

The Role of the Nigerian Labour Movement in the Democratic Transformation

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Currently, there are two central labor organizations in Nigeria; the Nigerian Labor Congress (NLC) which represents the ordinary labours, and the Trade Union Federation; an organization that includes the high rank officials. Both Organizations have a separate membership and each includes a number of affiliated federations in various economic sectors, not to mention the public enterprise companies.

In this respect, the government plays the role of the mediator between the heads of companies and the NLC and adopts the state policies. In an endeavor to apply terms for the discussion in the political life, the current regime (whether the militants or the civilians) had selectively interfered in organizing the Nigerian Labor Movement, especially in the NLC, so as to organize the foreign and domestic relations of the trade union organizations.

In this vein, the political, economic and social labour demands that had been met during the transitional period are deemed well, despite the political, economic, religious and ethnic plurality inside the Congress.

The Nigerian Labour Movement is represented in the NLC which the Nigerian government had established through amending the Labour decree No. 20 of February 28, 1978. Such a Congress includes 42 industrial federations.

At the same time, the NLC seeks to realize the highest level of decisions, objectives and strategies for realizing democracy. This is represented in the role of the Congress in democratic transformation and political participation. This study tackles the role of the Congress in

the democratic transformation through two pivots; the role of the Congress in democratic transformation, in mobilizing the public and in political participation.

The Role of the Conference in Democratic Transformation

The NLC plays a pivotal role in the strike towards democratic transformation. This is the outcome of various objectives and strategies through which the Congress can face the governmental strategies. The role of the conference in democratic transformation can be understood in three points:

- **The Role of the Congress in Restoring the Civilian Rule in 1999**

The transformation to a civilian rule started by the era of Abu Bakr Abdel Sallam. Despite the state violence, including assassinations and forced exile for various leaderships from the labour federations, yet such federations were continuously forming a pressure through organizing strikes. Thereupon, various strikes had taken place against the rise in prices. Such strikes were organized with the collabo-

ration of Nigerian vocational and non-vocational federations.

The Congress supported such federations so as to guarantee the success of the strikes, thus compelling the government to enter into negotiations and to lower the prices. Furthermore, the active federations had forced the government to adopt a rational rule, to respect the rule of law and to realize a national conciliation.

- **The Role of the Congress in Constitutional Reform**

Since the integration of the Northern and Southern Nigerian reserves in 1914 to constitute a region, currently known as Nigeria, no real comprehensive dialogue process that should lead to a social code or to a legitimate constitution had taken place.

The reform of the constitution is a vital matter to any state, being the statute which regulates the states' affairs. The constitution is also deemed the most important tool for governance, as any law that contradicts with the constitution is null and void.

This was emphasized in a report issued by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance over democracy in Ni-

geria. This report stressed the need to formulate a new social code for running negotiations between the state, the civil society and the public sector through a comprehensive national dialogue.

Thereupon, it is no strange that since restoring the civilian rule in 1999, the civil society organizations, the international governmental organizations and the government exert strenuous efforts so as to start the process of dialogue for constitutional reform. Despite such attempts, the proposed constitution in November 2004 was illegitimate. Thus, in order to understand the feedback of the dialogue for constitutional reform and to improve the process of running a dialogue in the future, the Center for Democracy and Development had organized a conference over "1999 Constitution and the Future of Democracy in Nigeria. This conference had formed the "Citizens Forum for Constitutional Reform". Since then, various organizations participate in the process of dialogue.

The NLC had also adopted an initiative that includes more than 30 civil society organizations and pro-democracy civil society net-

works. As a result, the 9th report on democracy had been issued in 2001. In its draft resolution, the Constitutional Reform Committee had included 6 paragraphs from the previously mentioned report which was discussed and adopted during the second summit, March 20/21, 2002 in Abuja.

The forum had organized a 7-day programme so as to tackle negotiation skills, conflict management and drafting the principles of constitution. Furthermore, the forum agreed upon tackling the following decisive fields;

Rights of citizenship

- Addressing the excessive concentration of authorities.
- Monetary Federalism/ Resources Control.
- Forming constitutional independent committees.
- Freedom of assembly and of forming political parties.
- Social and economic rights.
- Justice and Rule of law.
- The role of the security sector.

