

## **THE PLACE OF STUDENTS AND WORKERS ACTIVISM IN POLITICS: A HISTORICAL REFLECTION**

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**ABSTRACT.** History has revealed that overtime Students and Workers through their activism have played significant role in politics as they have acted as checks in any political dispensation that is against the common interest. This is because while the proletariats (workers) produce the wealth plundered by those in authority, the students form the literati, on whose shoulders rest the conscience of the society. It was in line with this mandate that in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Russian students were in the forefront of the struggle against the Czars' exploitative and dictatorial social system. Similarly, Chinese students constituted the most active groups in the fight against feudalism and Japanese colonization. In the 1960s, students took up arms in opposition to inhumane Western consumer societies and their exploitation and repression of the poor, black and yellow races. Also American students were actively involved in the civil right movements, especially in the Southern parts. Under the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) they created a climate of opinion about the Vietnam War which the American people could not ignore. In Africa, outbursts in Mali, Zaire, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria and South Africa have shown students and workers as important factor in the decolonization politics. This is because the oppressive policies of the state have most often further impoverish them both physically and psychologically. However, with the attainment of Independence, this role have been crippled by the forces which they paper intends to interrogate. Data obtained from primary and secondary sources were deployed to carry out the study with an analytical and narrative historical method. Findings indicate that oppressive politics has been the major factor that stimulated their role in politics especially during the decolonization process, and that in the neo-colonial state, emerging forces and policies of the government are directed at destroying this role.

**Keywords:** Workers, Students, Governance, Politics.

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## Introduction

The origin of trade union movement in Nigeria could be traced to the pre-colonial period. At this time, there existed guilds, mutual aid groups and professional or occupational craft unions all of which function to play the role of trade union. However, these associations are not in the modern sense of it full fledged trade union. Rather, most of them are merely workers association.<sup>1</sup> However, available historical evidence has revealed that cases of oppressive rules has also manifested in Nigeria especially during the Colonial period leading to the emergence of workers and students groups. In this way, activities surrounding the emergence of Trade Unionism have been associated with oppressive government. It is in line with this that it has been noted thus:

The revolutionary wave, that that was ravaging the world after the Second World War did not spare Nigeria. The first major confrontation between the Colonial master and the Nigerian working class broke out in June 1945, under the leadership of Michael Imoudu. This general strike lasted for 40 days and all the workers demands completely won. The 1945 general strike marked a significant turning point in the history of trade unionism in Nigeria; it was not for joke that Michael Imoudu eventually became the all-time Nigerian Labour leader number 1. This strike passed an unforgettable message to the colonial masters that Nigerian workers had finally arrived and were equally capable of revolutionary acts like their counterpart the world over. If the Nigerian workers had carried out this magnificent struggle under an independent working class party, the question of workers power might have been concretely posed, but it all ended up as ordinary economic struggle. The colonial masters did not leave this matter for chance; if Nigerian working class of 1945 was that powerful, what would become of it in 1950s and above?

From the above, it is clear that the inception of modern trade union in Nigeria could be said to coincide with colonialism. Consequently, the first set of trade unions were modelled after British unions. Unlike the situation in most developed countries, trade union preceded industrialization in Nigeria. However, at the earliest period of colonialism, Nigerians were discouraged from belonging to unions as union membership was regarded as anti- colonial attitude.<sup>2</sup> This situation sped up the birth of it, such that in 1912, the first trade union organization was born in Nigeria. The strength of it organisation became

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<sup>1</sup> D. Otobo, *The Role of Trade unions in Nigerian Industrial Relations* (London: Malthouse, 1987), 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

evident in the fact that by 1913, the union already had its branches in Kaduna and Port-Harcourt. It is on record that it was initially called Southern Civil Service Union, with about 500 memberships, cutting across the length and breadth of the nation. It was later renamed Nigerian Civil Service Union after the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorates.

