



THE NIGERIA LABOUR CONGRESS AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (1993 – 2000)

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Abstract:

The paper was written to reveal the complex multiplicity of challenges confronted with the Nigeria Labour Congress in the fulfilment of its mandate as workers and popular organization. It also showed the dynamics of the emergent international political economy that has a profound effect on the Nigerian context. The effective condition that has given impetus to the ascendancy of the anti-worker and anti-union managerial ethics that create grace to the bottom of Labour standard was observed. The paper examined the collective bargaining as the most Rational process of determining and reviewing the terms and conditions of employment and how the process manifests the power relationship between the employers and the trade unions. The Congress believes that the people must remain both the means and the ends of economic developments. In this context, the national development priority focuses on the protection and creation of employment. This paper concludes that the possibility of labour to achieve its various objectives, guarantee unity and organizational vibrancy depend on how it becomes a force in the socio-economic development of Nigeria, which requires good governance based on internal democracy. Nigerian Labour Congress as the leading organization of the working population, cannot afford to be alienated from this process. It was recommended among others that Nigerian Labour Congress should use international solidarity to protect the rights and gains of the Nigerian workforce, to strengthen trade organization in the sub-region, continentally and in the wider international level.

Keywords: collective bargaining, Nigerian labour congress, socio-economic transformation, social security

1. Introduction

The Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) continues to be confronted with a complex multiplicity of challenges in the fulfilment of its mandate as a workers and popular

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organization. These challenges are defined increasingly by the constellation of economic, technological and political changes, which have radically reconfigured the world under the hegemony of capital. The dynamics of the emergent international political economy has a profound effect on the Nigerian context. The country is locked more and more in the vice-grip of international Finance Capital, unleashing a political and policy regime that elevates the interest of capital over the interests of the people. For instance, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) policy and its conditionality under the overwhelming influence of neo-liberal theory, the Nigerian state is retreating rapidly from productive activities and the social sectors. This has led to massive loss of jobs and worsening of the human development situation, especially poverty and inequality. Although Nigeria has always been under capitalist rule, what distinguishes the current new liberal offensive from previous liberal strategies is its dramatic re-definition of the role of the state and the legitimization of the market and private capital as the exclusive drawer of development.

This is the objective condition that has given impetus to the ascendancy of the anti-worker and anti-union managerial ethics that create grace to the bottom of Labour standard. For the Nigeria Labour Congress the challenges are clear. Its policy is, we must continue to rebuild and re-tool our organization to operate effectively as a traditional defender of workers, working family and the working people. Today, NLC is also unarguably the most influential non-state actor in Nigeria. It must continue to sustain the capacity to articulate and defend national interests in relation to the once aught of reactionary forces author international patrons.

However, the policy document is prepared to lend greater clarity and consistency to the work of NLC as a worker's organization concerned about improvements in the world of work, as a federation of the working people and as a major player in the Nigerian polity, economy and society. The policy document encapsulates the challenges that confront organized Labour in the area of socio-economic transformation, labour and politics, trade Union democracy, ethics, and leadership, industrial relations and organizing, collective bargaining and social dialogue, gender equity, education and international solidarity. The idea is to ensure that the workers get value for their membership and that the congress and its affiliates develop the skills, Democratic inclusiveness and overall effectiveness necessary for defending workers and intervening effectively in wider democratic struggles. Therefore, the main strength of the policy document is its simplicity and the rather detailed exposition on what is to be done, why it must be done and how it must be done.

2. Policy on Collective Bargaining

According to Rose (2008), the term collective bargaining was originated by Webb and Webb to describe the process of agreeing terms and conditions of employment through representatives of employers (and possibly their association) and representatives of employees (and probably their unions). Rose maintained that collective bargaining is

the process whereby representatives of employers and employees jointly determine and regulate decisions pertaining to both substantive and procedural matters within the employment relationship. Collective bargaining is seen as the most rational process of determining and reviewing the terms and conditions of employment. The process manifests the power relationship between the employers and the trade unions.

However, collective bargaining goes beyond the process of negotiation between unions and employers on issues directly affecting conditions of employment. It is also a means of limiting unilateral decisions and actions by employers and governments. Strong, stable, well focused and democratically run unions expand the scope of collective bargaining and thereby strengthen industrial democracy. The roles of the NLC in collective bargaining are:

- a) Providing support data for negotiations through research;
- b) Continually reviewing the national minimum wages and ensuring that its negotiation involves broader consultations with all state holders;
- c) Influencing Labour legislation;
- d) Ensuring acceptance of collective agreement in all sectors of the economy;
- e) Intervening in industrial disputes with the aim of strengthening its affiliation;
- f) Enhancing the bargaining capacity of affiliates;
- g) Ensuring adequate protection for negotiators against possible victimization;
- h) Ensuring that collective bargaining is gender sensitive and it serves to enhance the interest of women;
- i) Ensuring that collective bargaining take into account the need to protect industry and work organization.

A large number of Nigerians in the wage sector are still not unionized. This may be owing to the following factors:

- a) Hospitality on the part of employers (as in the cases of the need generation financial situations: domestic airlines/road transport operators and most indigenous entrepreneurs engaged in various pursuits);
- b) Legal restrictions (prohibition of some employee's civil establishment's unionization);
- c) Inability of some unions to effectively unionize their potential members.