The Role of the Congress in Entrenching Democracy

The NLC had presented tangible contributions in the strife to-

wards realizing democracy in Nigeria. Such contributions are represented in the following fields:

- Rights of the People

The NLC had greatly contributed to the development and to guaranteeing the rights of the Nigerians. Such contributions were represented in the struggle against the military regime, the struggle for reaching transparent and free elections and the objection on rigging the electoral process, not to mention its role in monitoring elections, its contribution in the discussions over the political role of the state, and the strife to dismiss the corrupt civil servants from their posts.

Moreover, the NLC had compelled Buhari's regime to respect the fundamental human rights. Moreover, in 2007, the NLC and the civil society had prevented the process of rigging the elections. On the other hand, the NLC had contributed to raising the public resentment against Buhari's regime, thus ending his regime in August 1985. The NLC had also led to the establishment of the elec-

toral reform committee.

- Rights of Labors

The NLC had long defended the rights of labours throughout the years. Such efforts had extended to include the rights of labours not only in their working place, but also in the larger society. The strategies which the NLC was keen to spread in the society include enlightening its leaders of such rights so as to spread them in the society. Moreover, enlightening schools had been established for labours.

In January 2012, the National Union of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG) and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (Pengassan) had issued a statement declaring a three-day strike, to start on Feb. 13 if the labour trade union leaders did not return to their works and recognize the rights established in all free-zone companies.

In turn, the Ministry of Labor and productivity, Emerka Wogu and the oil and Gas Free Zone Authority (OGEZA) and the trade unions had all approved

on the fact that the companies shall grant 90 days to abide by the provisions mentioned in the law on companies which demands allowing the trade unions to freely fulfill their jobs without any detentions in their members. As in this respect, Oyo government had detained Bayo Akende, the trade union leader; under an accusation of mobilizing the labours against the government, when Tambari Yabo Mohamed, the police commissioner, regarded his activities as threatening the safety of the labours.

- Rights of women

The Congress had played a pivotal role in expanding the rights of women. This was represented in revising the women's constitution and in absorbing further participation of women in the labour trade unions.

On the other hand, the Congress had confined the discrimination against women in working places and in the wider society.

- Right of Students

The NLC has been well known by defending the rights of students. On June 1, 1986, the NLC

had sacrificed the freedom and the lives of its members for the sake of confronting the governmental educational policies.

In 1986, the government and the NLC had engaged in a conflict on defining the minimum wages, resulting in the assassination of a number of students from Ahmadu Bello University on the hands of the police in a demonstration. In this vein, the NLC had called for an urgent dismissal to Ango Abudullahi, the police commissioner in Kaduna and for presenting the police officers responsible for the death of the students, to trial.

Furthermore, the NLC had called his members to participate in a peaceful march expressing their resentment from the gun shooting and supporting the Nigerian students. As a response, the government gave orders to the police to be in a state of alert; thus resulting in the arrest of a number of prominent labour leaderships.

The NLC and the Social Issues

The NLC had also paid due attention to the social development in Nigeria. In this respect, the Congress had entered in con-

flicts with the government on matters like health, education, corruption and social services in general. Such contributions had been documented, not only in the NLC's publications, but also in the publications of other organizations.

The NLC had contributed to various issues such as their opposition to the state-owned petroleum refineries. In this vein, the government had previously adopted resolutions over the sales of the refineries to improve the investments. Thereupon, the NLC organized a protest against the social repercussions of such sales; represented in squandering job opportunities.

The Congress had also contributed to the field of education through adopting certain measures; organizing training courses, educational sessions and workshops so as to contribute to developing the skills of its members. On the other hand, most probably, the NLC is the only body that organized training courses to its members. It had also presented the proposal no. 12 to the Federal Government demanding the reform of the educational system and the proposal no. 14 asking the government to increase the amount of finance dedicated to the Nigerian educational system.