of trade unions, under the umbrella of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) during the military dictatorship of the late 1980s and the 1990s hastened the return to democratic rule in the country. Thus, trade unions are one of the most important social movements underpinning democracy. Workers' right to freedom of association and thus to take collective action lies at the core of all human rights because it creates the means by which all other rights are asserted and defended. It is a well known fact that the growth and development of any nation depends on the structures it has carved out for itself. In Nigeria, amidst the various arms of the government which has been working tirelessly to ensure the growth and sustenance of the Nigerian state is the emergence of trade unions.

However, democracy is said to be the most fashionable form of governance in the world. In all societies of the world today, the issue is not which political system is appropriate but rather when will society become democratised or fully democratic. The democratisation project is therefore, regarded as the age of civilization that every society should strive to attain rather than a political option among many others (Owolabi, 2003).

Democracy has thus been recognized as the only moral and legitimate way through which a society can be administered. Democracy, adequately understood, is a theory that sets some basic principles according to which a good government, whatever its form, must be run (Oluwole, 2003). Such principles include: justice, equity, freedom, liberty, accountability, openness and transparency in government. Indeed, effective democratic forms of governance rely on public participation, accountability and transparency. In his regard, democracy not only prescribes how political power should be acquired but also what to do with it or how it should be exercised. Governance is indeed good provided it is able to achieve the desired end of the state defined in terms of justice, equity, protection of life and property, enhanced participation, preservation of the rule of law and improved living standard of the populace. Eskor Toyo (1994), a decade ago critically pointed out that Nigeria had never experienced democracy. He argues that instead of the return to civil rule, we Nigerians find ourselves talking of return to democracy thus falling into presumption that a democracy had existed in Nigeria. The press, for instance, is incessantly drumming into our ears that "we are a democratic country" and bellowing that "in a democratic country like Nigeria", this or that should not happen. It thus, seems completely unaware of the cardinal fact that neither during colonial rule nor since independence has Nigeria been a democratic country. This argument is still forceful today. In a similar vein, Nwigwe (2003) contends that it would constitute a very difficult problem for political theorist to determine the classification of Nigeria's type of governments. It is not a monarchy, even though there are so many monarchs in the policy making positions. It is definitely not an aristocracy, because by its very definition, aristocracy means government by the best. It is of course not democracy because at least in its modern understanding, democracy is government of the people by the people

and for the people. What then is it? If we go by St Augustine's definition - government that Nigeria ever had could qualify as "Mafia Government". The word "mafia" within the paper's context means government infested with power drunken, self seeking, ideology-barren, orientation less operatives; usually selected by their kind and of course scarcely ever elected by the people.

However, the relevance of the media in democracy is undisputed. Media freedom is a fundamental political freedom, based on the right to free speech. The media sets the stage for public discussion, and undertakes to be a watchdog of government action. But media freedom is a flimsy good, and journalists are particularly exposed to threats. They operate at the frontlines of a battle for political power that is often waged with deadly weapons. Censorship, harassment and imprisonment of journalists and political control of news outlets are some of the most often cited dangers to a free media. Reports about killings of journalists frequently shock the public. Less often cited is the overall working and welfare situation of journalists. However, the freedom from fear and want is one of the four fundamental human freedoms that US President Franklin D. Roosevelt emphasized in 1941. Without it being granted, a country can have perfect media laws, it can establish codes of conducts for journalists and boost media plurality – all this is fundamentally endangered if journalists operate under conditions of fear and deprivation.

2. Historical Overview Of Nigeria Mass Media

The Nigerian media is arguably the most vibrant in African. The country is also reputed to have pioneered Television and radio broadcasting in Africa with the setting up of the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation (WNBC) and Western Nigeria Television (WNTV) as far back as 1957. The history of the Nigerian mass media began with the setting up of redistribution centres by the British colonial government to rebroadcast programmes of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) for the enjoyment of Her Majesty, the Queen's employees in the West African coast. Additionally, newspaper publication began with the setting up of the 'Iwe Iroyin' a vernacular newspaper by the Presbyterian mission in Abeokuta in 1859 by Reverend Henry Townsend. This was followed by newspapers like the Anglo African, Lagos Times, Gold Coast Colony Advertiser, Observer and Lagos Weekly Record etc. established by educated Africans like Robert Campbell, Richard Beale Blaize, John Payne Jackson etc.

Dimkpa (1997) confirms that:

"The second key owners of the media were foreigners who immigrated to Nigeria during the colonial days. These foreigners were mostly Sierra Leoneans and Liberians who were earlier exposed to western education before Nigerians" (pp.19-20).