However, a large number of unionized workers particularly in the public sector are covered by formal and well-structured mechanical bargaining system, which often leads to ad-hoc negotiations, occasioned by industrial crisis. Many government parastatals do not have collective bargaining machinery nor do unions negotiate with their management. Yet, the legislation, which established these parastatals, empowered their boards to independently review conditions of service. Most of those boards were not considering the period of prolonged military rule. Some administrators were appointed to take charge of these boards. In the core civil service, the age-long negotiating machinery became dormant in the 1990's and was only resorted to during severe industrial crisis. Perhaps, in the private sector, with the exception of the petroleum and print media industries, there exists an industry-wide joint negotiating council for each sector. The joint negotiating councils have functioned relatively well

except that collective agreements freely entered into are subject to ministerial approval by the federal ministry of employment, Labour and productivity.

Although the Nigerian Government has ratified the ILO convention 98, which guarantees the right to organize and to bargain collectively, the government is yet to ratify convention 151 on Labour relations which makes it obligatory to institute collective bargaining machinery in the public sector. Therefore, as far as bargaining machinery is empowered, dispute settlement in Nigeria provides for mediation, conciliation and compulsory adjudication through the Industrial Arbitration Panel (IAP) and National Industrial Court (N.I.C). The quality of conciliation made over the years has greatly declined. The processes for access to both the I. A. P. and N. I. C. are largely through the Minister of Labour. In add, awards are not made directly to this parties Dafe (1992).

The problem of collective bargaining in Nigeria in terms of its restricted nature, and the relative large number of workers outside its coverage emanate from developments in the national polity. The development and practice of collective bargaining are dependent on trade union consciousness, the attitude of the public rights and industrial democracy by the Nigerian government. The prolonged military rule in Nigeria led to the enactment of twin process of limited intervention and guided democracy in government/labour relations in 1975. The policies led to the enactment of numerous trade Union laws which undermined trade Union right, tended to co-opt the unions while also creating situation of fear, uncertainty and direct interference. Also prolonged military rule and abuse in government have created and perpetuated economic crisis and the attendant massive unemployment, insecurity of employment, factory closure, inflation and general social dislocation.

These developments have led to the systematic elimination of the middle class in Nigerian Society and the emergence of a vast army of depressed working class, on the one hand, and a tiny super rich class on the other hand. This tiny super rich accumulated and reproduced through access to state funds. This impacted negatively in trade Union and thus weakened their organization disoriented and disempowered the workers. The factors that weaken collective bargaining include victimization/intimidation by the government and employers, divide and rule strategy of employers, lack of awareness of negotiation objectives and techniques by workers because of ineffective communication between bargainers and members and the poor skills. Others are requirements for ethical ministerial approvals of agreements reached, problems, narrow composition of public service negotiating councils, decentralized collective bargaining in the public sector of government at all levels to respect collective agreements in the above circumstances it is inconceivable for collective bargaining to thrive.

In order to ensure that collective bargaining is accepted and strengthened in all sectors of the economy, Congress shall start the setting up of a tripartite committee of government, NEC and NLC to constantly recommend the review of the existing national minimum wage, Labour laws and the practice of industrial relations. Congress shall also ensure the reconstitution of the National Wages Commission, which should

reflect a tripartite structure made up of government, NECA and NLC. Again, Congress shall ensure that the automatic recognition of unions also carries with it the rights of members to belong to unions and to collective bargaining. Congress shall coordinate its affiliates to extend union coverage to new sectors and new forms of work, including informal employment across all sectors (John, 2007). Congress shall strive to entrench the principles of broader consultations in the process of bargaining and continually keep a tap on the bargaining activities of affiliates and agreement reached in the process. Also, congress shall organize an annual conference on collective bargaining as part of the means of identification and formulating responses to industrial relations challenges. In the private sector, congress is committed to promoting and strengthening free collective bargaining in all industries in the private sector. In this regard, congress shall establish in industry-wide collective bargaining machinery for the print media, ensure that collective machinery exist throughout all industries. In other words, the goal shall be on industry, one union and one collecting bargaining machinery (Olawejaju, 2008).

3. Policy on Socio-Economy Transformation

Being a National Trade Union Centre in an African Country, the Nigerian Labour Congress plays an active role in the transformation of the society. The regard the NLC's objective is want to see an end to industrial backwardness, mass poverty, illiteracy, the collapse of the health and social services and institutions foreign economic dependency, gross exploitation of labour and political dictatorship and instability. The thrust of the NLC's policy on socio-economic strategies, therefore would underline the need to ensure that economic and social policy target wealth generation aimed at meeting basic and broader needs of citizens, assets and power for the benefits of all.

The NLC shall also work towards a planned and performing economy. Nigerian economy had growth rate that average six percent (6%) during the first decade of our independent life as a nation (1960 - 1970). Congress shall contribute to efforts towards returning Nigeria back to the path of constituent job-driven economic growth, development and national planning, which was abandoned in the wake of the IMF and World Bank sponsored Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the mid-1980. The labour thus envisions an economy founded on twin pillar of state-led industrialization and agricultural development within the context of holistic national development plans. In the most recent past, on account of national planning, manufacturing activities transformed major industrial centers such as Lagos, Kano, Ibadan, Kaduna, Port Harcourt and Benin.

The Labour socio-economic strategies, therefore would take into account the growing need to adopt a more participatory approach which involves identification of specific process shoed pushed by representatives of congress in dealing with government, employers are other social, economic and political actors. Participatory strategies refer to the process of consultation that involves convening appropriate organ where specific discussion of policy matters are identified and decided (Sola, 2000).