The success of the activities of the Nigerian Civil Service Union and the need to check the excessiveness of the colonial administration led to the formation of other workers unions. This became evident when in 1931 the long pre-eminence of the civil service union was broken. This was when the railway workers went on a short and sharp strike led by Michael Imoudu, against a newly introduced system of calculating wages. In the same year the Nigerian Union of Teachers was inaugurated and the following year the Railway Workers Union was formed. The strike by the Railway workers was seen as significant because they gave a clearer picture of the exploitative manoeuvres of the colonial government and however this had robbed the people of the resources. In support of this, O. Kazeem opined thus:

Colonial political economy was founded on the exploitative principle. The colony served as a source of cheaper raw materials for metropolitan Britain as well as a market for its goods (Colonial economy was mainly geared towards making Nigeria supplier of raw materials for imperialist economy). To achieve this goal, the British colonizers built railways to facilitate the extraction of raw materials like cotton and ground nuts from the North, cocoa from the West and palm kernel from the East as well as mine products from Plateau. This made railway transportation the main pivot upon which the whole colonial economy was resting. The railway workers were carrying the burden of the colonial economy and felt that their interest might not be properly protected under the Civil Service Union where they were before 1931. Expectedly, Nigerian Railway Workers Union started out as a very militant labour union and was lucky to have a fearless and honest leadership headed by Pa Michael Imoudu.<sup>3</sup>

These were followed by the formation of the Post and Telegraph Workers Union, The Nigerian Marine African Union, and the Public Works Department Workers Union, and several others such that by 1940 there were over twelve trade unions actively organising on the railways, at the docks, in the post and telegraph offices, the PWDs, and the other key points in the sinews of the economic and military infrastructure of colonial Nigeria.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ola Kazeem, "Centenary of Trade Unionism in Nigeria," <http://www.workersalternative.com>.

<sup>4</sup> Yusufu Bala Usman, *Nigeria: Independence on a Gold Platter?*, vol 3, no. 3 (Nigeria: In-Depth Analysis, 1988), 10.

While most of the above-mentioned Unions could be described as formed by those directly affected by colonial employment policies, other bodies that were also discriminated against and wanted an end to what they described as unjust policies began to emerge. Thus, in 1937, Lagos, witnessed the formation of The Lagos Fishermen' Association, followed in 1938 by the Taxi Drivers Union and the Canoe Transport Union, and in 1939 by the Wholesale Builders Association and in 1940 by the Women Sellers Union. Even the Night Soil Removers Union was formed in 1942. In his analysis of the situation, Kazeem O. wrote:

...As a result of the fact that colonial exploitation was biting painfully hard not only in the southern protectorate, but also more terribly in the Northern protectorate. Nigerian working class started out with hands of solidarity and comradely interactions nation-wide, without any ethnic and religious bigotry, even before the nation was born. A lot of battles were waged and won by this union against the colonial masters and this further encouraged more workers to enroll and by 1931 another two major unions were formed: Nigerian Union of Teachers and Nigeria Railway Workers Union.<sup>5</sup>

On the eventual success of these groups in bringing an end to colonial exploitation in the area, Aremu I. noted thus:

The first generation of workers emerged from the nascent colonial economic and administrative structures. Colonial authority preferred forced unpaid labour but was challenged by the workers. In essence, the colonial order prompted the emergence of early working class movement in Nigeria. In between the two world wars, (from 1919 and 1945) the British colonial economy intensified colonial exploitation through direct increased taxation, retrenchment of the workforce, wage cuts, casualisation and hourly payments. These periods also marked the radicalization of the country's labour movement. The high point of labour's resistance was in 1941 when Nigeria's railway men led by Micheal Imoudu and the union's secretary, Mr Adenekan marched through streets of Lagos to see Governor Sir Bernard Bourdillion. The protest led to major victories for the workers in terms of improved wages and abolition of hourly pay system. Subsequent labour agitations such as the 44 day strikes of 1945 led by labour NO 1 Micheal Imoudu and the 1949 Enugu coal Iva Valley massacre in which 22 coal miners were brutally killed by the colonial police for daring to demand for wage arrears. These agitations linked the demand for better working conditions in particular with the demand for independence in general. Nationalists like Dr Nmadi Azikwe and Obafemi Awolowo backed the demands of the trade unions, deploying their journalist prowess to pressure the colonial authorities to improve the workers' lot.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Kazeem, Ola. "Centenary of Trade Unionism in Nigeria."