This group of newspapers were then followed by newspapers like the West African Pilot, Daily Times and the Nigerian Tribune all published by Nigerians like Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo etc. By 1937, no fewer than 51 newspapers had been established in Nigeria signifying the emergence of the first indigenous industrial enterprise. Most of "these newspapers" Dare (2000) observes:

"Were founded by men in all sorts and conditions of distress, people who according to Obafemi Awolowo ... himself a member of the second generation of pioneers of the press were regarded as the 'flotsam and jetsam' of the growing community of Nigeria's intelligentsia" (p.13).

Today, the Nigerian media landscape is crowded with scores of newspapers, magazines, radio, television and the new media. According to Kawonise (2012), there are presently:

"Not less than thirty (30) newspapers published daily; the weekly magazines – the serious ones, are about fifteen (15), while the soft sells are not less than fifty (50). Nigeria currently has more than 150 radio and television stations publicly and privately owned. Five (5) of the television stations are on the satellite and are thus watched beyond the shores of the country. Quite a number of the television and radio stations that broadcast on the terrestrial space are available online and could be accessed wherever there is broadband Internet access".

3. Media Rights and Practice in Nigeria

In almost every country, there is always a tension between the level of freedom which the media should (or is allowed to) enjoy and what duties and responsibilities the media should have. Each country takes a different approach in balancing these tensions, depending on several factors, including its political system and values, journalistic traditions, social values, culture, etc. How well or how badly a country balances these tensions can have implications for press freedom in that country (Edetaen, 2010).

In some countries, especially those with weak political cultures, the government may decide to aggressively regulate the conduct of media professionals. Such regulation can take different forms and in many cases, the attempts to regulate media behaviour frequently results in violation of journalists' rights, press freedom and freedom of expression in the most extreme manner. In other countries where the political culture and the rule of law situation are strong, the media regulates itself and media freedom is generally better respected. For instance, Nigeria's constitution guarantees everyone the freedom to say, write or publish anything he likes provided it does not contain any blasphemous, defamatory, obscene or seditious words. But this constitutional guarantee may be overridden. Nigerian mass media policies have been directed mainly toward the unification of the country, and to a lesser degree, toward the education of the masses. Thus, the present leaders have often said that they do not necessarily see themselves as censors of the Nigerian press: "All we are doing is to harness our limited resources of capital and manpower to our best advantage and if we can establish a credible and meaningful television network to the benefit of the people,... we are doing the right thing" (Edetaen, 2010). The Nigerian Federal Government has laid down journalism as a profession and is so risky that our forebears under colonialism had prison as second home. For instance, Chief Anthony Eromosele Enahoro at 21 in 1945 became the youngest editor when he was appointed to edit the Southern Nigerian Defender. At 22, he was convicted for sedition against the colonial governor, Sir Bernard Bourdillon and sentenced to nine months imprisonment. Two years later, he was sentenced to three years imprisonment for giving a speech in Warri during which he told African policemen to disobey orders to shoot African workers if they went on strike.

Things did not get better for the journalist after independence with the Preventive Detention and Newspaper Act of the First Republic. General Yakubu Gowon's regime was quite intolerant of the media; amongst its casualties were Minere Amakiri who was beaten and had his head shaven with broken bottles for writing a moderately critical article on then Rivers State governor, Alfred Diette-Spiff on his birthday. There was also the case of Segun Sowemimo who was battered by soldiers and died of the injuries he sustained. His offence was that he was carrying out his journalistic duties at a gathering in Ibadan where the governor was unwinding. The telegram announcing his death which read simply; "The Man Died," became the title of Wole Soyinka's prison memoirs.

Under President Shehu Shagari, media houses were opened and closed like daily markets, but at least, journalists like Dele Giwa had their days in court. Under the Generals Muhammadu Buhari, Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha regimes, journalists went through hell. Under Abacha things became so bad that some had to flee into exile. One of them, Dapo Olorunyomi was then with The News Magazine. Before he fled, he had to go into hiding.

One of the saddest episodes in Nigeria media history is the loss of Krees Imodibe of the Guardian and Tayo Awotunsin of the Champion Newspapers who were slaughtered while covering the Liberian Civil War. It is regrettable that their deaths were avoidable; they had been sent to cover a brutal war where no prisoners were taken with little funds. They had all the time to escape as the war drew near, but they had no funds! Consequently, NUJ provided that "The employer shall take out a life insurance policy worth at least five times the journalist's gross annual salary. This shall cover damages, injuries or death that may occur while the journalist is carrying out his professional duties.

