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## **The Trade Union Movement in Nigeria: Historical Developments, Challenges and Future Prospects**

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### **Abstract:**

*The global chain of production helped stimulate the growth of multinational corporations who control most of world trade and capital. But on other hand workers have not fared so well. Many men and women still toil and labor permanently in deplorable conditions and environments with no health or pension benefits, sick or annual leave, or even the assurance that they will have a job the next morning. Inarguably, workers need a platform to seek some modicum of day to day liberties in their work life*

*Against the above background, coupled with shrinking opportunities and decline in living standards, the Nigerian Trade Unions have been a veritable voice and platform for expressing the views of Nigerian workers. The paper traced the history of the trade unionism in Nigeria, examined the historical developments in the Nigerian Trade Union Movement, highlighted the roles played by trade unions in national development and finally analyzed the challenges currently assailing trade unions in Nigeria. The paper concluded by noting that the need to protect workers lies at the heart of the evolution and development of trade unions throughout the world and with respect to this paper in Nigeria generally.*

**Keywords:** Trade Unions, Workers, History, Development, Trade Union Movement

### **1. Introduction**

The imperative for the existence of unions was enhanced by the need to develop a voice that can be heard over the din of attempts to gloss over the very roots of social inequality. Unionism is also a potent means of developing effective responses to the growing inequities, abuses and lack of fundamental rights at work especially so rampant in the current world of work and practice of employment relations. According to Adewunmi(2007), 'trade unions arose to address the enormous problems faced at work, which include job insecurity, injustice, dependence and the inhuman conditions under which work is carried out. Wikipedia (2009) renders a simple, but elaborate description of what a trade union is: "A trade union or labor union is an organization of workers who have banded together to achieve common goals in key areas such as wages, hours, and working conditions. The trade union, through its leadership, bargains with the employer on behalf of union members (rank and file members) and negotiates labor contracts with employers. This may include the negotiation of wages, work rules, complaint procedures, rules governing hiring, firing and promotion of workers, benefits, workplace safety and policies. The agreements negotiated by the union leaders are binding on the rank and file members and the employer and in some cases on other non-member workers. *The Trade Union Act Cap 437 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 1990* defines a trade union as " Any combination of workers or employers, whether temporary or permanent, the purpose of which is to regulate the terms and conditions of employment of workers". Invariably, the Existence of trade unions as organizations or institutions for championing, advancing and protecting the interests of workers in the industry is a positive development for the promotion of equality, redistribution of wealth, advocating for social justice, minimizing oppression, entrenching fairness and ameliorating poverty worldwide

#### *1.1. Historical Antecedents*

According to Golia (2005), the earliest recorded act of unionism occurred in Egypt during the time of Ramses III( ca. 1186-1155 BC), when pyramid workers organized themselves and staged a sit in for three days, refusing to return to work until they were paid their daily wage of five kinds of fish and beer. But trade unionism has practiced today was said to originate from Britain. Before Nigeria eventually came under British rule in early 1900s, British workers had fought and won recognition for trade unions by employers. The industrial revolution which started at about 1760 and was accentuated by the growth of the factory system through the use of water and steam power created the favorable climate for the development of trade unionism as we know it today. Essentially, the industrial revolution is generally regarded as being responsible for the fundamental transformation of the human society, from the medieval to the modern. The factories, which emerged as centres of production ensured that activities associated with production and distribution of goods and services, were moved outside the boundaries of the home and family systems.

Adegunmi(2007) also noted that their emergence at the beginning of the industrial revolution in Britain was largely in response to the harsh conditions of, and deprivations inflicted by, the new factory system thrown up as new centres of production. The resultant organized production processes brought about the need to safeguard workers and enhance their living standards in Europe mostly in Britain, although craft unions existed earlier to protect craftsmen and their trades. The emergent factory system created totally different environments and conditions of work that compelled these early workers to form trade clubs to discuss their new conditions. Gradually, these trade clubs began to link up with their counterpart organizations in the areas leading to the formation of loose federations. This culminated in the formation of a national federation by the hatters in 1771 and the passing of an act by the British parliament in 1825 giving legal recognition to the right to combine for collective bargaining and right to strike, and the right to pay union check-off dues.