<sup>6</sup> I. Aremu, "The Nigerian Economy and the Labour Movement, recorded live from FRCN daily commentary," (2012), <http://www.nigeriacommentaries.blogspot.com>.

While the Workers' Union was formed and continued to fight for the liberation of the people, group of Nigerian students both at home and abroad also came together agitate for better government conditions in Nigeria. This action is well documented in the emergence and activities of West African Students Union (WASU) between 1925 and 1952. They established a news magazine WASU, in which they undertook public enlightenment sessions such as discussion groups, public lectures and conferences designed to influence political thinking within the British Political parties and spur activism at home. Members also undertook regular tour of Nigeria to raise awareness; as exemplified in the activities of leaders Ladipo Solanke between 1929 and 1932, during which in collaboration with others to establish branches of WASU in Lagos, Ibadan, Ago-Iwoye, Ijebu-Ode, Ile-Ife, Enugu, Port-Harcourt, Jos, Zaria and Kano. Some of these centres later became important branches of the Nigerian Youth Movement, mobilizing Nigerians for agitation against colonial rule. Even at the local levels, students continue to condemn the activities of the colonial administration as well as form Unions. Usman gave the picture thus:

... alongside these, old Boys of various secondary schools like Kings College and Teachers Colleges like Katsina College and Bauchi Teachers Training College organised themselves too. The Nigerian Union of Students itself was formed in 1939. Kinship and tribal Unions like the Igbirra Progressive Union, the Urhobo Renascent Convention, the Idoma Hope Rising Union sprang up along older ones like the Ibibio Welfare Union and the Ibibio Farmers Union.<sup>7</sup>

From the analysis of the activities of the Unions in the colonial period, it is safe to argue that the history of the country's labour and students movements are linked to the history, progress and development of Nigeria's society and economy. It is also important to note that the relatively peaceful road to independence in Nigeria contrasts sharply to years of bloody armed struggles that heralded freedom in other countries (Mozambique, Angola) as a result of the doggedness of both the Students and Workers Union of that period.<sup>8</sup> Nigeria's relative peaceful road to freedom, notwithstanding, the long struggle to the independence was also characterized by mass resistance, mass strikes and protests, enormous sacrifices largely by Nigerian workers, their trade unions and labour movement.

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<sup>7</sup> Usman, *Nigeria: Independence on a Gold Platter?*, 10.

<sup>8</sup> See Aremu, "The Nigerian Economy and the Labour Movement."

## **Workers and Good Governance since Independence**

The general idea of struggling for self government from colonial master was to create a situation in which the people will be free from the oppressive dictates of foreign rule as well as a situation in which the resources (both human and natural) will be channel towards internal development.<sup>9</sup> For example, in a letter dated 17<sup>th</sup> September 1945, from Poona, India, a Nigerian Soldier, Private No. 82602. Theo Ayoola, wrote home thus:

We all overseas soldiers are coming back home with new ideas...we have been told what we fought for. That is 'freedom' we want nothing but freedom.

In line with the above, Usman<sup>10</sup> opined that the above and activities of the workers Union in Nigeria made matters very clear to the British with their long experience of colonisation and decolonisation, going back almost two hundred years to the rebellion of North America colonies.

Since independence, the Nigerian trade union movement has led series of struggles for both good governance and decent work agenda. In the area of good or deceit wage, it has been noted that is evident from the Harragin, Turdo-Davis, Miller Commissions of the pre-colonial period to Adebo, Udoji, Shagari, 2000 minimum wage reviews and the current minimum wage Commission of the recent times. In the area of fighting against dictatorship, labour movement remained a unifying force for national unity. Significantly labour championed the struggle against military dictatorships with enormous sacrifices that included dissolutions of its elected executive councils. It has also been at the forefront of the resistance against polices such as fuel price increases without which the earning and purchasing power of the working class would have been eroded by inflation. The trade union has served as backbone for the first developmental effort of the newly independent Nigeria during the first and second Republics.