4. Press Freedom In Nigerian Democracy: A Reality Or Idealism

Ironically, though the succeeding post colonial administration inherited the fear, suspicious and hatred for labour from its predecessor, trade union activities were regarded by government as destabilizing to the interest of the state. Hence, right from the First Republic (1960 – 1966), the posture of government has been to regard trade union with suspicion and therefore took various measures to recapitulate the unions. This deliberate action of the Nigeria government has resulted into state intervention in trade union movement in what is regarded as the principle of "guided democracy" (Olugboye, 1996).

A significant instance of trade union activities towards enhancement of workers welfare under democratic role was in 1981 under the regime of Alhaji Shehu Shagari when trade unions successfully mobilize their members for general strike which forced the government to increase the monthly minimum wage to N125.00. The prevailing democratic atmosphere during this period enabled the unions to pursue its goal of improving the working lives of members through struggle for wage increase. During the current political dispensation, trade unions have had cause to mobilize members to embark on concerted actions aimed at resisting unpopular government programmes. For instance, since 1999 when democratic rule was restored in the country, the Federal Government has severally increased the pump price of petroleum products. On each of these instances, the Central Labour Congress had to mobilize the workers for strike against the policy. However, this did not go well with the government which responded by enacting what is now popularly known as anti-Labour Legislation – the labour bill of 2005. The law among other things seeks to decentralize the labour union in the country.

Article 22 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria states the obligations of the mass media: “The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives (contained in this chapter) and highlight the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people”. While this confers on the press a role in ensuring the accountability of the government to the governed, neither the government nor the press need be in an unnecessary and unyielding adversarial relationship with each other.

The media's role in the struggle for democracy in Nigeria for which scores of media professionals and organizations suffered severe repressions in the hands of the military is generally acknowledged. The critical issue now appears to be how the media can be positioned to effectively play its role of a watchdog, holding public officers accountable to the people, providing the citizens with information about the programme, policies and activities of the government, subjecting those policies, programmes and activities to scrutiny, exposing corruption, misconduct and incompetence in government, and serving as a true “market place of ideas”, by providing a platform for debate on public issues. To achieve these ends, the press must be seen, and must itself perform, as an agent of development. Where needed, the press must be supported through subsidies available to social services and/or left free to pursue its goals through commercial approach.

The problems which limit the Nigerian media's ability to perform these functions are multi-faceted. They include the problem of credibility with its audience, the nature of ownership and management of media establishment which does adequately reflect the ethnic and gender diversity of the country, the lack of editorial independence in the media, particularly publicly funded media, the conditions of service of media personnel, the economic environment under which the media operates in Nigeria, the social environment under which it operates, particularly the high level of illiteracy, the inadequacy of training of journalists and other media personnel, the lack of or inadequacy of the technological infrastructure at the disposal of the media, the inadequacy of investments in the media, etc.

5. Trade Unionism In Nigeria: A Synopsis

Trade unions are organizations of workers who come together with the aim of bettering their lots. There are, generally speaking, five major substantive issues which are at the heart of the workers' quest in uniting. These issues include: wages and other material remuneration; working conditions; job security; working time and; respect and dignity. Trade unionism is the drive, that quest for improvements in these substantive issues. This drive precedes even the formation of trades unions. Thus, while trade unionism might be the “business” of trades unions, it is actually a working class phenomenon, which precedes and even leads to the formation of trades unions themselves. Trade unionism is the natural tendency of workers to economic self-defence.

Trades unions have become key components of most modern societies be such societies democratic or totalitarian, advanced capitalist or backward post-colonial. The nature of trade unions and trade unionism are however quite different, even in otherwise similar societies. The United Kingdom and the United States for example could be considered as similar as societies could be (being the leading “liberal market economies” in the world), but they have quite different types of trade unions and approaches to trades unionism. Coming closer home, there are specific features of trade unionism and trades unions even in the closest of systems (e.g. Nigeria and Ghana).

There are however some universal threads which define trades unions as a particular form of social organisation and trade unionism as a particular form of working class phenomenon. The explicit definition of these categories of concern (i.e. trades union and trade unionism) stem from conceptions, of the broader categories of industrial relations and society. The practice of trade unionism equally has been largely influenced by the conceptions of what a trade union is, or at least should aim to be. This presentation is aimed at equipping trade union activists, emerging as work place representatives with a broad perspective of the contending conceptions and views of trades unions and trade unionism in general.