### *1.2. History Of Trade Unionism In Nigeria*

Okolie(2010) noted that historically, there has been organization of workers in Nigeria before the advent of modern trade unionism. During the pre-colonial period, there were guilds, mutual aid groups and professional or occupational craft unions which played roles similar to those of trade unions. However, these associations are not in the modern sense of a fully fledged trade union. Rather, most of them are merely workers association (Otobo, 1987:12). The trade unions in the former British colonies including Nigeria were not natural developments as in the metropolitan countries but rather a creation of the then British colonial office. In the traditional African Society, work was not categorized into jobs, occupations, skills and professions. Work activities were essentially for subsistence, mainly communal and devoid of clear cut distinction between employer and Labor.

Wage employment was not also attractive during the colonial era because it denied the African his freedom was not as profitable as returns from agricultural activities and posed a problem of adjusting to the world of industrial employment (Fashoyin, 1992). Therefore, the idea of wage Labor or employment was foreign to the system that Africans were used to. By the late 1800s and early 1900s, British capitalists set up industries in many countries in South, East and West Africa, the need to staff administrative offices, construct roads, bridges, harbors and railway lines arose. Yet the Colonial government found it very difficult to recruit the prerequisite manual Labor needed to build these infrastructures and promote wage employment. They had to resort to forced Labor or conscription of Africans using appalling tactics such as: introduction of taxation in cash; promotion of European consumable commodities that had to be paid for in the colonialists' currencies; the missionary crusades and the school system which sought to produce unskilled workforce that accepted the white man's values. In many of these countries, the working conditions and remuneration of the employed Africans was terrible and grossly inadequate.

The first organization that is known to have had an interest in trade union activities was the mechanics mutual aid provident and mutual improvement association formed in July 1883. One of the first major attempts made by Nigerian workers to assert their rights was by Artisan workmen in the Public works department (PWD) who went on 3-day strike in 1897 against a major change in their hours of work. However the formal history of Nigeria trade unionism began with the formation of the Southern Nigerian Civil Service Union on the 19th August, 1912. The union was more concerned with efficiency in the civil service and intensified nationalization of the service than with hard core trade unionism. Others include the Railway workers union and the Nigerian union of Teachers. Two reasons were adduced, Ubeku (1975) pointed out that 'a number of trade unions grew around the only establishments in existence then, while Yesufu (1984) opined that the main reason was merely to match the existence of such unions elsewhere i.e in Sierra Leone. It was much later that promoting the welfare and interests of Native members of the civil service was included among the union's aim. After the amalgamation of the protectorates, it became the Nigeria Civil Service Union (NCSU).

The laying of railway lines from Lagos to the North gave fillip to the desire of railway workers to form a union, Nigerian Railway Native Staff Union in 1919 to enhance their standard of living. The reason adduced for formation of the Railway workers union was the perception that the civil service union was too soft on fundamental issues and more so, it was not responsive to the economic dictates of the period. Other unions that sprang up during this period include the Railway Loco Drivers Union was formed basically to obtain better conditions of employment for train drivers, Nigerian Mechanic Union and Motor Transport Union. Taking a cue from the railway workers and also as a result of the increase in number of schools and quest for education by Nigerians, the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) was formed in July 1931 as a result of dissatisfaction with their employment conditions, to press for improved working condition of teachers, to promote national development and as a professional workers organization, to carry out the regulatory functions of the teaching profession and to be a watch dog of the government educational policy.

Later in 1931, the Railway Workers Union was formed from a splinter group from the Nigerian Civil Service Union. Another union, the Railway Technical Staff Union (RTSU) was formed to cater for the technicians. Aghast at the rate of formation of mushroom and splinter unions and most probably to reduce potential agitations from unions, the Colonial Administration enacted the Trade Union Ordinance in 1938 to restrict the growth of mushroom unions and made registration compulsory for trade unions seeking to either negotiate with employers or embark on strikes. The law laid down the mode of registration of trade unions and prescribed the rights and obligations of unions in the employer employee relationships. Even after the enactment of this legislation, union leaders were proactive to deduce that labour unity was key to actualizing not only their goals and objectives of enhancing workers welfare, but also central to the quest for Independence. Thus more unions like Postal Workers Union, General Workers Union and PWD Technical workers still came into being. The Second World War also played an important role in the growth of trade unions 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 1987:21). A distinguishing feature of trade unionism then was its close links with nationalist leaders and the struggle for independence. Thus nationalism enhanced trade unionism as they provided a basis for group collectivism and actualization of mutual, but identical goals.