In the discharge of the above, successive governments have tended to see labour as a problem in their attempt to implant their programs. Thus, various attempts were made (at various times, including legislative actions) to ensure that labour is amenable to the dictates of the regime in power. This was more during the military era when the various military regimes particularly pursued with vigour the fight against strong union, which they see as a potential threat, especially when considered in the light of the fact that their intervention in government has no constitutional backing and subject to rejection on the

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<sup>9</sup> Usman, *Nigeria: Independence on a Gold Platter?*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

basis of legality.<sup>11</sup> In this way any stumbling block was cleared with all military might and power. It was in line with this that even the Media was at various times declared enemy and the government had to come down hard on them. For example, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of August, 1973, a journalist Mr. Amakiri of the Observer had his head shaved with an old rusty razor blade, stripped naked and given twenty four strokes of the cane on his bare back. This happened at the office of the then Rivers State military governor, Commander Alfred Diete-Spiff, because he published the grievances the Nigerian Union of Teachers, Rivers State Branch had against the governor.<sup>12</sup>

The attempt by the Student Union to checkmate the illegality of military incursion into politics, met with the might of arms of the government which described their activities as illegal. For example, in 1978, the Obasanjo administration described the 1978 student crises as the handiwork of students and their hoodlum accomplices. In the federal government's statement on the crisis, it announced thus:

Those students and their hoodlum accomplices...ought to be ashamed of themselves;...it has been established that the students solicited and employed the services of undesirable ... to commit their lawless acts.<sup>13</sup>

As a way of making sure the activities of the students were brought under government control, the administration continued to target those they believed were importing what they described as Marxism into the school. For example, in 1981 and 1982 it attempted to deport Dr Patrick Wilmot, a radical sociology teaching in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, while it handed over Dr Dennis Brutus, a teaching at the university of Calabar to the South Africa Intelligence Agencies.<sup>14</sup>

By 1985, the administration of Babangida came with the policy of the imposition of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), which brought untold hardship on the populace, impoverishing parent so much so that it became very difficult for them to finance their wards through school. However, by 1986, with the implementation of SAP, the threat of the withdrawal of education subsidy and the restricted environment of academic pursuit was resisted by Nigerian Students.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> B.T. Bingel. "Understanding Trade Unionism in Nigeria: Historical Evolution and Prospects for Future Development," in *Trade Union in Nigeria: Challenges for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, edited by F. Adewunmi (Lagos: Fredrich Ebert Foundation, 1997), 32-33.

<sup>12</sup> Jakande, I.K., "The Press and Military Rule," in *Nigerian Government and Politics under Military Rule*, edited by Oyeleye Oyediran (London: Macmillan, 1979), 119.

<sup>13</sup> A. Iyorchia, *Essays in Popular Struggles* (Oguta: Zim Pan African Publishers, 1986), 56-58.

<sup>14</sup> "Wilmot: Spy or Extremist," *The African Guardian* (March 28, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> M. Tukur, "The Immediate Future of Higher Education in Nigeria," Letter to the Honourable Minister of Education, 27<sup>th</sup> September, 1984. B. Olukoshi, ed., *The Politics of Structural Adjustment in Nigeria* (London: James Currey, 1993), 24.

Like the Shagari's administration, Babangida finally succeeded in deporting Wilmot and continued to target other university teachers and students who spoke out. Describing the outcome of this Kukah wrote:

General Babangida began to wage war against what he referred to as undue radicalism. The target was the academic community. By this time, it had sharpened its tools of contestation with the military. The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and its counterparts in the universities of Ibadan, Calabar, Port Harcourt and Jos, had become the hot beds of very informed Marxists radicalism in the 80's;... University lecturers were harassed or detained. They were accused of not teaching what they were paid to teach. Fear began to grip the academic community as many radical intellectuals began what would later be referred to the season of migration.<sup>16</sup>