Trade unions as represented by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) in the contemporary times have been the subject of considerable research and commentary in terms of its nature, role, functionality, and effectiveness in ensuring the welfare of the Nigerian workers and the protection of her rights in industrial disputes with the public and private labour employers (Aiyede, 2004). The apparent puzzle of its longevity and continued survival despite attempts to emasculate and undermine it by succeeding regimes especially the military has often depicted it as the proverbial cat with nine lives. Despite the founded fear of its collapse into oblivion or disintegration into autonomous parts as a result of the mounted challenges confronting not only the organizational structure, but also the mechanism of its operations, the organisation has demonstrated a high degree of elasticity and resourcefulness in domestic industrial relations as well as political sagacity in the Nigerian political landscape.

5.1 Origin and Development of Trade Unions in Nigeria

The emergence of trade union movement in Nigeria could be traced to the pre-colonial period. At this

time, there existed guilds, mutual aid groups and professional or occupational craft unions all of which function to play the role of trade union. However, these associations are not in the modern sense of its full fledged trade union rather, most of them are merely workers association (Otobo, 1987, p.12).

The inception of modern trade unions in Nigeria could be said to coincide with colonialism. Consequently, the first set of trade unions were modelled after British unions. Unlike the situation in most developed countries, trade union preceded industrialization in Nigeria. The organized trade union movement in Nigeria dates back to 1912 when the workers in the Southern Nigerian Civil Service under the then colonial administration organized themselves into workers' representatives. This then became known as the Nigeria Civil Service Union (NCSU) in 1914. This became a pivot with which workers in other sectors began the agitation for the formation of Trade Unions before and after independence in 1960. At this period, trade union could not take the pattern of radical organization because of the paternalistic nature of colonial government which is the largest employer of public labour. Other unions which emerged during this period were the Nigeria Native Staff Union (NNSU), Nigerian Union of Railway men, Nigerian Mechanics Union and the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT).

It was in 1938 that the Trade Unions Ordinance was enacted which provided legal backing for trade unions. By 1975 during the military regime of General Murtala Mohammed, Trade Union in the country has risen to over 1,000 which include Mushroom Unions. In 1976, the Federal Government established a commission of inquiry into the activities of the various unions and appointed an administrator to administer the unions and come up with a structure for the proper administration of the unions. This became necessary as the Unions were polarized into ideological divide which was creating problems in the country.

Towards the end of 1977, these Unions were restructured into 42 along industrial line. The government also insisted on the formation of a labour centre as there were various multiple centres. In February 1978, the Nigeria Labour Congress was formed and inaugurated. The then 42 Industrial Unions became affiliates of the Nigeria Labour Congress with a legal backing of Trade Union (Amendment) Decree 22 of 1978. Several reasons have been given to explain the apparent late arrival of trade unionism in Nigeria.

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- Limited wage employment: Since the largest proportions of the citizens are engaged in the informal work sector, the few wage earners are colonial employers and these are restricted to the colonial officers as well as related parastatals.
- Low level of economic activities which limited the recruitment into the formal economy and hence membership of trade union.
- The repressive colonial labour policy also contributed to the late entry of effective trade unionism in Nigeria. The colonial administration regarded trade unions as destabilizing activities. Consequently, it took measures to discourage its employees from membership of these groups.
- Low consciousness of the worker as to the need of unionism.
- Absence of legal backing also impeded the early realization of Trade Union in Nigeria.

However, with time these obstacles were overcome and this paved the way for the emergence of trade unionism in the country. For instance, the emergence of small indigenous and large multi-national companies broke the monopoly of public sector employment in the country. The influence of neighbouring countries like Sierra Leone and Ghana also helped to boost the tempo of trade unionism in Nigeria. This factor for instance led to the enactment of Trade Union Ordinance in 1938 which gave legal backing to trade unions in the country; the Second World War also played important role in the growth of trade union in Nigeria. The war brought untold hardship to the workers and the general public in form of acute shortage of essential commodities, rise in prices, stagnant wage structure (Otobo, 1987, p. 21). These problems pushed many workers into joining trade unions which was seen as the only forum for improving their bad economic condition. Union agitation during the period led to the introduction of Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) as well as the first general strike in the country in 1945 with the participation of about 42,000 workers (Fajana, 1995, p.146). The war heightened the socio-political consciousness of the workers. The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) was formally constituted as the only national federation of trade unions in the country in 1978. Before then, four labour centres existed. These are Nigeria Trade Union Congress (NTUC), Labour Unity Front (LUF), United Labour Congress (ULC) and Nigeria Workers Council (NWC). The emergence of the NLC ended decades of rivalry and rancor involving the four centres and unions affiliated to them. The unions, numbering over 1,000 were also restructured into 42 industrial unions. The organization has had a chequered history, surviving two instances of dissolution of its national organs and consequent appointment of state administrators. The first was in 1988 under the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida. Congress' opposition to the anti-people Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) incensed the military administration to take over the NLC. The second military intervention was in 1994 during the regime of General Sani Abacha, whose government also became fed up with the labour movement's agitation for the restoration of democracy. Like the initial case, the military government dissolved NLC's National Executive Council and appointed a Sole Administrator. The same treatment was met

to the two unions in the oil and gas industry National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) and Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN).