The Most vibrant unions then were the Railways unions and it was their agitation for the cost of living award that led to the departure of their chief mechanical engineer who was fingered as the brain behind the poor conditions of employment of mechanical department staff and the eventual award of a substantial cost of living allowance (COLA) to all workers in 1942. The famous conference of 1943 resulted in the formation of Trade Union Congress (TUC) as the Central Labour Organization. The tremendous good will and support it enjoyed made it demand a cost of living increase over the awards made in 1942. Refusal of Government led to a successful 45 day General strike which paralyzed economic activities throughout the country. The success of the strike culminated in the creation of the Department of Labour in 1942 and establishment of the Tudor Davies Commission which eventually recommended that Government should grant substantial increases based on cost of living on zonal basis.

Sad enough, schisms developed shortly after leading to fractionalization within the Trade Union Congress and the emergence of other central unions. The various labour centers were balkanized along political and ideological lines, thus making it difficult for the Nigerian Labour Movement to have the prerequisite unity and potency. As a result, it became structurally weak, less functional and generally ineffective for a long period. These early divisions revolved around activities and positions taken by the trade union officials and union federations than those of individual unions, state manipulation and the nature of trade unions themselves i.e workers from diverse backgrounds form unions which from the word go seek to promote sectional interests of their members. Other factors such as prevailing culture and the segmentation of the unions along ethnic and junior/senior staff lines etc were also contributory.

In 1976, the Federal Government established a commission of inquiry into the activities of the various unions and appointed an administrator to manage the unions and come up with an efficient administrative structure for the unions. Towards the end of 1977, Unions were restructured into 42 along industrial lines. The government also insisted on the formation of a single labour centre instead of multiple centers. In February 1978, the Nigeria Labour Congress was formed and inaugurated. The then 42 Industrial Unions became affiliates of the Nigeria Labour Congress with the legal backing of Trade Union (Amendment) Decree 22 of 1978.

### *1.3. Historical Developments In The Nigerian Trade Union Movement*

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a movement as, “a course or series of actions and endeavors on the part of a group of people working towards a shared goal; an organization, coalition, or alliance of people working to advance a shared political, social, or artistic objective.” The actors in the movement are bound by shared goals and vision in addition to the lay trinity of unionism—fraternity, equality and solidarity.. Therefore, Nigerian Trade Union movement encompasses organizations and individuals who are primarily working to advance the rights, interests and welfare of the total working class population in Nigeria since they have shared goals and vision. Omole (1991) identified four significant phases in history of the Nigerian trade union movement. Although, Abu (2007) pointed out that there have been further union developments which seems to have increased the phases from four to five. The first phase which was the *prohibition stage* marked by the introduction of paid employment in Nigeria during the colonial period. In that era there were initially no laws regulating industrial relations practice, hence, the workers were at the mercy of their employers. Even, the situation was not different in the public sector that was under the colonial masters. The colonial administrators did not treat African workers fairly. Workers were prevented from active trade unionism, while those that were formed were not duly recognized. Despite lack of recognition by the government and employers, workers formed unions during this period. This period could be described as the *Laissez faire* period in the history of industrial relations practice in Nigeria. This is because of the workers’ determination to form unions and government’s non-interventionist approach to the formation of unions.

Omole (1991) described the next stage as the *phase of recognition*. The ordinance gave recognition to trade unions, it energized and encouraged the workers to unionize and to enforce and fight for their rights. The ordinance accelerated the growth and development of trade unionism in Nigeria. One of the characteristic features of this second phase was that unions became recognized and could operate openly without any harassment, molestation and intimidation by government operatives. Despite the recognition and permission for the formation of trade unions, workers were still not treated fairly especially in the private sector. Workers continued to face hardships and difficulties because unions were not strong and strategic enough to put pressure on government to alleviate the suffering of workers.