Other scholars<sup>17</sup> gave further information thus:

Across the campuses in Nigeria, members of ASUU therefore came under intense pressure. . . . the government launched a war across the campuses, seeking to curb what it termed undue radicalism. The government fought its war on two fronts. Its move to bare its fangs by flushing out some twenty lecturers across the country was thwarted when ASUU secured a court injunction restraining the Minister of Education from going ahead with the decision. Government then made another move. By promulgating the Trade Unions [Miscellaneous Provision] Decree of 1986, the government disqualified ASUU from membership of NLC. Along with this came the removal of the mandatory check-off system by which Unions automatically deducted monies from workers' salaries into the coffers of the Unions.

At the end of the day, the appointment Dr. Festus Iyayi, who was the president of the Academic Staff Union of Universities and lecturer with the University of Benin was in 1987 terminated on the grounds that he had been engaged in private practice. However, the academia argued that it was rather the fact that he was bent on opening the eyes of Nigerians to the evil of the government of the day that led to his deportation.<sup>18</sup>

This hostility continued even in the reign of Abacha, thus F. Adewumni, specifically noted thus:

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<sup>16</sup> M.H. Kukah, *Democracy and Civil Society in Nigeria* (Lagos: Spectrum Books Ltd, 1999), 79.

<sup>17</sup> Olukoshi, *The Politics of Structural Adjustment in Nigeria*, 193; Kukah, *Democracy and Civil Society in Nigeria*, 159.

<sup>18</sup> "Why was Wilmot Deported," *The Analyst* 3, no. 2 (March-April 1988): 34.



Events since the ascendancy of the Abacha regime in November 1993, have practically resulted in the complete demobilization of the unions. The incoherent response of organized labour to the political crises that followed the annulment of the 1993 presidential election provided the opportunity for the Abacha administration to dissolve the executive committees of the Nigerian Labour Congress, The National Union of Petroleum and National Gas Workers (NUPENG) and the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) who were frontally involved in the attempt to force a de-annulment of the election results in 1994.<sup>19</sup>

Apart from the above, the military administration under General Abacha continually clamped down on the media. For example, General Abacha within its first 100 days in office, seized over 50,000 copies of TELL magazine without any reason (January 2, 1994); Arrested and molested employees of Guardian Express (January 4, 1994); aborted NUJ Press conference (January 14, 1994); Charged the editor in chief of Razor Magazine for sedition (January 19, 1994); Executed Ken Saro-Wiwa and others (January 2, 1994), Disrupted the meeting of Campaign for Democracy, a Human Right Organization (February 15, 1994) (Akinkuotu, A. 1994).

Even before the Abacha Administration, the military administration under General Buhari, showed its intolerance to the media when the administration closed down newspaper houses, while practitioners were detained (Some of the newsmen detained include Tunde Thompson and Nduka Irabor. This led to the popular NUJ and Guardian protest) (National Concord, 1985).

The victories of the Student body in association with the Workers Union in in this pursuit have been acknowledged thus:

Students have indeed, over time, registered some considerable victories in this country. For example the demonstration against Murtala's death, the Ali must go demonstration of 1978, which shook even a military dictatorship; the Ango must go demonstration of 1986 which shook Ahmadu Bello University, the anti-SAP and removal of oil subsidy riots of 1989, 1990 and 1991 and the demonstration against the annulment of the June 12 elections in 1993 were all spasms that made Nigeria sit up on the issues of the day. To be sure, some of these clashes with security agencies have led to deaths. Unfortunately, student demonstrations in Nigeria have tended to be ad-hoc, chaotic, lacking substantial staying power, clarity and focus and ability to go across the board to draw national sympathies to their cause. This is not unconnected with the very limited and sectoral interests of the issues

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<sup>19</sup> Cited in A. Adesoji, "The Subversion of Labour Militancy in Nigeria: A Case of the Nigerian Labour Congress," *The Nigerian Journal of Economic History*, no. 5&6 (2003), (Ibadan: Quantum Publishers, University of Ibadan, 2003): 32.