3.1 Policy Framework

In policy framework, Labour envisions an economy that is composed of state, private and social sector. The state must play a leading role in encouraging investment through appropriate macro-economic policies and provision of infrastructure. In addition, through appropriate fiscal and monetary policies, good governance and transparency, the state exert a tremendous influence on the economy. Property relations must be transformed as to favour working men and women, entrepreneurs and genuine investors as distinct from the existing rentier, comprador, corrupt and parasitic class. To this extent, key socio-economic strategies sectors must remain in public hands. These sectors are education, health, energy, communication, land/water, social security, road development, security.

In achieving the goals, Labour socio-economic policy framework would therefore involve of:

- a) Empowering trade unions to participate actively in policy foundation and implementation through social dialogue on socio-economic matters.
- b) Demanding appropriate economic policies to specially and effectively arrest the current economic crisis facing the nation.
- c) Enthroning an activist agenda that is people driven that will focus on key macro-economic policies on employment creation and protection, guarantee a living wage and strengthen the nation's currency. Eradicate poverty, ensure prices stability, skill acquisition and motivate the workforce for improved productivity.
- d) Empowering relevant sectors of civil society to play active roles in all existing productive platforms hitherto dominated by the public sector.
- e) Support full timely implementation of relevant projects
- f) Ensure the engagement of well qualified personnel and organizations in the extension of government projects.
- g) Ensure that development goals are driven by patrol objectives.
- h) Ensure that government control key sector of the economy.
- i) Monitor development objectives and
- j) Advocate against wastage.

Hopkins (1996) averred that based on the recognition that the primary mandate of congress is to uplift the working and living conditions of workers, the mechanism for the realization of the above stated goals shall include;

1. Monitoring Key Economic Indicators: Nigeria Labour Congress shall through its research unit, monitor key economic indicators. These economic indicators shall cover cost of living induces, exchange rates employment levels, income distribution, sectoral performances and so on. Also, macro-economic aggregates related fiscal policy, industrial policy, international trade and the like shall be monitored. Independent findings of congress shall provide the background from yearly budgetary proposals and wider negotiations on policy directions of the economy.
2. Specific Sectorial Monitoring: To boost the negotiating power of congress and its affiliates, congress shall undertake a comprehensive survey of all sectors of the

economy on a periodic basis. In this regard, congress shall provide base capacity for affiliates to meet their sectoral survey needs for the purpose of collective bargaining.

3. Establishment of Statutory Tripartite Negotiating Body: The Nigerian Labour Congress shall seek to institute an annual statutory tripartite body towards the formation and implementation of broad macro-economic policy. This body comprising all the stakeholders, mainly government employers and labour, may be referred to as the National Advisory Council on the Economy.
4. Active Participation in All Statutory Bodies: Congress shall actively participate in all statutory national or adhoc bodies with a clear mandate and a proper report backed mechanism.
5. Strengthening International Solidarity for Economic Development: International Solidarity shall be pursued in order to meet increasing challenges associated with globalization. In this context, international solidarity shall serve to build capacity of congress and its affiliate to match, the increasing sophistication of capital and managerial skills through intensive training for union members and officials of all level.

3.2 Some Specific Policy Directions

The position and policy direction of the congress with respect to key issues in the economy and society are as follows:

A. Employment: The congress believes that the people must remain both the means and ends of economic developments. In this context, the national development priority must focus on the protection and creation of employment. The national economic performance should be assessed in the context of the provision of viable employment for Nigerians. It should not be just a question of monetary index or growth assessment, productivity and wages. The congress through advocacy, shall insist on Key macro-economic policies, which will ensure employment creation and retention. Economic policies should.

- a) Ensure that the parameters of fiscal policy are consistent with employment creation and retention strategies, Government will be encouraged to avoid imposing rigid and rapid deficit reduction targets, which limit public expenditure and infrastructural development that in turn lead to public sector job losses and job rationalization. The task of rebuilding Nigerian economy and social infrastructural calls for greater employment creation and retention and not retrenchment and job rationalization.
- b) Maintain and expand demand for domestically produced goods and services, which will generate employment.
- c) Meet increased demand through an expansion of the productive capacity of the economy, which in turn would generate new jobs.
- d) Stimulate demand by lowering interest rate, pursuing redistributing fiscal policies and developing effective strategies to boost exports should also create an environment conducive to boosting productive capacity of the economy. It

should also create stately investment to ensure that increased demand can be met through domestic production, and not through importation of goods.

B. Social Security: The social security policy of congress for Nigeria workers shall cover issues of pensions and general welfare programme. In the case of pensions, congress policy shall be based on the principle that the minimum wage shall not be less than the existing nationwide minimum wages. Moreover, congress shall advocate a universal social security agency catering for contributors and not contributors such as the sick, the under-aged, the aged and the unemployed (Yesufu, 1982).

C. Education Health and Housing: In the immediate post-colonial decades, Nigeria's social indicators were generally promising. There was a systematic effort to increase the level of school environment, increased budgetary allocation to education, which in early 1960's, averaged 50 percent of the then regional budget. It is tragic that this earlier social development effort was later reversed and abandoned. Today, half of the Nigerian population is illiterate compared to 40 in Ghana, 33 percent in Zimbabwe, 23 percent in Indonesia and less than 20 percent in Brazil and Mexico. Over 20 percent of children between ages 6 and 11 are today not enrolled in school. The health service is extremely poor. Public hospitals are barely functional. Private health care is out of the reach of most Nigerians. This is largely because the direction of the state policies has not been towards using Nigeria wealth for the welfare of workers and other exploited classes of Nigerians.