This was because most union leaders lacked the required experience, education and exposure in the organization and administration of trade unions. A large number of the union members were possessed little knowledge about modern trade unionism. Among the features of the union then were low membership, the unions were local and were not real unions in the modern usage of the word. Trade unions were free to choose their own structures with the result that all sorts of unions based on plants, enterprises or industry sprang up. The lack of a cohesive union structure during this period led to the proliferation of trade unions as ambitious leaders exploited workers through the formation of mushroom trade unions. However, the outbreak of the civil war in 1967 in Nigeria marked the end of this period.

The phase three was termed a *period of limited conscious government intervention* coinciding with the Nigerian Civil War from 1967 to 1970. During this phase, government’s intervention became more pronounced as various decrees were promulgated to establish the rules of the game and to consolidate the new government’s hold on trade unionism. During the Nigerian Civil War, government promulgated the Trade Disputes (Emergency (Provisions Decree) Act No. 21, 1968. The decree suspended the Trade Dispute (Arbitration and Inquiry Act of 1941). The main objective of this decree was to maintain industrial peace and harmony by banning strikes and lock-outs and also to make provision for disputes settlement during the war. The government further amended the decree with the Trade Disputes (Emergency Provision Amendment Decree No. 53 of 1969). The decree established an Industrial Arbitration Tribunal whose decision on trade dispute was final, but the banning of strikes and lock-outs were retained in the amendment. It also required Government approval before any wage increase could be implemented by employers.

The civil war actually fuelled the government interference in trade unionism. Various decrees were churned out by government to prevent labour problems/issues from distracting its attention towards prosecuting the civil war. Government now involved itself in the issues of wage increases, productivity, training, dispute resolution, workers' welfare, workplace, health safety and factory security. Such issues were no longer regarded as exclusive subjects for labour and management. The enacting of two emergency Trade Union Dispute Acts of 1968 and 1969 notwithstanding, government still allowed the principle of industrial democracy which gave both the employer and workers the opportunity to settle problems of wages and conditions of employment based on the principle of collective bargaining but only intervened as an impartial arbiter whenever a dead-lock arose.

In 1973, Trade Decree No. 31 was enacted to regulate the process of registration of trade unions. The new approach was a clear departure from the old order. The registration of trade unions was to be effected compulsorily by all employers of labour. The main goal of this decree was the general provision for protection of wages and contract of appointment. A key feature of this phase was the proliferation of trade unions and the Central Labor Organizations (CLO) in the country. The five existing CLOs dabbled into conflicts of ideology and international affiliations that harbored ominous portends if not nipped in the bud. Ubeku (1975) remarked that a number of splits occurred in the unions over the question of foreign affiliation. During this interventionist phase, government established some Commissions/Tribunals to recommend befitting wages and conditions of service for public servants. They made valuable contributions to the sustenance and stabilization of the conditions of service of the civil servants in Nigeria. Some of these commissions were Mbanefo (1959), Morgan (1964), Elwood (1966), Adebo (1971) and Udoji (1975) etc.

The **fourth phase was the period of proscribing and banning of trade unions**. Government was completely dissatisfied with the state of the Nigerian Labour movement and in 1975; it promulgated a decree banning any form of international affiliation of trade unions except with the International Labour Organization. In 1976, government set up the Adebisi Tribunal that investigated the activities of trade unionism in Nigeria. Consequent upon his report, government promulgated the 1978 Trade Union Decree. The certificates of registration of all the existing Central Labour Organizations were revoked, while some trade unions leaders were banned from further participation in trade union activities in the country. Government appointed a sole administrator to coordinate and administer the affairs of all the registered trade unions. The Administrator restructured the existing trade unions and limited the number to seventy (70), comprising 42 industrial unions, 9 employers' association, 15 senior management staff associations and 4 professional unions. The highlight of the exercise was the creation by military fiat of a single central union named the Nigerian Labour Congress, under which all 42 unions were affiliated. However, no central union was instituted for the Senior Staff Association.

As earlier enumerated Nigeria was under military dictatorship for twenty- nine years. The long years of military rule actually defined the nation's trade union movement and workers struggle in the country. As a result of the aberration and dictatorship that military regimes constituted, trade unions operated under very harsh environment and inclement circumstances especially against the backdrop of responding to and mobilizing workers against unpopular and antiworker policies of successive military governments from General Moses Gowon (1967-1975) to General Sani Abacha (1993-1998).