However, the administrators apparently added a further brief which plundered the finances of Congress and the two unions. The dissolution exemplified the travails of Congress, its leadership, affiliates and state councils under military rule. Arbitration, prolonged and unlawful detention of labour leaders, invasion and disruption of union meetings, seminars and other activities of Congress and its components by security forces and a vicious anti-labour campaign by the state generally marked the period. The military also invoked its legislative prerogatives to unleash all manner of legislation to check the activities of unions. For instance, under General Abacha, a decree that banned a section of the movement from holding leadership position in Congress came into effect. However, with the death of General Abacha, the unions reclaimed Congress, culminating in a National Delegates Conference held on January 29, 1999. The leadership led the NLC from 1999 - February 2007 with another delegate conference was held on February 2007, the current leadership was elected - Abdulwahed Ibrahim Omar – President.

From the colonial period up till the contemporary times, trade unionism in Nigeria has combined industrial agitation and political activism in varying degrees dictated by the political gladiators and the exigencies of the times. Unlike in other parts of Africa, the Nigerian workers are highly organised as a result of the existence of a strong trade union consciousness (NLC, 2012).

6. Trade Unionism In Nigeria Journalism

There was a lacuna in the history of Nigerian Union of Journalists because between 1961 and 1969, the Union's name was struck out from the list of the registered Trade Unions. This was because the Union failed to operate as a trade union. The Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) was founded on March 15, 1955 in Lagos, the then Capital City of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It has presently a registered constitution with the Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity. NUJ has recorded membership of 27,000 made up of 21,000 males and 6,000 females going by the 2009 headcount. Membership is drawn from the print and electronic media, wire service, public relations, book-work and freelance. The NUJ operates State Councils (branches) presently in the thirty six states of the federation and Abuja (federal Capital Territory). It has 8 zones and about 740 Chapels (branches) in media establishments where membership is drawn.

The union also have affiliate bodies like Nigeria Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ), Nigerian Guild of Editors and the Sports Writers Association of Nigeria (SWAN). The birth of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) under a six-man inaugural Executive Council at the premises of St. Paul's School, Breadfruit Street, Lagos marked the Zenith of years of a silent revolution for the actualization of a common front by some early nationalists who formed the core of a call for an independent Nigeria, via the power of the pen. In earlier times, such struggle that "Britain must go" had manifested in the expressed opinions, appearing in the now extinct newspapers including the Anglo African, The Eagle, Lagos Weekly Times, The Lagos Chronicles, The Lagos Standard, Lagos Weekly Record, The African Messenger, The Lagos Daily News, West African Pilot and others. In the home front, some writers who also, had had a taste of Western education and in particular in the field of journalism were determined to push for the struggle for commensurate wages. While in Britain in search of the golden fleece, the likes of Chief Olu Oyedanya then a member of the London Institute of Journalism had formed the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), Britain and on his return to Nigeria in 1954, he joined the colonial government as an Information Officer, spearheading the formation of the Nigeria Union of Journalists and became a member of the premier Executive Council and first Secretary, in 1955. Towing the policy line of the early leaders of the Union and in concert with established rules governing all industrial Unions globally, the NUJ has a working constitution, which remains the encyclopedia of its rules including the election of its National leaders.

7. Challenges and Prospects of Journalists Unionism in Nigeria

The Council not recognizing the N.U.J. as a trade union, but rather as a professional body means that the union cannot declare a trade dispute. The N.U.J. objected to the terms of the decree emphasizing that: (a) the decree does not give it the right to register its members under the council and (b) journalists are open to victimization, unjust trial and imprisonment. With 18 members of the Council and only four forming a quorum, any erring Nigerian journalist could be easily deregistered by a make-believe quorum formed by the government. Under the Council, Nigerian journalists would be required to disclose their sources of information in a very dangerous practice which could stifle free flow of information. Another attempt to restrain the press was made in 1982 by the National Assembly with the passage of the Electoral Act in 1982. The Act was designed to control government-owned media houses three months before and one month after the 1983 general election. Although the Federal Government has not established any clear-cut policy for the Nigerian mass media, some of the unfriendly attitudes most political leaders in Nigeria have toward the nation's press have inhibited the freedom of

the press. Before the Federal Government took over the ownership of New Nigerian, acquired 60 percent shares of the Daily Times and became the sole owner of the nation's radio and television stations, each state government was using the press as a political weapon. The states were once very autonomous. The state political leaders saw the press as a tool for stabilizing their power and also exercising almost equally strong powers as the federal government.