In the area of housing, there is no coherent housing policy in the country. Workers have been forced to pay to the Federal Housing Funds, which gives them nothing in return. The state government has not provided affordable houses for the people. From the welfarist approach of the immediate post-independence days, the Nigerian State has moved to an anti-welfarist ideology dictated by the World Bank and the IMF. Therefore, the NLC will advocate and lead the struggle for qualitative and free education at all levels for the accessibility to education to Nigerians. NLC shall strive to ensure that the content of education is in accordance with the needs of Nigerian. Education shall not be controlled by the interest of international capital organization. It shall campaign against the privatization of education, as this will drive the children of workers and the poor out of the education system.

D. Inflation: The problem of inflation is endemic. Government programmes targeted at reducing inflation level have consistently failed; fiscal indiscipline on the part of government has been identified as one of the factors responsible for the failure of policy measures to reduce inflation. Labour will campaign to enthrone fiscal discipline through active participation in budget formulation, monitoring and evaluation.

E. Income Policy: Nigeria is a classic case of wealth without hard work or entrepreneurship. This has implications for good governance, transparency, political stability and the evolution of a just and fair incomes policy. While Nigerian workers' productivity is low due to unstabilizing polices and their taxes are poor. Congress shall pursue a policy that guarantees wealth through hard work and entrepreneurship while also ensuring that direct stealing of national resources is eliminated. The Nigerian Labour Congress will also pursue income policy that shall lead to a regime of socially

defensible income differentials in the economy. Also, congress shall or insist on appropriate policy measure that will target the elimination of unearned income in the economy, particularly those associated with graft, crime and currency speculation (Frank, 1998).

F. Wages: The policy of congress of wages shall focus on engendering a just and fair living wage for all Nigerian workers. The initial stage shall be to raise the real value of wages of each worker to a level that will ensure that Nigerian workers live a decent live. However, a wage policy that enhances the standard of living of each Nigerian worker is measured on inflation index.

G. Prices: Price levels in Nigeria today are more a function of speculative activities by market actors rather than costs related to productive activities. This has resulted in varying degrees of distortions in national income accounting. It also encourages the current inflationary trend in the economy, which depreciates incomes, particularly wages. Labour 'Congress' policy on prices shall, therefore be targeted at eliminating the speculative activities of workers' productivity which now dominates the economy. The Labour Congress shall fight for strict mediation by the State as a strategy for stabilizing policies.

H. Exchange Rate: The devaluation of the nation's currency in relation to other international currencies is unacceptable. Congress shall, therefore, press for an exchange rate regime local industries as well as protect income levels of Nigerians. Specifically, congress shall press for an exchange rate that is based on the principle of purchasing power parity of currencies.

I. Protection of Local Industries: The current wave of trade liberalization ruining local industries local industries and marginalize the country in the global economy gave labour more concern. Being the largest market in the sub region necessarily attracts international market competitors, which, if not checked, will undermine local industries. Labour policy in this regard shall be to enthrone policy measures that will protect local industries through appropriate fiscal measures.

J. Agriculture: The importance of agriculture in national development life is the vital need of the nation to feed its people. To ensure the development of agriculture in Nigeria therefore, the following measure need be taken: i) Agricultural production must be local based organized to meet the needs of the people and imperative of food security. ii) Agricultural production must be encouraged in all parts of the country. iii) The integration of agricultural production must be promoted. iv) Agricultural production shall not be dominated by few individuals. v) The interests of farmers and farm workers must be protected. To achieve the above principles, the Nigeria Labour shall link itself with the various groups involved in Agriculture to protect the interests of Nigeria's workers, campaign for active state intervention in agriculture through subsidies etc; unionize all workers in the agriculture sector; struggle to prevent a situation where Nigerian workers produce agricultural goods that Nigerians cannot afford.

K. Poverty Eradication: In the recent past, government and its organizations have proclaimed commitment to poverty alleviation. Notwithstanding the rhetoric, the

poverty situation has worsened. Congress is committed, however, not just to poverty alleviation but, more importantly, to poverty eradication. The policy of Congress in poverty eradication shall be linked to the International Labour Organization (ILO) framework of creating income earning opportunities to citizens.

L. Debt Crises: Labour's approach to debt crises is premised on the need to first verify the current level of indebtedness. It is sad that Nigeria pays huge amount for debt servicing without verifying the authenticity or otherwise of these debts. As a policy framework, labour shall insist that all future debts servicing must target verified debts. Also, given the gravity of the debt problem which makes economic recovery impossible, congress supports the global coalition under the Jubilee 2000 initiative, for the conciliation of all African debts. Congress shall campaign for the recovery of looted funds and play an active role in combating corruption (Hoffman, 1996).

M. Deregulation and Privatization: According to Clark (1996), the current civilian government is committed to market oriented and private sector-led development. This commitment to a market driven economy has translated to such policies as privatization of public enterprises and attempted deregulation in the petroleum sector. These have had adverse implications for employment, prices and public welfare. Congress has registered its opposition to deregulation of petroleum products through mass actions and protests. It also insists that deregulation of petroleum products through mass actions and protests. It also insists that deregulation only serves as the insatiable desire of oil monopolies for profits, and it will accentuate poverty and increase inflation. Labour maintains that there shall be no divestiture in the strategic economic and social sectors. Where privatization proves inevitable the process must be transparent, participatory and accountable with the emphasis on the need to project jobs and benefits of the workers in the affected enterprise.