around which students agitate, namely, their welfare, and access to education and campus conditions. Of course, students do not necessarily have plans to replace governments since they have no strategic replacements from their ranks. Given their mobility and the fact that they are largely birds of passage, they can only hold out a moral vision for society. When they move on, they hand the baton and join the struggle in another turf in our turbulent national life.<sup>20</sup>

### **Nigerian Union, Government Repression and the Road Ahead**

The situation in Nigeria today is such that any observer of Workers and student unionism in Nigeria will have to concede that their dynamism has waned considerably. While the Workers union seems to still maintain some considerable influence, the Student Unions have greatly diminished as a result of long years of military repressions, intimidation, blackmail, infiltration by security agencies, co-option of members that have taken their toll considerably. It has also been observed that the lack of democratic space and misappropriation of resources led to sharp corrupt practices within the various bodies. As such, students have to align themselves with institutions and agents of sometimes dubious interests and credentials to remain afloat or secure things such as good grades, accommodation, etc. these are some reasons which have led to moral decay on our campuses, thus turning them into haven for cults and secret societies. Thus, instead of encouraging students bodies to engage the government in robust discourse, the political class would rather have them become armed thugs for political activities. This has been systematically achieved through the underfunding of the education sector, victimization of lecturers, encouraging brain drain as well as recruitment amateurs to manage the system. The result is that that energy that would have been channeled towards vibrant unionism is now tailored towards violent cult activities on campus, so much so that thousands of students have lost their lives to it while properties worth millions have also been destroyed. Apart from the injured and those rusticated or expelled, troubled universities students are generally known for their activism everywhere.<sup>21</sup>

The above is supported by the table below with gives a chronicle of activities of these groups since the period of military repressions, intimidation, blackmail, infiltration by security agencies.

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<sup>20</sup> Kukah, *Democracy and Civil Society in Nigeria*, 160.

<sup>21</sup> A.I. Ajayi, T.E. Haastrup, and F.M. Osalusi. "Menace of Cultism in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions: The Way Out," *Anthropologist* 12, no. 3 (2010): 155-160.

**Table I:** chronicle of activities of Cult Activities on Some Selected Institutions

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Place</b>
1985	A non-cult student incurred the wrath of another student, who was a cult leader for snatching the latter's girlfriend.	University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
1991	A student of University of Port Harcourt was beheaded during a feud between cult members; the activities of secret cult groups resulted in the death of a Principal Assistant Registrar and his wife.	Delta State University, Abraka,
2002	A 300 level economics student was shot dead and slaughtered at the Dallimore area	Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State.
2006	Cult members invaded University of Ado-Ekiti, burnt the cadet's office, killed three students and injured students and staff of the university	University of Ado-Ekiti
nd	ten students were gunned down in a day by cultists	Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife
2006	Seun Oyedola, a lecturer was abducted and killed during a clash between cults	Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ogun
1999	five students were killed slain students were George Yemi Iwilade, the then Secretary General, OAU Students Union, Tunde Oke, a member of Democratic Socialist Movement, Efe Ekede, Eviano Ekelemu and Yemi Ajiteru).	Obafemi Awolowo University
2003	Three students—Kehinde Dosumu, Omotayo Suraju and Olalekan Ajao were killed.	Kwara State Polytechnic
2008	Tony Ileogbuna, was murdered (acting Head of Geology department)	Enugu State University of Science and Technology
2004	Vincent Uloho was murdered in cold blood.	University of Benin
2004	Wale Adeyori and Banji of were killed	Federal Polytechnic Ilaro
2005	Ashifat Olatunji Saheed, a student was slaughtered	Polytechnic Ibadan
2005	Gbenga Joseph, a policeman attached to anti-cult squad of Kwara State police command was killed by suspected cultist	Kwara State
2005	Cultists slaughtered Bolaji Toniwa, a student	Lagos State University
2012	Cultist killed a final year student	University of Benin