However, press freedom in Africa, and Nigeria in particular, should be viewed from the perspective of the citizenry. Press freedom in Nigeria should not be isolated from other aspects of national development. Majority of Nigerians are poor and most of them are illiterate and ignorant. And one would ask: What does press freedom mean to a poor, ignorant and illiterate Nigerian who hardly feeds once a day? What does press freedom mean to the rural Nigerian who has no radio or TV? The urban immigrant who lives in squalor will rather value a moderate shelter and a means of livelihood than press freedom and democracy.

The basis of the existence of press freedom in Nigeria should be the provision of basic needs for all Nigerians. It is baseless and meaningless to talk of press freedom in a multi-ethnic state such as Nigeria which can explode at any misconstrued piece of misinformation. Thus instead of fighting one another, the Nigerian government and the Nigerian press should see themselves as partners whose main objective is to provide Nigerians with such basic needs as food, water, shelter, light, good roads and good education. The present western-type reporting system is increasingly creating bitterness between the press and government. There are basically four levels workers and employers can carry out negotiations and agreements. The first is at the enterprise or company level. This however is uncommon because with the advent of industry-based unionism, bargaining is often done at the industrial level. The second is at industry level; these are industry-wide negotiations and agreements. However, some pragmatism comes into play here; in some industries such as the banks, insurance and financial institutions, room is given for the insurance arm which may not be as viable or profitable as the bank arm to pay less. The mass media is an industry but it has the challenge that it does not have a central employer or employer association. The print media has its Newspapers Proprietors Association (NPAN) while the electronic media has the Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON), but the sorry state of the Nigerian journalist is not as a result of this; rather, it is due largely to the general ill health of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) for over two decades. The third is bargaining at the state level. This may be controversial since labour is on the exclusive list. However, in practice, state governments and their employees sometimes bargain wages and allowances which might be lower than that at the Federal level. For instance, while it is agreed by the Federal Government, Labour and employers that a new Minimum Wage bill of N18, 000 is to be sent to the National Assembly, but some state governments increased wages in the state by any percent of their choice.

The struggle to ensure a standard service condition for journalists has been on long before this generation. As earlier stated, in 1987 the George Izobo leadership inaugurated a committee to produce a basic Condition of Service for the media. Unfortunately, the will to follow through the process was lacking. But some journalists in Lagos decided to use it for negotiations with individual employers, however, in the absence of a collective effort this could not spread. Then there was a self serving campaign that the NUJ should divest itself of its trade union status and retain only the professional garb. This was mainly pushed by journalists who had attained positions of authority in management and did not want a strong union to challenge their position or decisions. Given the reality that journalists are workers who need to put food on the family table, this campaign was soon defeated.

Then over a decade later, the leadership of Smart Adeyemi resurrected the ghost and declared NUJ as being only a professional body. That leadership also tried its hands on all sorts of schemes to circumvent the reality that there is no basic condition of service for journalists. This included a Journalism Enhancement Bill. At this time, journalists in a number of organizations were not paid regularly. It was worse in the electronic media where in some cases wages were not paid for up to twenty six months which was later handled to a greater extent by the NUJ. But along the line, that leadership of the NUJ developed cold feet, and journalists suffered. Some employers in this unenviable league buckled under and journalists watched their salary arrears go down the drain. But the NUJ was not the only journalists union that had failed to secure basic standards; quite sadly this has been the case in most parts of Africa for over half a century after "the wind of change" swept through the continent bringing in its wake political independence. To tackle this problem, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) along with other interested organizations in November 2004 sponsored a forum of experts to produce a Standard Condition of Service that would serve as a model for the region.

8. Challenges And Prospects Of Trade Unionism In Nigeria

One big external issue that appears to have constrained the capacity of unions is the moribund ministry of Labour, Employment and Productivity. It is moribund in terms of injecting new initiatives that have capacity of strengthening the regulatory framework for the administration of labour and employment relations in the country. Similarly, its officials, like the unions, are also living in the Taylorian age and therefore not able to address

challenges associated with the rise of modern knowledge-driven work organisations.