However, it was during Generals Babangida and Abacha's regimes (1985-1998) that we saw the active participation of trade unions in the struggle for the improvement in the economic wellbeing of members and restoration of democratic rule. Trade unions faced immense challenges and repression especially two incidents of proscription and intimidation. The first was in 1988 when General Ibrahim Babangida regime took over NLC because it was at the forefront of the opposition to the Structural Adjustment Programme. 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. The dissolution of the National Executive Council of the NLC on both cases exemplified the travails of Congress, its leadership, affiliates and state councils, under military rule.

In 1996, another Trade Unions (Amendment) Decree 4 was enacted to restructure the affiliates of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC). This reduced the number to twenty-nine while Decree 22 structured the trade unions along industrial line (Fajana, 2002). One of the main clauses of the 1996 Amendment Act was the status of Nigerian Labour Congress as the only central labour organization. The Decree allowed for ten percent of all monies to be remitted to the central labour organization. The decree spelt out the responsibilities imposed on the Nigeria Labour Congress and established a modified process of check off dues collection i.e ten percent of monies collected should be remitted to the NLC.

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 to February 2007. Another delegate conference was held on February 2007 to usher in the Abdulwaheed Ibrahim Omar led executive, which was re elected in the last congress held in 2011. The promulgation of the Trade Union Amendment Act of 2005 kick started the commencement of the fifth stage. This phase was an attempt by government to recognize the independence of unions, ensure adequate representation and freedom of association vis a vis the principles of voluntarism, the constitution of an electoral college to elect members for the purpose of collective bargaining, constitution of an electoral college for the purpose of representation at tripartite bodies and voting before embarking on strikes

This period also coincided with the announcement of 15% fifteen percent increase in salaries and wages of the federal employees with effect from 1st January, 2007 and New National Minimum wage of December, 2009. The phase also included the Federal Government monetization policy for workers, 53% salary increase and Pay parity in federal establishments. This clearly encompasses government's interventionist approach to industrial relations practice in Nigeria. A historical development in this fifth phase was the recognition and take off of the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria, Nigeria's second labour centre and umbrella body for Senior staff associations in the country.

#### *1.4. The Role Of Trade Unions In National Development*

The perception of nation building mandates all individuals, institutions and organizations to collaborate in ensuring that the progress of the nation and its people is guaranteed and strengthened via generating genuine ideas and initiatives that are essential for promoting national goals. On this score, the trade union movement has a rich tradition of advancing national socio-economic and political development. To buttress this, Onuegbu (2013) noted that Government, employers and workers have realized mutual gains over the years as a result of constructive tripartite relations, the labour movement's participation in national development, and a proactive approach to labour-management relations. Trade unions took part in the anti-colonial struggle, and were also in the trenches during the struggle against military dictatorship. In partnership with civil-society organizations, they have promoted civil, civic, human, women and workers rights in the nation. Even during civilian rule, they have a pedigree of protesting against draconian government policies which cause untold hardship for Nigerian workers and their families. The trade unions have always risen above ethnic, religious and social divisions which has always bogged down the wider nation to organize, sensitize, mobilize and advance the cause of members and the generality of Nigerians. Solidarity and fraternity between and among members has been the key irrespective of social, age, gender economic, religious and political inclinations

Equally important is the perception in the minds of Nigerians that the labour movement has acted as a guardian that protects and preserves the interests of the masses. Though Nigeria is a multi-party democracy based on a presidential system, the opposition parties are quite effete. Therefore, trade union movement has become the defacto opposition party organizing several nation-wide general strikes, which were supported by workers, the middle class and other strands of society on issues ranging from protest against flawed elections, annulled elections, mismanagement of the national economy, higher prices for petroleum products, insensitive actions of leadership at all arms and tiers of government etc. The NLC as the centre point of all trade unions in Nigeria now acts as a check on all governmental policies campaigning and sensitizing its members and the general public against repressive, moribund and non progressive policies.

For instance, whenever government desires to effect change in fuel prices, trade unions have played significant role in mobilizing its members and the general public on the need to resist such action. A significant instance of the role of Trade union movement in enhancing workers welfare under democratic rule was in 1981 and 2012 respectively under the regimes of Alhaji Shehu Shagari and Dr Goodluck Jonathan when trade unions successfully mobilized their members for general strike which forced the government to increase the monthly minimum wage to N125.00 and revert the pump price of petroleum to N97. The prevailing democratic atmosphere during these periods enabled the unions to pursue its goal of protecting the interests of their members.