In the case of the Workers Union various government have continued to adopt manipulative measures to wane their strength. These ranged from the dissolution of the executives, arrest, detention and imprisonment of leaders, sponsoring pro-establishment labour leaders to central leadership positions as well as supporting malcontents within the rank and file of labour movements. In 1976, the National Executive Committee of the NLC led by Wahab Goodluck was dissolved while Goodluck along with other labour members was banned from participating in labour activities in 1977.<sup>22</sup>

The administration of General Babangida which did not hide is hatred for their radical position marked the doom of the labour movement, by meddling into the internal affairs of the body. This was achieved through the process of co-option, enticement and inducement. Having been rattled by the Ali Chiroma led NLC during the students' riots at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria in 1986. Ali Chiroma had kept the government restive during the period of his leadership of the NLC. The killing of students at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, the demonstrations against Margaret Thatcher and the resistance to fuel price hikes were some of the remarkable achievements of the Chiroma era between 1986-1988. To curb the power of the Union, the government, sponsored Takai Shamang, making available financial resources to the Shamang faction. The elections ended in a stalemate which led to the so-called sacking of the Chiroma-led executive with Shamang, the contestant, declaring himself as president. With this impasse, the military went on to proscribe the movement and install a sole administrator who later saw to another round of elections. This time, Mr. Paschal Bafyau, who was considered a military apologist became the new President of Labour.<sup>23</sup>

Under General Abacha, the government sensing the support for the Social Democratic Party, Chief Abiola's party, by the NLC decided to use only the opposition stalwarts to kill Labour. As a way of actualizing this, the administration sacked the executive following the oil workers' strike in 1995 and in its place appointed members of the National Republican Convention (NRC) to act as sole administrator. These include Major General Samuel Ogbemudia, Alhaji Uba Ahmed and Mr. Ason Bur. With this development, Labour was unable to make any serious input regarding the welfare of its constituency.<sup>24</sup>

In line with the above Adesoji<sup>25</sup> observed that the fear and apathy created in workers through unending rationalization, retrenchment, wage freeze as well as outlawing the use of a strike became effective as a tool of frightening

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<sup>22</sup> Adesoji, "The Subversion of Labour Militancy in Nigeria," 32.

<sup>23</sup> Kukah, *Democracy and Civil Society in Nigeria*, 161.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>25</sup> Adesoji, "The Subversion of Labour Militancy in Nigeria.", 32-33.

labour activists. This not only made it possible for the workers to be further away from their leaders, it has also made it possible for the leadership to trade away the union for their own aggrandizement.

## **Conclusion**

From the discourse so far it is clear from history that the struggles of Nigerian workers and students have been monumental and their liberation fight through checkmating dictatorial governance remains one of their most significant contributions in the history of the nation since colonial time. These unions consistently opposed capitalism during the colonial period and oppressive governance from the period of independence and in the process constructed its ideology of resistance which has assumed its highest exemplification in revolutionary socialism. In this way, these movements have had a harvest of qualitative social, economic and political improvements, progressive international and domestic legislations and tens of independent workers and states to show for its struggles. Significantly, unlike crusades of the bourgeoisies, its struggles have benefitted the entire oppressed humanity. The anti-colonial struggle in Nigeria for example, illustrates the extent to which political and economic struggle of workers and their students' union counterparts have expanded the frame of rights enjoyed by the citizenry and improved its overall quality of life. However, there have deliberate attempt to make sure both bodies do not perform these roles in post-colonial Nigeria, it was therefore not surprising that in order to deny the workers Union of the association and friendship that would have enriched it various government have deliberately prevented them from affiliating with other International bodies except the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Organization of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU). This was particularly observed in the 1970's under the Murtala/Obasanjo regime. This line has been towed by subsequent administration, thus weakening the ability of the Unions to checkmate the government. This resulted in situation in which the union leadership (both students and workers) became bunch of military lackeys who had no affinity with principles, integrity and democracy.

For there to be a turnaround there is need for a fundamental restructuring of the entire movements (especially the students unions) in order to make it respond both to the needs of its members and also to have clout in society. These Unions must therefore realize that the most potent weapon they have is their unionism, which remains the thread that binds them together, if they must retain their relevance.

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