With the emergence of civilian government, a critical challenge facing the unions is that of adjusting to the requirement of democratic practices. This issue would appear to be quite desolate, particularly when taken in context of the internal operations of the trade unions both at national and state levels. What is very glaring is that internal union administrations are undemocratic both at the level of the NLC, affiliates, national and state levels. This may be contestable in the trade unions largely on account of instinct for self-defence. However, it needs to be appreciated that democracy is about formal recourse to structures and ensuring that decisions of structures are complied with.

Admitted, there have been some efforts, resulting in some amendments to the structures of the NLC during the 2007 and 2011 delegates' conferences. The amendments did not address the bigger challenges facing the NLC and the Nigerian trade union movement. Those who seek to engage the discussion of challenges before the NLC around personalities would ignore these vital realities. Having raised these issues, one thing that should be emphasised is that the capacity of the NLC leadership to address some or all of the challenges would be determined by how it set out to approach key organisational questions. A major determinant would be the capacity of the secretariat and its officers who are more concerned with negotiating power issues rather than focusing on developing broad strategic agenda proposals. This is because in reality the powers of the secretariat was greatly reduced both by constitutional review and on account of having limited capacity to assert itself in the face of strong and demanding political leadership since 2000. The process that produced a weak secretariat took varying forms, from formal to subtle and even crude but informal strategies. As a result, there were distractive consequences, including usual leadership personality conflicts and time loss.

One issue that might be very disadvantageous has to do with the fact that there is very little focus on the internal workings of the NLC and the trade unions, except when a national strike is looming. It will therefore be important that if truly we believe in the potency of the union movement to the process of socio-economic and political transformation of our society, we need to subject the internal workings of the NLC and the trade unions to greater national focus and in the process contribute to strengthening organisational capacity.

These are challenges that have been with the NLC and its affiliates since 2000. Given the challenges facing workers in the country, the desirability for a strong and vibrant trade union movement cannot be over-emphasised. In order to have a strong and vibrant trade union movement, there is the need for selfless leadership. Looking at today's leaders of Nigerian trade unions and their conduct, selflessness is largely a gimmick. Many leaders of trade unions deploy strike as a means of self-promotion and relate with employers and government based on strategies for self-enrichment rather than improving the welfare of workers. The consequence is inability to negotiate or review workers' conditions of service. We today have a generation of leaders of Nigerian trade unions who may not have led any industry negotiations and therefore signed industry agreement. We have some trade union leaders with poor negotiation skills. In the midst of all these is the rising profile of the Trade Union Congress (TUC). Unlike in the past when NLC was first consideration to bipartite consultations between government and Nigerian trade unions, TUC today enjoys considerable recognition by the Federal Government. This is largely influenced by relative stability in the TUC vis-à-vis leadership crisis and threats of breakaway in the NLC. If the trade union movement is to measure up to public expectations in the country, there is the urgent need for the NLC to do the following.

Firstly, quickly restore sanity in the workings of the organisations through ensuring that the dispute over the sacking its general secretary, John Odah, is resolved amicably and fairly. Secondly, the leadership crisis that has resulted in some NLC affiliates threatening to register a rival labour centre under the integrity group should be addressed. There is the need to provide a level playing field for all affiliates. The Omar leadership has registered some achievements with the increase in the number of NLC affiliates from 29 to 42 now. However, this achievement will be dented, if not completely cancelled, if a breakaway is allowed to happen. Thirdly, the issue of organisational culture and practice needs to be taken very seriously by the NLC. The present dominant attitude of union leaders whereby interest of union members is compromised is unacceptable. Selfless services to workers should drive the agenda of all trade unions and to that extent facilitate collective bargaining and grievance handling with employers and government. Fourthly, the challenge for capacity development, more than ever before, is becoming more apparent today. Union leaders display crude arrogance rather than superior argument and knowledge. Some easily resort to blackmailing employers and government rather than mobilising members. This is a reflection of the knowledge gap of the leadership of unions (Uviehara, 2001).

Also, there is the need to narrow the current boundary between NLC and TUC. Given the good relations that exist between the two organisations and their leadership, there is the need to start exploring unity agenda. The question will be: unity to what end? It should be unity for a stronger and democratic trade union movement; a movement in which the leadership will be subordinated to the interest of members; a movement with efficient functional structures and competent personnel; and a movement that can play leading role in our democratic struggles as a nation. These are challenges which the current leaders of NLC and the Nigerian trade unions need

to address.