As earlier enumerated, nation building should not be reserved solely for Government; all of us collectively have roles to play to improve the country's economic, social and political fortunes. In this regard, I think the Unions have tried to advance and champion societal common good. Promote

#### *1.5. Contemporary Nigerian Trade Unionism: Issues And Challenges*

The Nigerian Trade Union movement has achieved a lot over the past seventy years, but it currently faces assorted challenges of many shades and sizes. First, the gradually extinction of the welfare state and its multiplier effects is a big challenge for workers and their trade unions. We have seen situations where by governments throughout the world have come under a barrage of pressure to deregulate and, increasingly, to abdicate most of their welfarist roles. 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. For instance in Nigeria, Governments at all arms, levels and tiers have inculcated the belief that their sole role to create enabling environments and not to provide services. Thus services are left to market forces at exorbitant rates to the poor masses of Nigeria.

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 organizations 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. For instance, the Current Governor of Wisconsin, Scott Walker in 2011 successfully passed a law removing the right to collective bargaining from state employees. Equally noteworthy such flexible work patterns not only makes it difficult to organize workers for collective representation which is at the core of workplace rights, but also creates difficulty in identifying the real employer for bargaining purposes i.e Newly recruited contract staff and Outsourced workers in public and private sectors and the situation of AIRTEL workers and five outsourcing firms.

The issue of voluntarism is a creeping challenge that may boomerang later if not effectively handled. This is also against the backdrop of the deplorable unemployment situation in the country and the probability of workers withdrawing their membership of unions on threat of disengagement by employers. The onus on workers to decide for themselves whether or not they want to be union members is a controversial issue. These days most employers seek to capitalize on the deplorable unemployment situation in the country to stifle the rights of workers to associate, organize and bargain collectively. They deliberately misread voluntarism to mean no unionism despite the provisions of the Trade Union Act which call for recognition of trade unions and right of workers to form trade unions. But unions need to keep on organizing, mobilizing and sensitizing workers in respect of this key issue because it has become very difficult if not impossible to unionize employees of MTN, Globacom, Etisalat and Airtel in the Telecommunications sector, while the Management of new generation financial institutions seem to have firmly shut their doors against unions.

Against the backdrop of job losses associated with economic downturns, organizational restructuring/mergers, closure of companies and the fall outs of varied public service reforms, a major challenge threatening the subsistence of trade unions today is how to arrest the tide of declining trade union density and get more members to join the fold. This is critical in the sense that

the strength of the union is in its numbers and the state of the economy has been wrecking havoc on the membership force of trade unions. A veritable solution is to mobilize and organize members in the traditional sectors of the economy and one wonders why the unions often show apathy towards this all important exercise. Oyelola (2008) explained that Labour laws and collective wage bargaining, so far, are mostly confined to the formal sector in Nigeria and once workers organize in formal groups, they can have labour laws enforced in their sector or company. In the same vein, there is a need to also look at the prospect or possibility of unionizing casual staff in addition to organizing the unorganized in the informal sector of the economy, an act that will surely shore up the numerical, political and financial strength of unions

Another great issue facing trade union leaders is education. This was buttressed by Ademiluyi and Imhonopil(2010), who called for qualitative education for all trade union leaders so they can match the intelligence and wits of employers, government and its agencies. Labour unions must meet the internal challenges facing them which include strengthening the leadership skills, abilities and competence of all levels of their leadership by deepening internal democracy in all areas of union work and ensuring that they are all provided with and adopt the working class position on history in all areas of union work. They also include strengthening their human resource base by ensuring that they have enough staff of the required orientation who will conduct union work at all levels. The capacity building of Union leaders must permeate the shop floor, states and industrial unions and not just the Central labour Organizations i.e NLC and TUCN alone.