N. Globalization: Globalization has been characterized by bigger and more powerful multinationals with more clout than national government. Globalization has produced such negative effect, as major players' casualization, mass-retrenchment of labour, elimination of local industries in the developing countries, trade liberalization and the economic, political and cultural domination of the "The Third World" countries. For the workers and the poor in general, its intensities as regards hardship, creates a deeper levels of poverty. Labour in its efforts to mitigate the negative effects of globalization shall among other things; counter globalization through;

- a) Building solidarity with progressive groups, environmental human rights and other civil society organizations across the globe for the purpose and curtailing the powers of multinational companies.
- b) Action and policy initiatives that expose the dangers of the programmes of Global Finance Capitalist institutions such as IMF World Bank and World Trade Organizations.
- c) Action and policy initiatives that enhance the capacity of Nigerian workers in particular and the Nigeria people in general to resist and detect policies of Bretton wood institutions.
- d) Mobilizing, training and re-training workers.

- e) Fighting for wage disparity of Nigerian workers and their counterparts in the same industries in the advanced countries.
- f) Campaigning for an industrial policy that would enhance Nigeria's economic comparative advantage
- g) Working for an urgent program of universal computer literacy to enable the country take advantage of information and communication technology. In this connection, labor shall urge government to invest heavily in the computer and communication industry so as to make internet and telephone services available and affordable to a vast majority of Nigerians.
- h) actively defending the right of each Nigerians to full employment, qualitative and comprehensive education, health care, water, electricity, adequate housing, good roads, a comprehensive rail network and provision of essential infrastructures.

As regards trade and industrial policy, labor considers the creation of quality jobs and mass employment as a preeminent challenge and objective of industrial policy. Also, labour shall campaign for the protection of labor-intensive industries, namely, agro-allied, industries, furniture, construction, textile, food, public works and service sectors. It shall also campaign for trade policies that enhance rather than undermine local production, the review of Nigeria's membership of WTO, which has adversely affected domestic industries leading to mass jobs losses through dumping of relatively cheaper goods without corresponding market access by Nigeria goods (Oladummi, 1998).

3.3 Policy on Building Internal Democracy

The possibility of labor to achieve its various objectives, guarantee unity, organizational vibrancy and become a force in the socio-economic development of Nigeria, requires good internal governance based on internal democracy. This will mean encouraging the promotion of culture of active participation by members, transparent, and accountable leadership, commitment to working class value and respect for union constitution an all tenants of democracy. Internal democracy in NLC and other unions' constitutional provisions, ethical expectations and mandate of leadership on the one hand and actual practices on the other determine to a large extent the success of NLC in struggle for economic development.

Some tendencies thrown up by the gap of lack of internal democracy often include indiscipline's accountability and transparency deficits and subversion of democratic principles. These impair the capacity of leadership to deliver and undermine the mandate of the unions. Despite determined efforts of deepening internal democracy in all segments of the movements, the challenges of continually revisiting the democratic tradition and ethics of the movement remains obvious. However, to achieve, internal democracy, congress has set for itself the following goals;

- a) To a participatory, functional and democratic trade union movement founded on free and fair elections, collective leadership and commitment to the promotion of

the welfare and right of the working people, irrespective of age, class, ethnicity or region.

- b) To build a virile and dynamic organization that is capable of defending the rights and interest of the working people in Nigeria.
- c) To build an organization that will facilitate the development of working class consciousness, education, unity and solidarity among Nigeria workers and Nigerian working people in general.
- d) Labour and the affiliate unions shall commit resources for membership education as strategy of re-awakening working class consciousness among workers.

Internal operations of the trade union movement in Nigeria give cause for great concern. Military rule and the attendant might-is-right ethos have impacted on civil society, including unions occasioning some acute initiative militarism. Some of the worse manifestations in the movement can be seen in an officership culture that is not founded on principles of democracy and union rules and values, major decisions on policies are occasionally adopted without broad consultations or debates within the union and its various organs. Harmony and synergy between union leadership and membership have, in some cases, been subverted by poor officership, involving no consultation and legitimacy. Thus, the membership is not able to own the union and its decisions in some cases but proffer to be lukewarm.

The observed lapses and sharp practices in relation to finance do occur in various forms and exact a heavy toll on resources and funds, with the attendant consequences of weakened capacity. Internal communication would need to continually benefit from re-tooling to ensure that the observed democratic deficits are addressed. However, to eliminate the above problems, the Nigeria Congress shall regularly review its constitution to provide internal democracy through accountability, transparency, debate, consultation and commitment to worker's welfare. It should strive to make membership education a priority and ensure that the constitution provides for adequate funding of education programmes, strict sanctions should also be applied in cases of violation of the constitution and a code of conduct, to provide for a well spelt out rules that guarantee checks and balances and structure the powers and functions of organs and officers of the congress. This will be done in such a way that the rules project the integrity and proper workings of the congress.

The congress should enshrine accountability and transparency in financial dealings so as to ensure that all resources due to the congress are remitted as and when due and are expended in accordance with the state objectives of the congress, create a content resolution mechanism for prompt intervention in intra inter-unions and disputes. This shall include the establishment of a standing committee for conflict management and resolution. The Nigerian Labour Congress shall also promote financial discipline through a policy of annual budgeting, approved by the Central Working Committee (CWC) and National Executive (NE) which should serve as a model to industrial unions.