9. Globalization as a Threat to Trade Unionism in Nigeria

This globalization is a challenge for workers and their trade unions. There is the pressure put on governments to deregulate and increasingly, to abdicate their role. A nation-centered system with national social and economic policies helped to create a degree of social justice and economic equity. This nationally based approach has come under severe pressure. Due to the diminished role of national institutions, there has been a certain shift towards the world level, but without an international framework and institutions in place that can deal effectively with issues of justice and equity. An additional challenge for trade unions is the changing nature of the employer. In a world where capital is much more mobile than workers, different forms of business organization and relationships have been created which can shift employment and threaten collective bargaining relationships, including the introduction of new management methods, sometimes “best practice”, but too often “worst practice”, and the threat to relocate to countries with lower social or environmental standards and no independent trade unions. New forms of work organization have been established as well as changes in the employment relationship. A long list of examples can be given such as outsourcing, subcontracting, contract labour and various other forms of precarious employment.

Globalization has also helped to extend the market and the responsibility for goods produced under extreme forms of exploitation such as child labour or forced labour. Because of these changes, one of the fundamental goals of organized labour, taking workers’ rights out of competition by establishing fundamental common standards, is under direct attack. Even with the emergence of corporate social responsibility as the latest fashion, competitiveness and flexibility are still the main objectives for most of the enterprises in the global environment. They put workers into increasingly fierce competition with each other, put pressure on social safety nets, and, at times, effectively undermine workers’ rights that were won through many years of struggle.

With the advent of globalization, there had been a decrease of trade union density, increase of the informal sector (most of the workers employed in the informal sector are women and children), increase of a typical forms of labour (contract labour), global attack against workers’ rights, strikes repressed by employers or the police, trade unionists harassed, arrested, detained, killed or “disappeared”. Some employees were dismissed because of their trade union activities, unequal pay where women are paid anything between 10-50% less than men for doing similar job or different job of equal value while numerous women and children becomes victims of cross-border human trafficking, and fundamental human rights compromised.

10. Conclusion

Nigerian trade union movement has a long history beginning from the colonial era to the present day. The post-colonial administration was seen to inherit the anti-labour policy of the colonial era. The military regime was considered to demonstrate harsher attitude towards trade union activities than the civilian administrations. However, both political environments were seen to pose serious challenges to trade union movement in the country. At the international sphere, the impact of globalization has allowed trade bodies internationally based to have affiliates in other countries. Also, it employs labour from different countries into their work force (though it is sometimes a form of cheap labour). Undoubtedly, trade unions represent one of the few era through what workers in developing country like Nigeria can articulate for the improvement of their work lives. It then becomes imperative for the organization to position itself well for it to meet these challenges. This may require reorganization of its structure, paving way for increasing democratization aggressive policy of and mobilization for active participation of more members in union activities.

11. Recommendations

In the course of this research, the following recommendations were made:

1. To effectively perform its role, the Media must be independent. This does not mean absence of government involvement but rather that the Media should be given the freehand to perform within the ethics of the profession even when they are owned by private individuals.
2. On its parts, the Media must operate in a responsible manner by exercising a strong sense of fair play and a deep respect for truth in the handling of news and opinions. To maintain its independence while still being responsible, the media must operate an effective system of self-censorship.
3. The Media in Nigeria must assist in building and maintaining an environment conducive to democracy in the country. It must promote free choice of leadership; respect for the rule of law by both the rulers and the ruled; social justice and equity as well as respect for human rights. In carrying out this role, the media must not be merely a “mirror” of society passively reporting events. They must act as the watchdog of the citizenry and the instigators of positive change.
4. Media and democracy go hand-in-hand. A viable and articulate press is essential for the creation and

sustenance of democracy. The media has an important role in democracies to assist in entrenching a political culture that allows for orderly succession, especially of civilian-to-civilian administration.

5. Since democracy is about popular participation, the media must play the role of providing a link between the rulers and the ruled articulating and constructively criticizing the policies and goals of the former, and disseminating the views and opinions of the later.
6. Public officials must grant the media access to public information as a constitutional obligation. Any laws restricting such access or likely to restrict media performance in general must be resisted.
7. The media should adopt a more positive approach to newsgathering. It should take greater pains to investigate reports and should avoid the temptation to regard as gospel truth whatever comes from top government officials who should always be held accountable for their actions. Such accountability must include being asked to account for unfulfilled promises made to the people.
8. Media ownership is a public trust. This means that whoever owns a media organization does so on behalf of the people and should therefore not use it to destroy any individual or group. This also means that the government must stop its practice of regarding the media as mere propaganda instruments to disseminate only information favoured or favourable to it.

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