Another big challenge facing the union is how to effectively partner and develop a working collaboration with civil society, human rights, community based, media, non government organizations to create a more formidable coalition that can form a social platform to canvass for common good and also pose a wider force or counter force to a strong Federal Government. Labour needs to strengthen, maintain and cultivate relations with all the stakeholders in this wider movement. Ademiluyi and Imhonopil(2010) identified such existing links with civil society organizations as those with Labour and Civil Society Coalition (LASCO) , Trade union congress, Academic staff union of Universities, Labour Party. The trade unions should recreate themselves as social movements. They must continue to broaden their goals to encompass social progress beyond the immediate employment relationship and rediscover their capacity to mobilize workers and non workers in campaigns for workplace and wider society

The virtual nonexistence of employment security and frequent spate of job losses in the nation is a threat to national socio-economic development, International Labour Organization's decent work agenda and the goals of unions to enhance the status of workers. Job loss translates to more problems for the working poor i.e, the disengaged and their families. Dependency increases with the loss of each job, poverty is spread and everyone loses. The challenge for unions now is how to proffer practical solutions to the huge unemployment situation, become an employer of labour and at the same time provide some sort of stipends for workers who have lost their jobs as it is obtainable in other climes. This is very important because the gradual decrease in union numerical strength over the past decade has impacted negatively on the virility, functionality and utility of Trade unions

Equally worthy of mentioning is the issue of continued relevance of the movement. Sustaining workers welfare is essential and quite vital in employment relations. But unions must understand that the world of work is tripartite in nature and the interests of the other parties—Employers and the state slightly differs, therefore workers rights and welfare may definitely not be paramount on the agenda of the employers and the state. The imperative therefore is for the movement to continuously and consistently jostle in a world of myriad of issues and problems that require attention. Presently, Nigeria is so bogged down with problems of intractable and obdurate pedigree. For instance, with the mindless insurgency in North Eastern Nigeria and environmental degradation in the South Geo-political zone, few people actually care about or focus on trade unionism. It is in this kind of clime, that the trade union movement must exist and continue its work

Emerging human resource/personnel policies of public and private sector organizations abridges workers rights and also hinders consultation on issues that are germane to the world of work. They are perceived as anti unionism and worker, the onus is for unions to device means of ensuring that the fundamental rights of workers in the workplace is not only safeguarded, but also sustained. This issue needs to be squarely tackled because of growing intolerance of unions, threat to freedom of association, right to organize and right to collective bargaining and association and attendant curtailing of workers' rights to same with the promulgation of several statutory and organizational policies to emasculate the movement and stultify workers.

Another key challenge that is related to the above is the state of labour legislation in Nigeria. Apart from the fact that they are stale , retrogressive and do not capture the present aspirations of Nigerian workers, they are not the outcome of joint consultation between parties as stipulated by International Labour Organization, thus making them lopsided against workers and their representative groups. The onus lies on workers to up the ante and mount pressure on government to ensure that labor laws are not only up to date and in sync with global best practices, but are also the products of tripartite deliberations.

## 2. Conclusion

From a modest beginning in the colonial period, the Nigerian trade union movement has come a long way. Against all odds, unions in Nigeria have continued to be effective vanguard for the promotion of good governance and economic emancipation of the labouring masses in the country. However, it is still far from nirvana and its obviously not yet uhuru. Union leaders should not be oblivious of the fact that trade unionism in Nigeria is still evolving and faces enormous challenges considering the changes taking place in the socio-economic and political spheres and the democratic process of the country which is capable of redefining the labour movement in terms of organization, structure, membership drive and in fact the totality of the trade union as an institution. As a result, it is essential for union leadership to be incisive, innovative and proactive in embarking on diverse initiatives to revamp and reposition unions at the local, national, regional , international and even organizational levels. This is important given that union density has fallen seriously over the past decade.

The very circumstances that necessitated the coming together of workers in trade unions during the early stages of the factory system are still very much present in this era. The trade union remains the only organization that workers own collectively and it is the only body that can address their concerns; no other body or persons can do it for them. At every point in time what should be uppermost in the agenda of the Nigerian trade union movement is to strengthen and boost the capacity of the trade union organization to present a robust and sophisticated front when advancing the interests, welfare and wellbeing of the working class and the citizens in the larger society. Despite the multifaceted setbacks, the acervation of challenges and multiplicity of obstacles, the prospects for trade unions as champions, promoters, protectors and advancers of workers socio-economic, physiological and political interests in Nigeria is still high, but this can only be accomplished if the members and leaders can tenaciously, sincerely and proactively work to move the trade union movement to the next level for the benefit of all

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