Besides, as part of its corporate efforts to achieve, sustain and promote internal democracy, the NLC shall adopt feedback mechanisms for its affiliates, members and the general public. These Feedbacks Mechanisms for its affiliates, members and the general public. These feedbacks mechanisms shall include annual reports, from the General Secretary, News Letters, Departmental Reports, meetings of the organs of Congress, namely, NAC, CWC, NEC and delegates Conference. Progress reports on assignments and report on assignments and programmes, Press conference. The NLC shall also cultivate the use of internal communication to promote democratic decision-making processes through internal memoranda to ensure that all officials are aware of all activities. There should also be dialogue/consultation to ensure that issues are informally and formally discussed before official decisions are taken (Bob-Lander, 1984).

3.4 Policy on Gender Equity

Nigeria is still characterized by patriarchy who permeates all modern public and private institutions in the country. This has been the result of both the traditional system and the borrowed capitalist exploitation. Gender discrimination, sexual exploitation and the denials of life's opportunities to women are being presented as part of this culture. Gender inequality is the result of unjust economic, political and social relations. Women are educated to believe in and accept an inferior social status. In most Nigerian communities, women have no right to inheritance of family property and equal opportunity to education. In modern employment, women are marginalized to the lower cadre of public and private establishments and the care and nurtures departments and sectors. In most sectors, it is unofficially understood that women cannot attain certain leadership positions. In additions, women receive lower pay for equal work. Generally, there are various forms of discrimination against the child, for example denial of child education, child labour and early marriage.

Other forms of gender abuses against women include violence and negative widowhood practices that diminish the status and wellbeing of women. In summary, there are social, cultural and beliefs and practices, which do not enable women to realize their full potentials. In the trade unions, the gap between men and women is a rejection of the beliefs and practices in the wider society. Trade unions are supposed to be democratic and empowering organizations, there is, cranially a lack of awareness of gender issues amongst members. Consequently, negative gender practices are common and negative, gender practices are well entrenched. Women have little representation at the leadership level and decision making bodies. Where they manage to feature, they are elected or appointed into the 'women's socially expected roles of welfare officers or treasures' issues sensitive to women are do not get the required attention.

It is worthy of note that there is a growing awareness about women's right and the need for affirmative action. The trade unions have been drawn into the growing debates and activities on these issues and they must provide leadership in the struggle for gender equity and justice. Policy issues coming from the need to address the above problems can be broadly categorized into the following main themes;

- a) Constitutional review to include the gender perspective;
- b) A framework of action;
- c) Human Resources Development;
- d) Equal Employment Opportunities;
- e) Building Bridges of Co-operation, and
- f) Re-addressing imbalances in staffing of NLC and affiliates.

A strategy for the greater inclusion of women within the NLC should begin with an amendment of the constitution of the NLC and all existing trade unions in the country to include a definite gender clause. The basis for this is founded on a genuine desire to mainstream women and ensure their participation at all levels of NLC programmes. This principle of the gender clause shall permeate all actions, policies and activities of empowerment within the NLC. The content of the gender clause shall also be injected in the NLC mission statement. The Nigeria Labour Congress affirm its belief and respect for equal opportunities for all Nigerians regardless of gender. The NLC recognizes the peculiar nature of women's roles as affecting their ability or inability to participate effectively in the public spheres. Empowerment of women should, therefore, begin from a re-examination of the place of women within Nigerian society. The NLC is therefore, committed to building a world where gender justice reigns which recognizes an internal restructuring complemented by external working partnerships. Gender justice, as a cardinal principle of congress, shall mean equal access to employment opportunities, absence of discriminatory practices against both genders and recognitions of the productive and reproductive roles of each gender.

The framework for achieving gender justice in the work place and in the NLC through internal structuring shall be based on the committed and detailed implementation of the following plan of action;

- a) The Nigeria Labour Congress and each of its affiliates shall urgently review their constitutions to ensure that the congress and provisions of the constitutions provide for and promote gender justice at the higher level.
- b) The NLC shall implement its decision in the establishment and role of a woman's commission at the national level as a matter of urgency. The commission shall not be a parallel structure to those currently existing in the NLC and its goals shall include promoting awareness among women.
- c) The Nigeria Labour Congress shall from time to time facilitate national conferences research on women. The conferences shall bring together government officials, employers organized union under the Nigerian Employers Consultative Association (NECA), trade unions organized under the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), Senior Staff Consultative Association (SESSCAN), Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASSIU), Progressive Women's Organizations and the National Association of Nigeria Students (NANS).
- d) The Nation Conference shall scrutinize employment practices in Nigeria, assess gender practices in work organizations and identify supportive entrustments that serve to entrench discriminatory practices against women. The conference shall also recommend appropriate measures aimed at guaranteeing equal access

to opportunities for all genders as well as explore the possibility of instituting machinery for monitoring progress made in this regard.

- e) The National Conference, research and surveys shall promote inputs for national policies on women as well as encouraging formal and informal networking among its women access unions.
- f) Labour shall advocate for budgetary allocation for the empowerment of women by government business establishment, trade union and civil organizations. For the furtherance of the gender programme, the NLC shall engage in all round advocacies for equal opportunities for women and targets for their realization. The congress shall work for legislation that protects widowhood rights, the right of girls to education and marriage related rights (Oladummi, 1998).

3.5 Policy on Nigeria Labour Congress and Unionism

The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) is a federation of unions across all sectors, all cadres, covering both white and blue collar workers as well as pensioners. It is a symbol of unity and strength of the country's trade union movement. The behaviour and responses of the congress to issues impact positively or otherwise on the entire trade union movement. This explains why most Nigerians including some workers do not see any difference when labour speaks and acts on behalf of workers and working people generally for the pursuit and attainment of economy, social and political interest. Given the vanguard that NLC is expected to play; it cannot adopt an indifferent attitude towards the growth and development of its affiliates.

An objective appraisal of organized labour in Nigeria reveals that; (1) With a population of over 120 million, the wage labour force in the formal sector is less than four million. (2) The information gathered from this sector, which is rapidly expanding that, they are not registered with the union. Some indigenous employers and some ministries are hostile towards union. The existing trade union law cannot prohibit some segments of civil employees from unionization. Generally, that is why some unions are not viable due to: dwindling membership (3) There is a very low check-off rate in the public sector due to relatively depressed wages, inefficient administration and declining membership. (4) Leadership deficiency resulting from prolonged military rule, departure from the ideals of the trade union movement and the delay in affiliating the wider society membership apathy in most unions are caused by inadequate response of unions to the massive unemployment of and insecurity of jobs, severe social and economic dislocation of workers, internal administrative and organizational deficiency.³⁷

With the enactment of the Trade Union Act, 2005, the stage is now set for the full application of the principle of voluntarism. This means that a worker is at liberty to join any union he/she likes while unions are free to in affiliating to any federation or form new ones if they meet the necessary requirements. The challenges to affiliate to unions are serious, bordering mainly on the need to continue to justify their existence by delivering on their mandate credibly. The worker will be more conscious and aggressive in demanding value for his/her membership of the union, which goes also

for the NLC. The goals of the Nigeria Labour Congress towards the trade unions shall be;

- i. Organization and conceptive transformation of the trade unions including the NLC from mere legal expression to organizations founded and sustained by the strength of its membership and their relevance to the society.
- ii. To ensure independence of trade union in a democratic dispensation NLC would work towards ensuring that:
 - a) Unions are structurally, organizationally, democratically and financially viable. All unionized workers in the formal and informal sectors are unionized. Existing labour legislation which undermines voluntarism, rights of workers, union and trade union independence are repealed.
 - b) Only one union exists in every industry to cover all categories of workers. Affiliation to congress is not restrictive but open to all types of trade unions including workers in informal employment. All unions promote broad participation in their affairs, practice the principles of collective leadership and allow the tenets of democratic governance. Nigerian workers are politically conscious and continually mobilized to defend democracy, influence public policy, identify with the oppressed and the disadvantaged and participate actively in the labour movement.
 - c) Nigerian Trade Unions are appropriately equipped and technically efficient. Unions that do not honour their financial obligations to NLC shall be subjected to discriminatory practices. The Labour Union shall ensure the enforcement of appropriate accounting system that enforce probity and eliminate fraud.

3.6 Policy on Labour and Politics

The primary goals of workers' involvement in politics as an organized group, is to promote the radical restructuring of the unequal economics relations system. This is because the working class, with its homogenous values, rather than other social classes, having different and, at time contradictory interest, is best placed to provide leadership and direction for the radical transformation of the system of production. For this reason, there must be consciousness

Consciousness, implying the awareness of economic, social and political interest of both the leadership and membership are fundamental in this respect. There are two types of consciousness, namely; trade union consciousness and working class consciousness which is central to addressing the issue of labour and politics. Trade union consciousness which is the workers' awareness of their own economic interest in better wages, better conditions of work, the pursuit of which does not require the workers to challenge existing political order. This supports the dominant perception of politics as something for the survival and defense of existing economics relationships within a political structure that permits the few to hold on to power to the execution and on the basis of the increased exploitation of the working class.

On the other hand, working consciousness requires that the members of the working class are able to tie their interests and their success in pursuing their goal, to

the distribution of state power among socio-economic class. Working class consciousness is essentially political, involving class political interest. The individual worker who has considerable trade union consciousness may yet not connect this consciousness with class struggles and state power. But a working class person with considerable working class consciousness gives a political articulation and explanation of very turn, every trend in workers' economic struggles.

Given such a situation, therefore, the goal of worker's involvement in politics must be to advance and deepen the essence and practice of democracy aimed at sustaining and advancing a democratic culture that promotes prosperity for all, equity and higher welfare levels for Nigerians (Joseph, 1997).

3.7 Analytical Approach

The Nigerian experience, like in others, has produced different approaches. In the first republic (1960-66), a section of the labour movement formed the Socialist Workers and Farmers Party (SWAFP) and the Nigerian Labour Party (NLP). The most advanced sections of the leadership of the working class formed both SWAEP and NLP. Also, during the aborted third Republic (1989-93), the NLC spear headed another effort to form the Nigerian Labour Party (NLP). The Labour Party that emerged from this process however, did so in the circumstances of adaptation to the dictatorship of General Ibrahim Babangida, the "politics of registration". The existence of various ideological groupings within the working class leadership, the opportunism of some of that leadership and of course, the lack of organization "below" and a low level of specific class consciousness combined to ensure that the NLP in 1989 did not produce the much needed working class party. The two experiments, although at different time in Nigeria's history showed that;

- a) Nigerian workers desired their own party
- b) Workers could be organized to create and develop their own party.
- c) The leadership of worker's party must emerge from the ideologically most advanced, committed persons having their deep roots within the labour movement.
- d) The party of the working class must have a program that will depend upon the state of the political consciousness of workers, but, definitely its contents should be unambiguously socialist.
- e) The party workers should be based on working class membership and should be sustained by workers, not by assistance or "alliance" with segments of the ruling class.
- f) Ideological uniformity is not necessary for the party to take off and grow. The existence of ideological groupings will lead to a period of "self-purification" in the practice of the party.

However, workers may also not have a political organization, a party of their own. But at each run, organized labour, or the politically more advanced section of labour movement articulates the interests of the workers in relation to the existing non-labour parties. This was the case when sections of the movement supported the Unity

Party of Nigeria (UPN) and the People's Redemption Party (PRP) during the second republic, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) during the 1999 elections. The support for these parties was informed by their stated commitments to programmes of minimum wage, social welfare etc. This type of approach collapses as soon as the parties begin to implement the dominant perception of democracy which is to sustain existing economic relationships. This will mean the entrenchment of poverty and inequality among workers, and between workers and the economically-politically dormant class. This case of SDP governments embarking on policies of wages cut, as was the situation in Edo State in 1993, exemplifies this and is being entrenched in large number. It also collapsed as soon as workers began to make deep working class demands party as the minimum wage agitations in many states, including the AD states, where workers were locked in battle with their government.

Workers, as individuals or as an organized group, may support political parties that would serve their interest and promote workers' freedom both in the short run and long run. This is because every political party, whatever, it so admits or not, expresses the objectives of some social class, and fulfils them in the long run, if not in a short run. It is also possible for workers to form their own party and the party does not articulate or present a practical program adequate to the political goals and interests of workers as a class. This is why as some argue, the existence of a labour party is not necessarily the existence of a working class in orientation depends on the character of its programme, the degree of the class-consciousness of workers and the level of political education and practical struggles in the given society.

3.8 National and International Solidarity Policy

Solidarity means support and commitment to one another irrespective of industrial, geographical and other forms of boundaries. In the context of trade unions, this implies strengthening the joint capacity of workers and their unions across industrial and geographical boundaries to engage employers and government with the objective of eliminating and minimizing exploitation and repression (Famco, 2005). The congress policy on solidarity shall focus on both the nationwide and international context. Within the national context, solidarity shall be dictated by the overall objective of the union to defend the rights and interests of workers as well as strive to expand such rights and interest as a condition for enhancing the livelihood of the Nigerian people. This will require networking activities with individuals and organizations who have a commitment to the cause of the working people or who are at least, friendly to the cause of workers.

Nigerian workers have been at the receiving end of government policies. The consequence is a general erosion of the rights and privileges of workers resulting in a state of virtual destitution for the average worker. However, from a situation where the union movement was the arrow head for the struggle against injustices, as was the case with the NLC of the late 1970's and mid-1980s, the union movement was reduced to a very marginal non state actor. So many factors accounted for this. This was the subversive generosity of the state directed towards un-developing the militant

disposition of the NLC in Collaboration with the state NLC from its traditional practice. There was the repressive dimension which considerably undermined organizations such as the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) and Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) which were considered the traditional allies of the NLC. All these factors negatively affected the capacity of trade unions to reengage in solidarity. This meant that unions were unable to substantially offer or re-engage receive solidarity assistance within the national setting.

Nigerian Labour Congress shall aggressively initiate actions to put the union movement at the forefront of the struggle to social justice, equity and democracy. This shall be done through strengthened engagement with civil society organization networking activities. Networking activities will be broadened to cover socio-economic, political and cultural practices which broadened to cover socio-economic, political and cultural issues and would primarily focus on empowerment of the working people in particular and the mass of the Nigeria people in general. Activities related to solidarity work will include collaboration such as meetings, educational engagement advocacy and mass action e.g. agitation and protests rallies.

4. Conclusion

This paper envisaged that labour congress shall aggressively initiate to put the union movement at the forefront of the struggle to social justice, equity and democracy. However, despite all these, there are issues of unionized workers particularly in the public sector are covered by former and a well-structured mechanical bargaining system, which often lead to adhoc negotiation occasioned by industrial crises. We are in a global setting where there is a greater integration of the world economy. Information and communication technology has made interest easier, faster and cheaper experiences and aspiration among people and social groups with common historical backgrounds. The Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), as the leading organization of the working people of Nigeria, cannot afford to be alienated from this process. Congress is, therefore committed to participate actively and positively in this global reality in furtherance of the interest of Nigeria workers. Congress, however, shall resist the domination of Nigerian worker under any global arrangement.

4.1 Recommendation

This paper recommends that;

1. International Solidarity should strengthen the capacity of Congress and its affiliates to deal with the challenges of globalization.
2. Congress should use international solidarity to protect the rights and gains of the Nigerian workforce, to strengthen trade organization in the sub-region, continentally and in the wider international level.
3. International solidarity should be used to promote the exchange of educational, cultural and conventional experience between trade unions, to encourage the development of information technology and its application in the movement.

Congress should also use international solidarity to check activities of multinational corporations.

4. Congress should consolidate its global alliances, foster new ones and expand bilateral relations with progressive track union centers within and beyond African continent.
5. Labour should enhance its capacity to participate in a multiplicity of alliances and platforms to agitate and advocate on various issues that affect workers and the Nigerian people.
6. Labour should encourage information and communication technology among its affiliates and members so that Nigerian workers can have a say and participate in the new global discourse.
7. Labour should seek to strengthen the participation of affiliates in the international trade union movement in general and the global union federations in particular.
8. Labour and its affiliates should commit themselves to the exchange of information and campaigns in respect of unions and individual trade unions whose rights are threatened or violated by governments and employers.
9. Congress and its affiliates should work towards the institution of an international solidarity fund for educational and other forms of solidarity assistance to trade unions that are in need.
10. International solidarity should be taught and incorporated in congress and industrial union education programmes.

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